Report of the Commission on Church Order

Responsibilities; Meetings

The General Synod’s Commission on Church Order (CCO) is responsible for “making recommendations concerning the content, structure, and style of the Book of Church Order” and for providing “advisory responses to requests for interpretation of the Book of Church Order” (BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 4b [2018 edition, pp. 112–113]). To fulfill those responsibilities, the CCO met October 18 through 20, 2018, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and January 30 through February 1, 2019, in the RCA’s regional office in New York, New York. Additional communication occurred by electronic means. In its service to the church, the CCO addressed the referrals from the 2018 General Synod, as well as work generated from advisory responses and from its own life as a commission.

REFERRALS FROM THE 2018 GENERAL SYNOD

The CCO received three referrals from the 2018 General Synod: CO 18-4, RF 18-3, and OV 18-14. The General Synod referred an additional matter to the Commission on History, the Commission on Theology, and the CCO for joint action (TE 18-1); the action of the Commission on Theology and CCO is included in this report. The Commission on History elected to work separately following a joint meeting of the commissions.

CO 18-4: Affiliation of a Local Church with More Than One Denomination

The CCO recommended to the 2017 General Synod certain amendments to the Book of Church Order that, if adopted, approved, and declared effective, would have provided an orderly way for local churches to affiliate with other denominations. At that time, the CCO noted examples of affiliated churches already in existence in the RCA, as well as other churches expressing interest in such a relationship. The commission did not, and does not, offer an opinion on the merits of affiliation. The 2017 General Synod voted not to adopt the proposed amendments (MGS 2017, R 17-46, p. 271).

Some delegates at the 2017 General Synod wondered about the meaning of “full communion” that was used in the version presented to them. There isn’t a clear written definition of this term, though it is used elsewhere in the BCO (Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 4 [2018 edition, p. 14]). The CCO resubmitted the proposed amendments to the 2018 General Synod, employing the phrase “an agreement for the orderly exchange of ministers” in lieu of “full communion” to provide greater clarity because the General Synod has such written agreements. The 2018 General Synod took the following action: “To refer CO 18-4 to the General Synod’s Commission on Church Order for further refinement and clarity” (MGS 2018, p. 263).

The CCO undertook additional revisions to provide greater structure and clarity to its proposal. Specifically, subparagraphs related to finances and representation were added. Accordingly, the commission presents the following recommendation:

CO 19-1
To adopt the following amendments to the Book of Church Order for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined):
Chapter 1, Part I

Article 9. Affiliated Churches

Sec. 1. A consistory or governing body, with approval of its congregation and classis, may affiliate with another denomination with which the Reformed Church in America has an agreement for the orderly exchange of ministers. A consistory or governing body that affiliates with another denomination remains subject to the provisions of the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America, including those regarding representation at higher assemblies. Any obligation of the consistory to pay assessments to the classis is not reduced by virtue of affiliation with another denomination, unless otherwise approved by its classis.

Sec. 2. The governing body of a church from a denomination with which the Reformed Church in America has an agreement for the orderly exchange of ministers may affiliate with a classis of the Reformed Church in America upon approval of its congregation, the receiving classis, and the affiliating church’s current denomination/s.

a. Ministers and elder delegates from an affiliating church shall have the privilege of the floor. The receiving classis may grant voting privileges and if granted, the delegates may participate in higher assemblies.

b. The number of elder delegates from an affiliating church shall be determined as provided in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 3.

c. The affiliating church and the receiving classis may agree upon the method for calculating the affiliating church’s assessments.

d. A minister of an affiliating church shall remain subject to the discipline of the minister’s denomination.

A church that affiliates with the Reformed Church in America remains subject to the governance of its current denomination, unless it is otherwise agreed.

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance was to amend CO 19-1 as follows (additions are underlined twice; deletions are stricken twice):

…Sec. 2. The governing body of a church from a denomination with which the Reformed Church in America has an agreement for the orderly exchange of ministers may affiliate with a classis of the Reformed Church in America upon approval of its congregation, the receiving classis, and the affiliating church’s current denomination/s.

a. Ministers and elder delegates from an affiliating church
shall have the privilege of the floor. The receiving classis may grant voting privileges and if granted, the delegates may participate in higher assemblies at the classis level, but they may not participate in higher assemblies.

A motion was made and supported to cease debate.

**VOTED:** To cease debate.

**VOTED:** To adopt the amendment to CO 19-1.

**VOTED:** To adopt CO 19-1 as amended.

The final version of CO 19-1 as amended and adopted reads as follows:

**CO 19-1**

To adopt the following amendments to the Book of Church Order for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined):

**Chapter 1, Part I**

**Article 9. Affiliated Churches**

Sec. 1. A consistory or governing body, with approval of its congregation and classis, may affiliate with another denomination with which the Reformed Church in America has an agreement for the orderly exchange of ministers. A consistory or governing body that affiliates with another denomination remains subject to the provisions of the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America, including those regarding representation at higher assemblies. Any obligation of the consistory to pay assessments to the classis is not reduced by virtue of affiliation with another denomination, unless otherwise approved by its classis.

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a. Ministers and elder delegates from an affiliating church shall have the privilege of the floor. The receiving classis may grant voting privileges at the classis level but they may not participate in higher assemblies.

b. The number of elder delegates from an affiliating church shall be determined as provided in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 3.
c. The affiliating church and the receiving classis may agree upon the method for calculating the affiliating church’s assessments.

d. A minister of an affiliating church shall remain subject to the discipline of the minister’s denomination.

A church that affiliates with the Reformed Church in America remains subject to the governance of its current denomination, unless it is otherwise agreed. (ADOPTED)

RF 18-3: Criteria to Guide General Synod Agents in Granting the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry

RF 18-3 involves proposed amendments to the BCO that would identify certain criteria to guide the agents of the General Synod in granting the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. The amendments were intended to be a part of BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11. The 2018 General Synod took the following action:

To refer RF 18-3 to the Commission on Church Order to determine, in consultation with the Pastoral Formation Coordinating Committee (current body)/Pastoral Formation Oversight Board (future body), the appropriate placement in the BCO and make the wording less ambiguous (MGS 2018, p. 89).

After consultation with the Pastoral Formation Coordinating Committee/Pastoral Formation Oversight Board (PFCC/PFOB), the commission began working on language responsive to this request. Upon returning to the PFCC/PFOB, that organization requested that a proposed amendment be presented at a later time, after further consultation between the commission and that organization. Noting the request from the Vision 2020 Team through the General Synod Council (GSC) to limit, if possible, the business before this synod, the commission agreed to continue refining these sections to be presented at a future General Synod.

OV 18-14: Roles of Classes and MFCA in Certificate of Fitness for Ministry Process

OV 18-14 was adopted by the 2018 General Synod in response to three overtures submitted by the Classis of Rockland-Westchester. The overtures appear to be intended to address questions regarding the respective roles of classes and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA) in supervising students of theology and awarding Certificates of Fitness for Ministry. The 2018 General Synod’s action was as follows:

To direct Overtures 14, 15, and 16 to the Commission on Church Order with instructions that, in consultation with the Pastoral Formation Coordinating Committee (present body)/Pastoral Formation Oversight Board (proposed body), the commission review the overtures and if warranted, that the commission present possible amendments to the Book of Church Order to the 2019 General Synod (MGS 2018, p. 132).

After consultation with the Pastoral Formation Coordinating Committee/Pastoral Formation Oversight Board, the commission began working on language responsive to this request. Upon returning to the PFCC/PFOB, that organization requested that a proposed amendment be presented at a later time, after further consultation between the commission and that organization. Noting the request from the Vision 2020 Team through
the GSC to limit, if possible, the business before this synod, the commission agreed to continue refining these sections to be presented at a future General Synod.

**TE 18-1: Bounds**

The 2018 General Synod adopted the following recommendation made in the Report of the Professorate:

> 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).

At the joint meeting of the commissions and the GSC in fall 2018, the three commissions met together for discussion and idea generation. Following this meeting, two members from the CCO and the Commission on Theology (COT) met together and generated a paper. The Commission on History (COH) elected to generate its own paper. The joint paper was reviewed at the CCO’s winter meeting, and revisions were made. Following this, the COT reviewed the paper as revised and approved it. Accordingly, the CCO, together with the General Synod’s COT, presents the following report and recommendations.

**Introduction**

As the congregations, classes, regional synods, and General Synod of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) seek to fulfill our common call to Christian ministry, the *Book of Church Order (BCO)* provides a framework for the formation of new classes. While traditionally most classes in the RCA were formed with boundaries that are geographic in nature, the Commission on Church Order and the Commission on Theology have been asked by the General Synod, in response to a request from the professorate, to offer an “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” (TE 18-1, *MGS 2018*, p. 322).

The task given to the commissions concerns both the larger question of whether classis boundaries must be understood geographically and the more specific question of the formation of “ethnic classes.” Both questions are fraught with challenges. Regional synods have already worked to form non-geographic classes, to the joy of some and the consternation of others. This prior experience with non-geographic classes may affect how the findings of these commissions are received. Additionally, the specific question of “ethnic classes” touches upon the present realities of race within the RCA as well as our call to strive “for a multicultural future freed from racism” (Transformed & Transforming). Racism is a wound that cuts through the history of North America, and the sin of apartheid, which began as a pastoral concession, is part of the history of the broader Reformed communion.

Additionally, because socio-economic pressures work to separate languages and races into different physical communities, having classes based only upon geographic proximity may actually impede a multicultural future. If we seek to foster the laudable goal of becoming more fully a multicultural church, we need to recognize that geographically tied classes may make it more difficult. As we address the possibility of classes gathering separately based upon ethnicity, we must be mindful of these realities and seek to move forward in faithfulness.
We have tried to respond to the charge given to us with an awareness of these challenges and sensitivity to the issues involved. In what follows, we will first consider the usage and meaning of the word “bounds” in the BCO before addressing the specific question of the formation of ethnic classes.

“Bounds” in the BCO

Though the words “bounds” (17 times) or “boundaries” (2 times) are used in the BCO in reference to three different levels of governance—boards of elders, classes, and regional synods—they are never specifically defined. The majority of these instances are some derivative of the phrase “within its bounds” without further context, and thus are not particularly helpful in providing a definition for what constitutes bounds, only that bounds exist. For example, in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 2, the classis is given the responsibility to “exercise a general superintendence over its enrolled ministers, its commissioned pastors, and over the interests and concerns of the congregations within its bounds” (emphasis added). Similarly, in Chapter 1, Part III, Article 2, Section 1, the regional synod is given the responsibility to “exercise a general superintendence over the interests and concerns of the classes within its bounds” (emphasis added).

The BCO indicates that both the classes and the regional synods have bounds that are defined for them, either implicitly or explicitly, by the immediate superintending assembly. Regional synod bounds are “determined for it by the General Synod” (Chapter 1, Part III, Article 1, Section 1), and the General Synod “may make changes in their boundaries, and may transfer classes and churches from one regional synod to another” (Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 3). In fact, the General Synod took such action as recently as 2018 when it transferred City Classis from the Regional Synod of the Far West to the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics and then transferred Faith Community Reformed Church of Stickney, Illinois, from Chicago Classis in the Regional Synod of Mid-America to City Classis, newly in the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics.

The regional synod has the responsibility of forming, combining, or disbanding classes, and it may “transfer churches from one classis to another within its bounds” (BCO, Chapter 1, Part III, Article 2, Section 3). In exercising this responsibility, it should be noted that the BCO does not specify what factors the regional synod must consider regarding forming or re-forming classis boundaries within the regional synod’s own bounds; instead, it is left to the collective representative wisdom of the elder and minister delegates from the classes who constitute the regional synod. This is the particular context that prompted the professorate to request an interpretation of bounds.

In the report of the professorate that led to TE 18-1, it was noted that recent actions have “called into question the traditional meaning of ‘bounds’” (MGS 2018, p. 321). Historically, the local congregations of the RCA have usually banded together geographically, but this has not been the exclusive practice. While the BCO does not provide a specific definition of “bounds,” there seem to be two prevailing interpretations: bounds as geography and bounds as membership.

**Bounds as Geography**

A geographic definition of bounds is supported by the conviction that proximity aids the assembly in fulfilling its responsibilities of guidance and governance in the shared call to ministry and mission. From within the BCO, the strongest case for a geographic interpretation of bounds is a reference to “the classis’s own geographic area” regarding the planting of new churches:
When an organizing church is initiated by a classis not within the classis’s own geographic area, the initiating classis shall receive the permission of the classis in which it intends to initiate its ministry. Since a classis is composed of “all the churches within its bounds” (Chapter 1, Part II, Article 1), normally an organizing church shall become a part of the classis to which it is geographically most proximate within a period of ten years from the date of its first gathering for worship… (Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 6).

We can also point to a second link regarding the supervision of Ministers of Word and Sacrament:

A classis within the geographic area of service in which a minister serves in an RCA congregation or in a specialized ministry shall be the classis in which membership is held… (Chapter 1, Part II, Article 15, Section 1).

While both of these instances offer strong support for an implicitly understood geographic meaning of bounds, neither specifically does so to the exclusion of other forming considerations, be they linguistic, ethnic, or demographic boundaries. The RCA’s history includes multiple examples of classes formed for linguistic reasons, despite member congregations being geographically located among English-speaking classes. Classis Passaic was originally organized for Dutch immigrants and held its meetings in Dutch, and Classis Germania spanned Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, and South Dakota. However, it is important to note that these linguistic classes eventually united with other classes, so that for most of our history, geography has been the most significant factor in the composition of classes.

Neither of these references within the BCO specifically precludes the possibility of there being two classes with overlapping geographic areas. Note the BCO provision regarding supervision of ministers refers to “a classis within the geographic area” (emphasis added), leaving open the presumed possibility that two or more classes could in fact overlap, as has historically happened and presently is observed with the bounds of City Classis overlapping the bounds of several other classes, for instance. If two or more classes overlap boundaries, it logically follows that, while geography may be a consideration in those boundaries, it cannot exclusively be the definition.

**Bounds as Membership**

To this point, the analysis of bounds has focused on the assemblies of classis and regional synod. Though easily overlooked when articulating an interpretation of bounds, it is prudent to consider how the BCO uses “bounds” as it applies to a consistory in the context of the local church. The board of elders has a responsibility to “seek to impress upon members of the church who move from the bounds of its ministry the duty of obtaining a certificate of transfer to another church” (Chapter 1, Part I, Article 5, Section 2e [2018 edition, p. 21], emphasis added). While traditionally the bounds of a church’s ministry carried a sense of being a geographic parish, in many parts of the RCA, we have multiple RCA congregations within one geographic community, all caring for the same parish but doing so with different senses of fellowship and mission. It is not remotely the purview of this paper to address why individuals move from one church to another, but it seems this sense of “bounds” is different than a strictly geographic interpretation. Rather, the sense of “bounds” referenced here in the BCO has to do with membership.

Our order and theology understand membership in the local congregation to be about relationship embodied in belonging and accountability. The congregation, governed in
part by the board of elders responsible for those within its bounds, “is a body of baptized Christians meeting regularly in a particular place of worship” (BCO, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 1, Section 1a [2018 edition, p. 11]; cf. Hebrews 10:25), and the elders are guided in their “supervision of the membership of the church” by the requirements of discipleship, care, making faithful use of the means of grace, and discipline (see Chapter 1, Part I, Article 5 [2018 edition, p. 20]; cf. Belgic Confession, Articles 28-29).

This look at the use of “bounds” within the BCO leads us to conclude that a geographic interpretation of bounds is not so much ingrained in our order as it is traditioned by our practice. Geography alone, in any age, but particularly in the twenty-first century, is an insufficient condition for the kind of covenantal relationship envisioned by Scripture and our order for the church’s assemblies. The call to community and fellowship for the sake of mission—a sense of membership, belonging, accountability, and purpose in the gospel—undergirds it all as the strongest interpretive lens for the meaning of bounds. To that end, we will turn our attention to reflecting on the purpose of classes and sharing our recommendations for receiving the full gifts of the body of Christ in the creation of classes.

**The Purpose of Classes**

While our history and the usage of “bounds” within the BCO do provide some guidance for us, they settle neither the issue of the nature and purpose of the classis nor the question of the formation of ethnic classes. In order to gain more clarity, we will look theologically at the purpose of classes and then explore a biblical framework for receiving the various gifts of the body of Christ.

Christ has called and given the church ministers, elders, and deacons who serve Christ by fulfilling their callings for the sake of the body of Christ and the kingdom of God. In response to the spread of the gospel, the church has structured itself in order to maintain unity and faithfulness. In the RCA, we have discerned the wisdom of gathering elders and ministers into larger assemblies—classis, regional synod, and General Synod. Like the General Synod and the various regional synods, classes are created and structured for the well-being of the church.

The main purposes of these bodies are guidance and governance, what the BCO often calls superintendence and church discipline. Under the responsibilities of the classis, the BCO includes considering “the nature and extent of ministry within classis bounds in obedience to Holy Scripture and in response to the needs of the world within which the classis ministers” (Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 1 [2018 edition, p. 29]) as well as exercising “general superintendence over its enrolled ministers, its commissioned pastors, and over the interests and concerns of the congregations within its bounds” (Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 2 [2018 edition, p. 29]). The task of governance given to the classis includes both general superintendence and the responsibility of discipline. The 2018 Commission on Theology paper, “The Nature of Office and Assembly,” summarized the teaching of the RCA on the higher assemblies by saying, “The primary purpose of the greater assemblies of the church is to maintain the unity of the church’s doctrine, life, and witness in the world. In short, guidance and governance” (MGS 2018, p. 312). This overall purpose and calling should guide the structuring and creation of classes.

The classis provides guidance, care, and discipline for all those under its care. The classis is the nearest of the higher assemblies to local congregations, being in closest relationship to the particular churches within its bounds. Because of its proximity to particular congregations, many forms of care and guidance are seen to be the responsibility of the
classis. Creating and disbanding congregations, approving the formation and termination of pastoral relationships (whether by call or by contract), and examining and ordaining theological students are the responsibility of the classis. Discipline for ministers, consistories, and congregations begins with the classis. The twin responsibilities of guidance and governance are placed in the hands of the classis as it relates to the ministers, consistories, and congregations within its bounds.

The size and shape of a classis, as well as its internal structures, should allow for proper oversight over ministers, theological students, commissioned pastors, and its congregations. The work of the classis should, like all of our church government, “aid the church in the development of its own life, in order that it may carry out the mission of its Head—to announce the good news of his Saviorhood and extend his Lordship throughout the world” (BCO, Preamble, p. 1). As it gathers those called and ordained to the offices of minister and elder, the classis works to maintain the unity, purity, and peace of the church so that the body of Christ can walk faithfully in Christ’s mission together.

The recent creation of “ethnic classes” (such as the Classis of the Americas) as well as other “non-geographic classes” (such as City Classis) has raised new questions about how best to structure ourselves as a church. Can congregations be gathered into a classis on a basis other than geographic proximity? As noted above, historically, we have usually, but not always, banded churches together into classes because they were closest to one another in physical space. But with new technology and new contextual challenges, can classes be organized differently? While there may be other reasons for forming a non-geographic classis (mission or ministry context), we will limit ourselves in this paper to the specific question of ethnicity and language. In short, can the reasons for gathering a particular set of churches into a classis be linguistic or ethnic?

Unity and Diversity in the Body of Christ

Whether we should form ethnic classes is rooted in how we understand the best way to encourage the various gifts of congregations for the sake of the whole church. If the gifts and voices of certain congregations are not being well-received in the current denominational structure, should these congregations separate out into their own classis? How do we acknowledge and receive all the diverse gifts of our congregations in a classis? What does unity look like within a diverse church?

In order to answer these larger questions, we will look first at the place of language at Pentecost in Acts 2 and then at Paul’s discussion of the members of the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12. When the Spirit is poured out on the church at Pentecost, there is a multiplication of languages. This group of Galileans begins to speak in the native tongues of “Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs” (Acts 2:9-11). This diversity of language was a gift of the Spirit and given so that the mighty acts of God might be proclaimed in the native language of all who heard. The multiplication of languages served to multiply the witness of the church. In a similar way, the variety of languages in the body of Christ today enables the church to speak of the mighty acts of God in the native languages of all people. This is why the church has often been at the forefront of language translation—consistently seeking to witness to Christ in the language of the people. Our linguistic diversity as a denomination may serve to multiply our mission and our witness. However, how can these diverse languages and cultures be held together in the unity of Christ? How do we best acknowledge and receive our different gifts within the body of Christ?
There is both unity and diversity within the body of Christ. This is not an accident but part of God’s design. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12, “there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone” (vv. 4-6). These gifts were given by the Spirit and were given for the common good (v. 7). The diversity of spiritual gifts within the body of the church should not lead to division, nor to the prizing of one set of gifts above another. All members of the body are not the same; the church is not a body made up of only one part. God has arranged these parts of the body and united them in Christ through baptism. The world may prize strength and despise the weak, but the church is called to recognize the God-given dignity of those considered weak and least in the body and to bestow honor and respect upon these members. The diversity of the gifts given by the Spirit should not lead to dissension but to care for one another. If one suffers, all suffer. If one is honored, all receive honor.

What is true in the relationship between individual members of the body of Christ may also be true for congregations and classes. Each congregation has been given gifts by the Holy Spirit for the sake of the whole body of Christ. This diversity of gifts is part of God’s intention for the church’s life in the world. These gifts have been gathered together into the one body of Christ by the Spirit. This unity does not destroy this diversity of gifts, even as it overcomes the enmity and division that has resulted from the effects of sin. Even the new creation will not erase the diversity of gifts, but it will fully join us together in using these gifts to praise the name of the Lord. Not only did the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost lead to a multiplication of languages, but also in the new heavens and the new earth, there will be multiple peoples and languages praising God. In the vision given to John in Revelation 7, he sees a great, uncountable multitude standing before the throne and before the Lamb, proclaiming the salvation of God. This multitude is said to be from every nation, tribe, people, and language. While they sing together, they sing in their own tongues. Similarly, we see at Pentecost that the Spirit unites the church even as its gifts multiply the languages in the church. There can be, in the church, both a unity of Spirit and a diverse gifting of the Spirit through a multitude of languages and tongues in the church.

This diversity of language is a well-documented fact in the history of the church. The Christian gospel has, from the very beginning, been translated into other languages (as noted by missiologist Lamin Sanneh). There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, but not one language for the church. Christ calls us to maintain the unity of the body, to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, and to offer our bodies as holy and pleasing sacrifices to God. This unity that we are given does not destroy the distinct gifts or languages of the members of the body, but it should allow us to receive and honor them to the glory of our one head, Jesus Christ.

In light of our growing multiethnic and multilingual present, we must recognize the various gifts our different congregations bring to the one body of Christ. We should recognize these gifts as coming from the Spirit of God and ask how best to structure our classes to receive these gifts for the sake of the body of Christ. How do we best receive the various gifts of the body so that due honor is given to the members while maintaining the unity, purity, and peace of the church that Christ calls us to? While we recognize that neither the Commission on Church Order nor the Commission on Theology can dictate to the regional synods how to form classes, is there any wisdom that can be offered to the regional synods as they work in creating, supervising, and maintaining classes?

From Scripture, we know that we are called to receive the gifts of the body of Christ in its diversity. We are not many bodies, but one body made up of eyes, hands, and feet. Does our current structure of classes allow these various gifts to be received? Do our non-Anglo
pastors and congregations sense they are equally welcome in a classis when they are by far the minority? Do language barriers keep particular voices from being heard and gifts from being received? Overall, we have to ask what will enable us as the body of Christ to receive the gifts of the whole body.

The answers to these questions are not straightforward. If the gifts of all the congregations within the RCA are not being received, then we may well need to consider other options. It is possible that allowing the formation of ethnic and linguistic classes could allow the gifts of certain congregations, who within the current classis structure do not sense they have an equal voice or place at the table, to be more faithfully and fully received. That being said, it is also possible that new classes structured around ethnicity and language could end up being a way for those voices to be marginalized; that is to say, a different structure that enables classes to gather together by ethnicity and/or language could end up being simply another way in which those voices are isolated and not heard by the larger church.

Whichever way our larger body decides to move forward, we will need to be intentional about our biblical call to receive the gifts of the entire body of Christ. If we maintain geographic classes in regions of growing diversity within the church, this will require greater attention and intention to receive the gifts of the whole body, not just the majority. If we create non-geographic classes, this will likewise require attention and intention in maintaining unity across classes so that the gifts of the whole body are received.

Receiving Gifts: Wisdom for the Creation of Classes

Based upon the use of “bounds” within the BCO, our own history in regard to classes, and a biblical theology of the unity and diversity of the body of Christ, we can offer at least four pieces of wisdom for the creation of classes:

1. **Classes should be created, maintained, and structured so that they can fulfill their primary calling—guidance and governance.** If a classis is too large, too small, or too disconnected, efforts should be made to promote the kind of relationships, shared work, and structure needed to provide accountability, mutual encouragement, shared mission, and care of those within its bounds. This wisdom applies not just as we think about new classes, but also as we consider current classes that are so large that it may limit the possibility of accountability and all voices being heard or classes so geographically spread out that they struggle to connect. The intentional use of newer communication technology creates new possibilities, but that may call for many classes to rethink their structure.

2. **As we continue the conversation around the creation of ethnic classes, we should do so with prayerful discernment and caution.** Although the BCO does not prohibit the formation of classes around other defining characteristics, it would be wise to pursue alternatives with caution. The ability to gather in the flesh “regularly in a particular place” for guidance and governance, and to bring together the full gifts of the body of Christ for the sake of the church’s witness in the world, should not be dismissed lightly. The challenges that come with the creation of classes organized around ethnicity and language, particularly in light of the history of the Reformed tradition with apartheid, need to be carefully and prayerfully considered. At the same time, we must consider the possibilities that such language-based classes may allow us to multiply our mission in the world.
3. The creation and structure of classes should seek to maintain the unity, purity, and peace of the church. While the creation of classes does gather various churches into a particular assembly and draws boundaries between one set of congregations and another, the purpose of classes should not be separation. As Paul warns, we should not seek to cut off the other members of the body of Christ out of love for our own gifts. The structures of the church should never work to suppress the gifts of the body, but only to guide them as they build up the body. Unity cannot come at the cost of purity or peace, nor vice versa. Church history includes both suppressive unity and bitter schism. We should guard ourselves so that we partake of neither of these as we form and maintain classes.

4. Classes should be created, maintained, and structured so that all the gifts of congregations can be fully received. In Corinth, Paul proclaimed that the presence of the many and varied gifts of the body of Christ should not lead to disension, but to care for one another. When barriers of language and culture prevent the full participation of members, delegates, or congregations in their classes, this must be addressed. It is possible that this could be addressed through the creation of new “ethnic classes,” but it is also possible that the creation of such classes could result in new forms of marginalization. This would need to be carefully thought through before it is implemented.

Conclusion

Do classes need to be based solely on geography? No. Our history, polity, and theology all indicate that this does not necessarily need to be the case. The language of “bounds” in the BCO does, at times, point toward geography, but at other times, toward membership. Our own history as the RCA has included non-geographic, language-based classes for the sake of the health and mission of the church. Theologically, we are called to structure ourselves in such a way that the diverse gifts of all the church (including diverse languages) are received for the sake of the larger mission of the church. All of this points to the possibility of non-geographic classes. However, the formation of these classes should be done prayerfully, with the right spirit, and with the right ends in mind.

Language matters. Our own history, in the Classis of Germania and elsewhere, demonstrates that we recognize the significance of a shared language for more fully carrying out the shared mission of the church in all levels of the Reformed Church in America. If language mattered then for the mission of the church and helped shape our structure, why not now?

Accordingly, the Commission on Church Order and the Commission on Theology present the following recommendation:

CO 19-2
To advise regional synods to be guided by the following policies in forming, combining, and disbanding of classes and the transfer of churches between classes:

1. Classes should be created, maintained, and structured so that they can fulfill their primary calling—guidance and governance.
2. Ethnic classes should be formed only after prayerful discernment and with caution.
3. The creation and structure of classes should seek to
maintain the unity, purity, and peace of the church.

4. Classes should be created, maintained, and structured so that all the gifts of congregations can be fully received. (ADOPTED)

COLLABORATION WITH TASK FORCES, AGENCIES, AND OTHER COMMISSIONS

Pastoral Formation Coordinating Committee/Pastoral Formation Oversight Board: Governing Document for Pastoral Formation Oversight Board (RF 18-1)

RF 18-1 was adopted by the 2018 General Synod for the purpose of constituting a Pastoral Formation Oversight Board (PFOB). The final paragraph of RF 18-1 states that “[t]he General Synod Council and the PFOB, in consultation with the Commission on Church Order, shall work together to bring an official governing document for the PFOB to the General Synod 2019 for approval” (MGS 2018, pp. 86–87).

The commission invited Chad Pierce, representing the Pastoral Formation Coordinating Committee/Pastoral Formation Oversight Board (PFCC/PFOB), which had prepared a preliminary draft of bylaws for the PFOB, to its meeting in October 2018. Prior to the commission meeting, members of the Commission on Church Order reviewed the bylaws and provided their comments to the full commission. At this meeting, the comments were discussed with Chad Pierce. Chad then provided the comments (and results of the discussion) to the PFCC/PFOB at its next meeting, which occurred in early January 2019. At the commission’s January 2019 meeting, it discussed the final work-product of the PFCC/PFOB and highlighted items which differed from the original content of RF 18-1. The commission understands that the proposed PFOB bylaws will be presented to the 2019 General Synod by either the PFCC/PFOB or the General Synod Council (GSC).

Commission on Christian Unity: Communications regarding General Synod’s Creation and Funding of an Interreligious Coordinator

The commission received and responded to a communication from the Commission on Christian Unity regarding the decision of the General Synod Council (GSC) to “… delay the hiring of the coordinator of interreligious relations position (RF 18-4 and F 18-4) until after the 2019 General Synod has an opportunity to reconsider the action” (GSC 18-47, GSC Minutes, October 2018). The commission determined, to the extent this was a request to provide an advisory response to a request for interpretation of the BCO, that the BCO permits the GSC and commissions to respond in nuanced ways to actions of the General Synod.

GSC Committee to Explore Alternate Funding Methods

The commission received and responded to a communication from RCA treasurer Jillisa Teitsma regarding what amendments to the BCO—if any—would be necessary if the General Synod adopts an alternative method for calculating assessments that is based upon income rather than membership. The moderator and treasurer exchanged emails regarding the sections that may need amendment, as well as possible amendments. As a part of this discussion, the commission also considered whether the responsibilities of classes should be amended to add levying assessments upon local churches and organizing churches. The commission agreed to suspend its discussion of this topic until the General Synod acts on the question of whether to adopt an alternative method for calculating assessments.
Commission on Nominations/GSC

A member of the Commission on Nominations attended the CCO’s fall 2018 meeting, a member of the GSC attended the CCO’s meeting in January/February 2019, and the commission met with three GSC members during a meal at the fall joint gathering of the GSC and commissions. The stated purposes of these visits requested by the Commission on Nominations and the GSC were to provide these bodies an opportunity to learn more about the work of the CCO, encourage coordination of the work of the commissions and GSC, discuss preferred gifts and expertise of possible new commission members (in the case of the Commission on Nominations), and enable the GSC members to gather information so the GSC can fulfill its responsibility “[t]o review all General Synod commissions at least once during each five-year period and to recommend to General Synod a continuation of, a reconstitution of, or a discontinuation of such commissions, with the understanding that the necessity for continuation shall not be assumed” (BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6g, [2018 edition, p. 109]). The commission appreciates the interest in its work and desires—in all of its work—to be of service to the church.

Fall Joint Gathering of GSC and Commissions

The Commission on Church Order appreciates opportunities to gather and interact with other commissions at the fall joint gathering. It believes that the church is best served when the business is done in good order and pursuant to the BCO. The fall joint gathering is an opportunity for discussions to happen both formally and informally and for collective wisdom to be shared. The CCO welcomes communication from anyone regarding possible improvements to the BCO. The church’s order exists to serve the church. The order must be malleable enough to empower the church to carry out its mission and ministry, while still providing crucial structure and reflection of our theology and history. The order should not be a repository of good ideas, nor a process manual, but must provide, with the other components of the Constitution, structure and support to the church.

REQUESTS FOR INTERPRETATION OF THE BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER; AMENDMENTS TO THE BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER INITIATED BY THE CCO OR RESULTING FROM COMMUNICATIONS FROM OTHERS

“Transferring” Ministers to “Non-Formula of Agreement” Denominations

The commission received a communication asking it to consider the current practice of many classes of “transferring” a Minister of Word and Sacrament in one way or another to another denomination that is not a party to A Formula of Agreement: the Orderly Exchange of Ordained Ministers of Word and Sacrament (or a similar agreement, such as the one between the RCA and the Christian Reformed Church in North America). The commission did so, and concluded that such a process must be described in terms of “demission” rather than “transfer.” Accordingly, the commission presents the following recommendation:

CO 19-3
To adopt the following amendments to the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 15, Section 13a (2018 edition, p. 56) for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

a. A person who has been ordained to the office of minister may voluntarily relinquish the office by demission, but only after application to, and with the consent of, the
classis of which the person minister is a member. The classis, having fulfilled its pastoral responsibility insofar as feasible, may declare the person to have demitted the office of minister and, if so declared, shall remove the name of the member from the roll of classis and, if requested, transfer the person to the membership and care of a local church. A request from a minister to transfer to another denomination is an application for demission, which, following the classis’s consent, shall be deemed effective upon reception by the other denomination. (ADOPTED)

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance was to vote in favor of CO 19-3.

General Synod Responsibilities regarding Regional Synods

The commission received a communication noting that, while the BCO empowers classes to “form, dissolve, and disband churches, and shall form or dissolve combinations of two or more churches” (BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 4 [2018 edition, p. 29]) and similarly empowers regional synods to “form, dissolve, or disband classes” (BCO, Chapter 1, Part III, Article 2, Section 3 [2018 edition, p. 63]), there is no similar provision in the description of the General Synod’s responsibilities regarding regional synods. The BCO simply says that “[t]he General Synod shall form regional synods. It may make changes in their boundaries, and may transfer classes and churches from one regional synod to another” (BCO, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 3 [2018 edition, p. 67]). The commission believes that the responsibilities of the General Synod regarding regional synods should be similar to the responsibilities of regional synods regarding classes and classes regarding churches. Accordingly, the commission presents the following recommendation:

**CO 19-4**

To adopt the following amendments to the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 3 (2018 edition, p. 67) for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined):

Sec. 3. The General Synod shall form, combine, or disband regional synods. It may make changes in their boundaries, and may transfer classes and churches from one regional synod to another. (ADOPTED)

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance was to vote in favor of CO 19-4.

A motion was made and supported to cease debate.

**VOTED:** To cease debate.

**VOTED:** To adopt CO 19-4.
COMMISSIONS

Formulary No. 3

The commission received a communication questioning the accuracy of the parenthetical explanation that appears at the beginning of Formulary No. 3 (BCO, 2018 edition, pp. 132–133). The phrase “at the time of ordination or installation” in the parenthetical seems to make the declaration exclusively for situations when the minister in question is being either ordained or called and installed as a senior or associate minister. Those are not the only circumstances under which the declaration is made. Accordingly, the commission presents the following recommendation:

CO 19-5
To adopt the following amendments to the Book of Church Order, Formulary No. 3 (2018 edition, pp. 132–133) for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

(This Declaration shall be made orally by the candidate in the presence of the classis at the time of ordination or installation reception into the classis. The newly ordained or installed received Minister of Word and Sacrament shall then sign a book containing the declaration, which shall be maintained as a permanent record of the classis.)

(ADOPTED)

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance was to vote in favor of CO 19-5.

Other References to a “Book” Containing Declarations

While working on Formulary No. 3, the commission became aware that many classes do not have a “book” that contains declarations. It proposed removing the reference in Formulary 3, but then recognized that there are other, similar references throughout the BCO. The commission believes the references should be uniform.

Accordingly, the commission presents the following recommendation:

CO 19-6
To adopt the following amendments to the Book of Church Order for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

Chapter 1, Part II, Article 15 (2018 edition, p. 56)

Sec. 12. The classis shall keep a record book permanent record in which the declarations for licensed candidates, commissioned pastors, and ministers are clearly written. Those who are received on examination or on certificate shall subscribe to the proper declaration in the presence of the classis.

Formulary No. 1 (2018 edition, p. 131)

(This Declaration shall be made orally by the candidate in the
presence of the classis. The candidate shall then sign a book containing the declaration, which shall be maintained as a permanent record of the classis.

Formulary No. 7 (2018 edition, p. 136)

(This declaration shall be made in the presence of the Christian community at the time of installation. It shall be made orally by the person being installed. The newly installed professor shall sign a book containing the declaration, which shall be maintained as a permanent record of the General Synod.)

Formulary No. 16 (2018 edition, p. 143)

(This declaration shall be made orally by the candidate in the presence of the classis at the beginning of each commissioning approved by the classis. The newly commissioned pastor shall then sign a book containing the declaration, which shall be maintained as a permanent record of the classis.)

(ADOPTED)

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance was to vote in favor of CO 19-6.

Formulary No. 9

In response to comments from one of its members, the commission agreed that Formulary No. 9 (BCO, 2018 edition, p. 138) should be revised to add a “receipt” section to be completed by the stated clerk of the classis to which a minister is transferred. The commission also agreed that references to “dismission” in the certificate and in the BCO instead should be to “transfer.” Accordingly, the commission presents the following two recommendations:

CO 19-7

To adopt the following amendments to the Book of Church Order, Formulary No. 9 (2018 edition, p. 138) for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

9. Certificate for the Transfer of a Minister of Word and Sacrament

Dismission of a Minister

To the Classis of __________________:
From the Classis of __________________:

This is to certify that the Rev. __________________ is a member in good and regular standing of the Classis of __________________, and is now requesting dismission transfer to the Classis of __________________, to whose Christian fellowship and care this minister he/she is
hereby affectionately commended.

When received by the Classis of __________________________, the Rev. __________________________’s relation to this classis shall cease.

Last served as delegate to regional synod ____________ (year)
Last served as delegate to General Synod ____________ (year)
Year of ordination ____________ (year)

____________________________, Stated Clerk
Classis of ________________________________ (date)

Receipt of a Minister

To the Classis of ___________________________
From the Classis of ___________________________

This is to certify that the Rev. __________________________ was received to unite with the Classis of __________________________ and signed the Declaration for Ministers of Word and Sacrament on ________________.

____________________________, Stated Clerk

(ADOPTED)

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance was to vote in favor of CO 19-7.

CO 19-8
To adopt the following amendments to the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 15, Section 9 (2018 edition, p. 55) for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

Sec. 9. A minister who moves from the bounds of one classis into another shall request a Certificate of Dismission Transfer (Formulary No. 9) from the classis where membership is held. The Certificate of Dismission shall be presented prior to the approval of the minister for reception into the new classis. That classis shall notify the sending classis when a minister is received. (ADOPTED)

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance was to vote in favor of CO 19-8.

Formulary No. 15

The commission considered a suggestion for revisions to BCO Formulary No. 15, including whether the term “member church” is appropriate, as this term is not defined in
the BCO, and whether the formulary should be revised to cover “organizing churches.” As a result of those discussions, the commission presents the following recommendation:

CO 19-9
To adopt the following amendments to the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 1, Section 1 (2018 edition, p. 11) for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

. . . similarly to both a consistory and a board of elders. For purposes of Formulary No. 15, a member church is an organizing church, a local church, or a collegiate church. (ADOPTED)

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance was to vote in favor of CO 19-9.

Transfers of Licensed Candidates from One Classis to Another

The commission discussed the process by which licensed candidates are transferred from one classis to another. It determined that the process should mirror that of Ministers of Word and Sacrament, both the language and the appropriateness of a formulary. Accordingly, it agreed to present to the 2019 General Synod the following two recommendations:

CO 19-10
To adopt the following amendments to the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 6 (2018 edition, p. 50) for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

Sec. 6. A licensed candidate who seeks ordination in a classis other than the classis with jurisdiction over the candidate’s church shall [request|apply for] a Certificate of Transfer (Formulary No. 17) as a licensed candidate to that classis. The transfer certificate shall be granted if the candidate is in good standing. When the candidate is received under care by signing the Declaration for Licensed Candidates, the new classis shall notify the sending classis.

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance was to vote in favor of CO 19-10.

A motion was made and supported to amend CO 19-10 as follows (additions are underlined twice; deletions are stricken twice):

…The transfer certificate shall be granted if the candidate is in good standing. When the candidate is received under care by signing the Declaration for Licensed Candidates, the new receiving classis shall notify the sending classis.

VOTED: To amend CO 19-10.
VOTED: To adopt CO 19-10 as amended.

The final version of CO 19-10 as amended and adopted reads as follows:

**CO 19-10**  
To adopt the following amendments to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter I, Part II, Article 13, Section 6 (2018 edition, p. 50) for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

Sec. 6. A licensed candidate who seeks ordination in a classis other than the classis with jurisdiction over the candidate’s church shall request a Certificate of Transfer (Formulary No. 17) as a certificate of dismission as a licensed candidate to that classis. The transfer certificate shall be granted if the candidate is in good standing. When the candidate is received under care by signing the Declaration for Licensed Candidates, the receiving classis shall notify the sending classis. (ADOPTED)

**CO 19-11**  
To adopt the following amendments to the *Book of Church Order* for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined):

17. Certificate of Transfer for a Licensed Candidate

**Dismission of a Licensed Candidate**

To the Classis of [Classis Name]:

From the Classis of [Classis Name]:

This certifies that [Full Name] is a licensed candidate in the Classis of [Classis Name]. [Name] is now requesting a transfer to the care of the Classis of [Classis Name], to whose Christian fellowship and care this licensed candidate is affectionately commended.

When received by the Classis of [Classis Name], [Name]’s relationship to this classis shall cease.

The date that [Full Name] read and signed the Declaration for Licensed Candidate is [Date].

[Clerk Name], Stated Clerk  
[date certificate is issued]

**Receipt of a Licensed Candidate**

This is to certify that [Full Name] was received under the care of the Classis of [Name] on [Date], when [Name] read and signed the Declaration for Licensed Candidates.
The advice of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance was to vote in favor of CO 19-11.

Supervisors of Consistories

An amendment to BCO Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 3 (2018 edition, p. 34) was declared effective by the 2018 General Synod. Subsequently the commission received a communication asking whether a further revision to the amended BCO provision should be proposed to more clearly state that “a minister” means “an RCA minister.” The commission discussed the concern raised and concluded that no clarification is necessary.

Supersession of Consistories—Periodic Status Reports

The commission received a communication suggesting that amendments to the BCO be proposed to provide for periodic reviews and renewals of the supersession of a consistory. The commission concluded that any revision responsive to the suggestion would not enhance the supersession process, and therefore, the commission took no further action.

Classis Votes on Constitutional Amendments

The commission received a communication regarding potential implications of a BCO amendment that was adopted by the 2018 General Synod. The stated purpose of the amendment is to clarify that only classes whose delegates were eligible to be seated at the General Synod at which the amendment was adopted may vote on the question of whether to approve the amendment. At the time of the communication, the amendment was before the classes for their vote on the question of whether to approve it. For this reason, and because the overture that served as the basis for the concern was referred to the Vision 2020 Team, the commission concluded that it would be premature to consider the questions raised in the communication and therefore took no action.

EDITORIAL REVISIONS

The following non-substantive, editorial corrections to the BCO will be made in the 2019 edition:

1. BCO Chapter 1, Part II, Article 9, Section 3d (p. 38 of the 2018 edition) will be edited to delete the phrase “identified in the notice to show cause.”

2. BCO Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Section 4d (p. 42 of the 2018 edition) will be edited to eliminate the word “and” from the final section of that sentence. According to research done by staff to the commission, the text was originally adopted by the 1974 General Synod and then, following the requisite classis votes, approved by the 1975 General Synod. (See MGS 1974, R-2, p. 190, and MGS 1975, R-2, p. 100.) The “and” that this editorial correction eliminates first appears in the 1984 edition of the BCO as a part of substantial revisions to the entire BCO to make its language gender neutral.

3. BCO Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11, Section 8 (p. 46 of the 2018 edition) will be edited to replace the word “it” at the beginning of the third line with the words “the classis.”
4. Edits will be made throughout the BCO to capitalize (where necessary) the words “Word” and “Sacrament” whenever they are used in the phrase “Minister of Word and Sacrament.”

5. Edits will be made to Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 7 (p. 30 of the 2018 edition) and the title of Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11 (p. 44 of the 2018 edition) to change “students of theology” to “candidates for ministry” to make the language consistent with the remainder of the BCO.

POSSIBLE FUTURE ENDEAVORS

In addition to the work it has readied for submission to the General Synod, the commission has several ongoing projects.

Boards of Elders

In response to experiences of and comments received by a member of the commission, the member proposed revisions to the “Responsibilities of the Board of Elders” (BCO, Chapter 1, Part 1, Article 5 [2018 edition, pp. 20–22]). The purposes of the proposed revisions were to clarify certain existing provisions and add others to address situations not presently covered by the article.

Work on this topic has commenced, but the commission has not yet reached a consensus regarding amendments (if any) to propose to the General Synod. If it does, it intends to submit them to the Commission on Theology for its review and comment before presenting them to the General Synod for adoption.

Judicial Bodies

In 2007, the commission brought to General Synod a recommendation that proposed significant changes to the BCO in how judicial business would be conducted in the RCA. Generally, that proposal stated that in most assemblies, when functioning as a judicatory, that work of the judicatory would be facilitated by a new judicial body of that assembly called a Commission on Judicial Business. The 2007 General Synod approved the recommendation, and a majority of the classes voted to approve proposed BCO amendments, but the amendments failed to receive the necessary approval by two-thirds of the classes. The commission informed the 2009 General Synod that it had been working and would continue to work on a similar proposal but one that only involved the judicatories on the level of the regional synods and the General Synod. It informed the 2010 General Synod that, while it continues to believe that there are merits for the proposed amendments, it would postpone proposing any amendments due to other business that would likely be before the church. That status report remains essentially unchanged—the only difference is the business before the church that the commission does not want to interfere with. The commission has shared this idea with the Vision 2020 Team in hopes that it may be useful to that team’s work. Consequently, the commission will continue to keep this subject on its agenda for future consideration.

ELECTION OF MODERATOR AND SECRETARY; APPOINTMENT OF DELEGATE TO 2019 GENERAL SYNOD

The commission elected Philip De Koster to serve as both its moderator and secretary for the annual period commencing July 1, 2019. Additionally, the commission appointed Philip DeKoster to serve as its corresponding delegate to the 2019 General Synod.
COMMISSION MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

The commission thanks Larry Schuyler for his service on this commission and therefore to the General Synod. The commission greatly appreciated his wisdom and experience resulting from his many years of service to the church, most recently as Holland Classis leader. He has completed six years of service on the commission and is rotating off its membership at the end of June.

Respectfully submitted,
Philip DeKoster, moderator