CLIMATE CHANGE

1. The Classis of Albany overtures the General Synod:

   To urge RCA institutions, congregations, and members to take immediate steps to begin to reduce fossil fuel consumption and transition to renewable energy; and further,

   To direct the General Synod Council, in conjunction with the Advocacy initiative, to develop a means for gathering information and sharing stories to help encourage and equip RCA institutions, congregations, and members to take steps to reduce fossil fuel consumption; and further,

   To direct the General Synod Council, in consultation with the Global Mission team and the Commission on Christian Action, to prepare a preliminary assessment of the effects of projected climate change (sea level rise, increasing frequency of extreme weather events such as droughts and floods, food shortages, the growing number of environmental refugees, etc.) on RCA congregations, mission facilities, and programs and to suggest measures for addressing these challenges; and further,

   To instruct the Commission on Christian Action to review the previous 1993 Christian Action report, “Global Warming,” and the 1999 report, “Climate Change Update,” and to report to the General Synod in 2020 with additional recommendations for resources and actions to help the church more faithfully care for God’s creation and be a bold and compassionate witness in a time of environmental and social crisis.

Reasons:

1. The 1993 Christian Action report “Global Warming” (MGS 1993, pp. 98–103) stated that “the greatest priority must be to reduce the use of fossil fuels, particularly coal and oil” and called on churches “to play a positive role with wise purchases and an active educational effort to inform members about the cause and consequences of global warming and the steps that are necessary to reduce this danger” (p. 100). In response to that report, the General Synod:
   • voted to instruct the general secretary to write letters to governmental leaders in the United States and Canada “urging support for national and international policies to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases, to curb deforestation and to promote reforestation” (p. 102).
   • called on pastors “to prepare special liturgies and sermons so that members may be equipped to understand environmental issues from the biblical perspective of creation and stewardship” (p. 102).
   • called on churches “to improve the energy efficiency of church buildings and appliances…” (p. 102).
   • encouraged “RCA camps and conference centers to stress environmental issues in their programs and to model environmental stewardship in their operations” (p. 103).

2. The 1999 report of the Commission on Christian Action, “Climate Change Update,” (MGS 1999, pp. 98–104) noted that addressing climate change is:
   • a matter of faithfulness to the biblical mandate “to till and keep” the garden of creation.
• an issue of justice. The poor, the marginalized, and future generations will suffer
the most from the effects of climate change, while the wealthier and those in the
more developed nations have been responsible for most of the greenhouse gas
emissions.
• a means of fulfilling the biblical command to love our neighbors as ourselves.
  We cannot ignore the plight of our neighbors who are already suffering as a
result of global climate change.

3. Since those reports were presented to the synod, the threat of climate change has
become even more severe. Twenty-five years ago when the first Christian Action
paper on global warming was presented, the CO\textsubscript{2} level in the atmosphere was
approximately 350 parts per million. Today, it is more than 400 parts per million. U.S.
carbon emissions jumped by 3.4 percent in 2018, the biggest rise in eight years.
The 20 warmest years on record have been in the past 22 years, and 2018 was
the fourth warmest year on record. The most recent report (October 2018) of the
Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a U.N.-sponsored collection of
the world’s top scientists, stated that the world may have as little as 12 years to act
to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. If we don’t act to reduce fossil fuel
emissions, the consequences will be catastrophic, according to the report. Drought
and poverty would intensify. There would be food shortages, more devastating
wildfires, coastal flooding, and an increasing number of environmental refugees;
coral reefs would die off at an alarming rate. “Several hundred million” lives are at
stake, according to the IPCC.
• The U.S. National Climate Assessment released in November 2018 reported that
climate change could cause hundreds of billions of dollars in annual damage in
the U.S. as deadly heat waves, wildfires, crop failures, coastal flooding, and an
increase in extreme weather events take their toll. The report estimates that the
cost to the United States’ economy of projected climate impacts would be $141
billion from heat-related deaths, $118 billion from sea level rise, and $32 billion
from infrastructure damage by the end of the century, among others. The nation’s
farm belt is likely to be among the hardest-hit regions. By 2050, if action is not
taken, the scientists forecast that changes in rainfall and hotter temperatures
will reduce the agricultural productivity of the Midwest to levels last seen
in the 1980s. “This report draws a direct connection between the warming
atmosphere and the resulting changes that affect Americans’ lives, communities,
and livelihoods, now and in the future,” the document reads, concluding that
“the evidence of human-caused climate change is overwhelming and continues
to strengthen, that the impacts of climate change are intensifying across the
country, and that climate-related threats to Americans’ physical, social, and
economic well-being are rising.”
• The 2018 report of the Lancet Countdown on health and climate change noted
that above-average and record-setting temperatures in the U.S. and heat waves
have been getting more frequent and lasting longer, which puts people at risk for
heat exhaustion and heat stroke while worsening chronic conditions such as lung,
heart, and kidney disease. One estimate predicts that by 2050, approximately
3,400 more Americans will die prematurely each year as a result of increased heat.
According to the report, climate change is also elevating the risk of mosquito-,
tick-, and water-borne diseases. Climate-sensitive vector-borne illnesses
transmitted by mosquitoes, ticks, and fleas, including Lyme disease and West Nile
virus, tripled between 2004 and 2016. Longer warm water seasons and increased
water temperatures support pathogens and bacteria, like Vibrio, which can cause
gastrointestinal illnesses, food poisoning, skin infections, and even death (www.
ashx?la=en&hash=99279F373B9F005C9EC364AB02EB7F636F1380CF).
• Similar data can be cited for the nation of Canada. Average temperatures in Canada have increased by 1.7 degrees Celsius since 1948. The nation has experienced a higher rate of warming than most other regions of the world, particularly in its far-north and west. Cases of Lyme disease have been reported across Canada in areas where it was never thought to exist. In early July 2018, a heat wave in the southern part of the Canadian province of Québec took the lives of up to 54 people. The Canadian Arctic is especially vulnerable, and it is warming at a much faster rate than much of the rest of the world. Scientists are already seeing dramatic reductions in Arctic sea ice cover, particularly in the summertime. This shrinking sea ice disrupts normal ocean circulation and causes changes in climate and weather around the globe (www.canada.ca/en/services/environment/weather/climatechange/causes-effects.html; www.climate realityproject.org/blog/how-climate-change-affecting-canada; www.cbc.ca/nature ofthings/blog/how-climate-change-is-already-afecting-canada).

4. Nevertheless, there is cause for hope. Increasing awareness, advances in technology, and renewed commitment to the ministry of creation care are making change possible. As examples, Fowler Camp and Conference Center has significantly reduced its fossil fuel consumption by installing solar panels and implementing other energy conservation measures. First Reformed Church in Schenectady has made care of creation a central priority in their congregation, including a decision to eliminate investments in the fossil fuel industry from a portion of their endowment funds and to re-invest in renewable energy. The RCA Creation Care initiative, coordinated by Earl James and in partnership with Creation Justice Ministries, has held several workshops and training events to equip congregations to address climate change and other threats to the well-being of God’s creation.

These are small signs of hope, signs that the Spirit is at work among us. “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God” (Romans 8:19), wrote Paul, suggesting that creation itself is yearning for the children of God to fulfill their biblical mandate “to till and keep” the earth. But the need for action is urgent. We are the first generation to feel the impact of climate change and the last generation able to do something about it. By working together, we can more faithfully care for God’s good earth, protect the lives of the poor and vulnerable, show love for our neighbors, and in word and deed witness to God’s promise “that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Romans 8:21).

2. The Reverend Classis of Schenectady overtures the General Synod:

To urge RCA institutions, congregations, and members to take immediate steps to begin to reduce fossil fuel consumption and transition to renewable energy; and further,

To direct the General Synod Council, in conjunction with the Advocacy initiative, to develop a means for gathering information and sharing stories to help encourage and equip RCA institutions, congregations, and members to take steps to reduce fossil fuel consumption; and further,

To instruct the Commission on Christian Action, in consultation with the Global Mission team and the General Synod Council, to prepare a preliminary assessment of the effects of projected climate change (sea level rise, increasing frequency of extreme weather events such as droughts and floods, food shortages, the growing number of environmental refugees, etc.) on RCA congregations,
mission facilities, and programs and to suggest measures for addressing these challenges; and further,

To instruct the Commission on Christian Action to review the previous 1993 Christian Action report, “Global Warming,” and the 1999 report, “Climate Change Update,” and to report to the General Synod in 2020 with additional recommendations for resources and actions to help the church more faithfully care for God’s creation and be a bold and compassionate witness in a time of environmental and social crisis.

Reasons:

1. The 1993 Christian Action report “Global Warming” (MGS 1993, pp. 98–103) stated that “the greatest priority must be to reduce the use of fossil fuels, particularly coal and oil” and called on churches “to play a positive role with wise purchases and an active educational effort to inform members about the cause and consequences of global warming and the steps that are necessary to reduce this danger” (p. 100). In response to that report, the General Synod voted:

a. To instruct the general secretary to write letters to governmental leaders in the United States and Canada “urging support for national and international policies to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases, to curb deforestation and to promote reforestation” (p. 102).

b. To call on pastors “to prepare special liturgies and sermons so that members may be equipped to understand environmental issues from the biblical perspective of creation and stewardship” (p. 102).

c. To call on churches “to improve the energy efficiency of church buildings and appliances...” (p. 102).

d. To encourage “RCA camps and conference centers to stress environmental issues in their programs and to model environmental stewardship in their operations” (p. 103).

2. The 1999 report of the Commission on Christian Action, “Climate Change Update,” (MGS 1999, pp. 98–104) noted that addressing climate change is:

a. A matter of faithfulness to the biblical mandate “to till and keep” the garden of creation.

b. An issue of justice. The poor, the marginalized, and future generations will suffer the most from the effects of climate change, while the wealthier and those in the more developed nations have been responsible for most of the greenhouse gas emissions.

c. A means of fulfilling the biblical command to love our neighbors as ourselves. We cannot ignore the plight of our neighbors who are already suffering as a result of global climate change.

3. Since those reports were presented to the synod, the threat of climate change has become even more severe. Twenty-five years ago, when the first Christian Action paper on global warming was presented, the CO2 level in the atmosphere was approximately 350 parts per million. Today, it is more than 400 parts per million. U.S. carbon emissions jumped by 3.4 percent in 2018, the biggest rise in eight years. The 20 warmest years on record have been in the past 22 years, and 2018 was the fourth warmest year on record. The most recent report (October 2018) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a U.N.-sponsored collection of the world’s top scientists, stated that the world may have as little as 12 years to act to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. If we don’t act to reduce fossil fuel emissions, the consequences will be catastrophic, according to the report.
Drought and poverty would intensify. There would be food shortages, more devastating wildfires, coastal flooding, and an increasing number of environmental refugees; coral reefs would die off at an alarming rate. “Several hundred million” lives are at stake, according to the IPCC.

a. The U.S. National Climate Assessment released in November 2018 reported that climate change could cause hundreds of billions of dollars in annual damage in the U.S. as deadly heat waves, wildfires, crop failures, coastal flooding, and an increase in extreme weather events take their toll. The report estimates that the cost to the United States’ economy of projected climate impacts would be $141 billion from heat-related deaths, $118 billion from sea level rise, and $32 billion from infrastructure damage by the end of the century, among others. The nation’s farm belt is likely to be among the hardest-hit regions. By 2050, if action is not taken, the scientists forecast that changes in rainfall and hotter temperatures will reduce the agricultural productivity of the Midwest to levels last seen in the 1980s. “This report draws a direct connection between the warming atmosphere and the resulting changes that affect Americans’ lives, communities, and livelihoods, now and in the future,” the document reads, concluding that “the evidence of human-caused climate change is overwhelming and continues to strengthen, that the impacts of climate change are intensifying across the country, and that climate-related threats to Americans’ physical, social, and economic well-being are rising.”

b. The 2018 report of the Lancet Countdown on health and climate change noted that above-average and record-setting temperatures in the U.S. and heat waves have been getting more frequent and lasting longer, which puts people at risk for heat exhaustion and heat stroke while worsening chronic conditions such as lung, heart, and kidney disease. One estimate predicts that by 2050, approximately 3,400 more Americans will die prematurely each year as a result of increased heat. According to the report, climate change is also elevating the risk of mosquito-, tick-, and water-borne diseases. Climate-sensitive vector-borne illnesses transmitted by mosquitoes, ticks, and fleas, including Lyme disease and West Nile virus, tripled between 2004 and 2016. Longer warm water seasons and increased water temperatures support pathogens and bacteria, like Vibrio, which can cause gastrointestinal illnesses, food poisoning, skin infections, and even death.

c. Similar data can be cited for the nation of Canada. Average temperatures in Canada have increased by 1.7 degrees Celsius since 1948. The nation has experienced a higher rate of warming than most other regions of the world, particularly in its far-north and west. Cases of Lyme disease have been reported across Canada in areas where it was never thought to exist. In early July 2018, a heat wave in the southern part of the Canadian province of Québéc took the lives of up to 54 people. The Canadian Arctic is especially vulnerable, and it is warming at a much faster rate than much of the rest of the world. Scientists are already seeing dramatic reductions in Arctic sea ice cover, particularly in the summertime. This shrinking sea ice disrupts normal ocean circulation and causes changes in climate and weather around the globe (www.canada.ca/en/services/environment/weather/climatechange/causes-effects.html; www.climate realityproject.org/blog/how-climate-change-affecting-canada; www.cbc.ca/nature ofthings/blog/how-climate-change-is-already-affecting-canada).

4. Nevertheless, there is cause for hope. Increasing awareness, advances in technology, and renewed commitment to the ministry of creation care are making change possible. As examples, Christian camps within our denomination have significantly reduced fossil fuel consumption by installing solar panels and implementing other energy conservation measures. Multiple churches have made care of creation a
central priority in their congregation, including a decision to eliminate investments in the fossil fuel industry from a portion of their endowment funds and to re-invest in renewable energy. The RCA Creation Care initiative, coordinated by Earl James and in partnership with Creation Justice Ministries, has held several workshops and training events to equip congregations to address climate change and other threats to the well-being of God’s creation.

There are small signs of hope, signs that the Spirit is at work among us. “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God” (Romans 8:19), wrote Paul, suggesting that creation itself is yearning for the children of God to fulfill their biblical mandate “to till and keep” the earth. But the need for action is urgent. We are the first generation to feel the impact of climate change and the last generation able to do something about it. By working together, we can more faithfully care for God’s good earth, protect the lives of the poor and vulnerable, show love for our neighbors, and in word and deed witness to God’s promise “that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Romans 8:21).

4. The Regional Synod of Albany overtures the General Synod:

To urge RCA institutions, congregations, and members to take immediate steps to begin to reduce fossil fuel consumption and transition to renewable energy; and further,

To direct the General Synod Council, in conjunction with the Advocacy initiative, to develop a means for gathering information and sharing stories to help encourage and equip RCA institutions, congregations, and members to take steps to reduce fossil fuel consumption; and further,

To instruct the Commission on Christian Action, in consultation with the Global Mission team and the General Synod Council, to prepare a preliminary assessment of the effects of projected climate change (sea level rise, increasing frequency of extreme weather events such as droughts and floods, food shortages, the growing number of environmental refugees, etc.) on RCA congregations, mission facilities, and programs and to suggest measures for addressing these challenges; and further,

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Reasons:

1. The 1993 Christian Action report, “Global Warming” (MGS 1993, pp. 98–103), stated that “the greatest priority must be to reduce the use of fossil fuels, particularly coal and oil” and called on churches “to play a positive role with wise purchases and an active educational effort to inform members about the cause and consequences of global warming and the steps that are necessary to reduce this danger” (p. 100). In response to that report, the General Synod did the following:
   • voted to instruct the general secretary to write letters to governmental leaders in the United States and Canada “urging support for national and international
policies to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases, to curb deforestation, and to promote reforestation” (p. 102).

- called on pastors “to prepare special liturgies and sermons so that members may be equipped to understand environmental issues from the biblical perspective of creation and stewardship.”
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- encouraged “RCA camps and conference centers to stress environmental issues in their programs and to model environmental stewardship in their operations” (p. 103).

2. The 1999 report of the Commission on Christian Action, “Climate Change Update” (MGS 1999, pp. 98–104), noted that addressing climate change is:

- a matter of faithfulness to the biblical mandate “to till and to keep” the garden of creation.
- an issue of justice. The poor, the marginalized, and future generations will suffer the most from the effects of climate change, while the wealthier and those in the more developed nations have been responsible for most of the greenhouse gas emissions.
- a means of fulfilling the biblical command to love our neighbors as ourselves.

We cannot ignore the plight of our neighbors who are already suffering as a result of global climate change.

3. Since those reports were presented to the synod, the threat of climate change has become even more severe. Twenty-five years ago, when the first Christian Action paper on global warming was presented, the CO2 level in the atmosphere was approximately 350 parts per million. Today, it is more than 400 parts per million. U.S. carbon emissions jumped by 3.4 percent in 2018, the biggest rise in eight years. The 20 warmest years on record have been in the past 22 years, and 2018 was the fourth warmest year on record. The most recent report (October 2018) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a U.N.-sponsored collection of the world’s top scientists, stated that the world may have as little as 12 years to act to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. If we don’t act to reduce fossil fuel emissions, the consequences will be catastrophic, according to the report. Drought and poverty would intensify. There would be food shortages, more devastating wildfires, coastal flooding, and an increasing number of environmental refugees. Coral reefs would die off at an alarming rate. “Several hundred million” lives are at stake, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

- The U.S. National Climate Assessment released in November 2018 reported that climate change could cause hundreds of billions of dollars in annual damage in the U.S. as deadly heat waves, wildfires, crop failures, coastal flooding, and an increase in extreme weather events take their toll. The report estimates that the cost to the United States economy of projected climate impacts would be $141 billion from heat-related deaths, $118 billion from sea level rise, and $32 billion from infrastructure damage by the end of the century, among others. The nation’s farm belt is likely to be among the hardest-hit regions. By 2050, if action is not taken, the scientists forecast that changes in rainfall and hotter temperatures will reduce the agricultural productivity of the Midwest to levels last seen in the 1980s. “This report draws a direct connection between the warming atmosphere and the resulting changes that affect Americans’ lives, communities, and livelihoods, now and in the future;” the document reads, concluding that “the evidence of human-caused climate change is overwhelming and continues to strengthen, that the impacts of climate change are intensifying across the country, and that climate-related threats to Americans’ physical, social, and economic well-being are rising.”
• The 2018 report of the Lancet Countdown on health and climate change noted that above-average and record-setting temperatures in the U.S. and heat waves have been getting more frequent and lasting longer and put people at risk for heat exhaustion and heat stroke, while worsening chronic conditions such as lung, heart, and kidney disease. One estimate predicts that by 2050, approximately 3,400 more Americans will die prematurely each year as a result of increased heat. According to the report, climate change is also elevating the risk of mosquito-, tick-, and water-borne diseases. Climate-sensitive vector-borne illnesses transmitted by mosquitoes, ticks, and fleas, including Lyme disease and West Nile virus, tripled between 2004 and 2016. Longer warm water seasons and increased water temperatures support pathogens and bacteria, like Vibrio, which can cause gastrointestinal illnesses, food poisoning, skin infections, and even death (www.apha.org/- /media/files/pdf/topics/climate/2018_us_lancet_countdown_brief.ashx?la=en&%20hash=9927F373B9F005C9EC364AB02EB7F636F1380CF).

• Similar data can be cited for the nation of Canada. Average temperatures in Canada have increased by 1.7 degrees Celsius since 1948. The nation has experienced a higher rate of warming than most other regions of the world, particularly in its far north and western regions. Cases of Lyme disease have been reported across Canada in areas where it was never thought to exist. In early July 2018, a heat wave in the southern part of the Canadian province of Québec took the lives of up to 54 people. The Canadian Arctic is especially vulnerable, and it is warming at a much faster rate than much of the rest of the world. Scientists are already seeing dramatic reductions in Arctic sea ice cover, particularly in the summertime. This shrinking sea ice disrupts normal ocean circulation and causes changes in climate and weather around the globe (www.canada.ca/en/services/environment/weather/climatechange/causes-effects.html; www.climaterealityproject.org/blog/how-climate-change-affecting-canada; www.cbc.ca/natureofthings/blog/how-climate-change-is-already-affecting-canada).

4. Nevertheless, there is cause for hope. Increasing awareness, advances in technology, and renewed commitment to the ministry of creation care are making change possible. As examples, Fowler Camp and Conference Center has significantly reduced its fossil fuel consumption by installing solar panels and implementing other energy conservation measures. First Reformed Church in Schenectady has made care of creation a central priority in their congregation, including a decision to eliminate investments in the fossil fuel industry from a portion of their endowment funds and to re-invest in renewable energy. The RCA Creation Care initiative, coordinated by Earl James and in partnership with Creation Justice Ministries, has held several workshops and training events to equip congregations to address climate change and other threats to the well-being of God’s creation.

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In response to Overtures 1, 2, and 4, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

ONB 19-1
To urge RCA institutions, congregations, and members to take immediate steps to begin to reduce fossil fuel consumption and transition to renewable energy; and further,

To direct the General Synod Council, in conjunction with the Advocacy initiative, to develop a means for gathering information and sharing stories to help encourage and equip RCA institutions, congregations, and members to take steps to reduce fossil fuel consumption; and further,

To instruct the Commission on Christian Action, in consultation with the Global Mission team and the General Synod Council, to prepare a preliminary assessment of the effects of projected climate change (sea level rise, increasing frequency of extreme weather events such as droughts and floods, food shortages, the growing number of environmental refugees, etc.) on RCA congregations, mission facilities, and programs and to suggest measures for addressing these challenges; and further,

To instruct the Commission on Christian Action to review the previous 1993 Christian Action report, “Global Warming,” and the 1999 report, “Climate Change Update,” and to report to the General Synod in 2020 with additional recommendations for resources and actions to help the church more faithfully care for God’s creation and be a bold and compassionate witness in a time of environmental and social crisis. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. For the reasons listed in the overture (see Overture 4, pp. 123–125).
2. As much as there is need for concrete action in response to climate change, which this recommendation would help us to move toward, there is also a need to keep the matter of human stewardship of the earth’s resources before us in a more conceptual and symbolic way. In an age of information overload and compassion fatigue, when there are many important issues vying for our time and resources, it is important that we take decisive steps to keep the matter of creation care in front of our congregations and other bodies—for all of the reasons already stated. The value of the action steps put forth in this recommendation lies as much in their potential to remind us of our biblical mandate to be stewards of God’s creation as it does in their potential to actually move the needle toward physical, tangible, measurable improvements in the earth’s health and well-being.
3. In terms of our denomination’s work to put hands and feet on the three priority areas of Transformed & Transforming—discipleship, leadership, and mission—this recommendation has roots in and implications for all three.
   • As disciples who love Jesus and are seeking to become more like him in our thinking and actions, how are we working to broaden our perspectives to encompass the whole of God’s creation and our impact on it? Are we willing to acknowledge our own complicity in the systemic ecological injustices that ripple out into neighborhoods and communities and ecosystems? In what ways
is the Holy Spirit calling us, as disciples, to speak truthfully and to act boldly as witnesses to God’s work as Creator and Sustainer of the earth?

- As those who are ourselves leaders and who are seeking to raise up and equip new leaders, what messages are we communicating through our words and our actions about the things that we care deeply about? Are we seeking to lead in ways that best serve our immediate needs and interests, or are we learning to lead (and teaching others how to lead) with an attunement to needs and interests that stretch beyond what lies directly in front of us? Are we listening to and walking alongside emerging leaders for whom creation care and stewardship is centrally important in our work and witness?

- As those who are called to share God’s love through mission, are we faithfully living into that call if we downplay or ignore the importance of the “stage” on which Jesus’s love is enacted—the earth? How likely is it that our efforts at disciple-making will bear fruit, especially among younger people, if our sharing of the gospel, through our lives and our words, doesn’t adequately acknowledge our God-ordained role as creation-keepers? In what ways might God be calling us into deeper missional engagement of the world through a renewal of our commitment to care for all creation?

A motion was made and supported to cease debate.

VOTED: To cease debate.

VOTED: To adopt ONB 19-1.

SPECIAL RULES OF ORDER REGARDING OVERTURES

3. The Classis of Delaware-Raritan overtures the General Synod to adopt the following changes to the Special Rules of Order of the General Synod (Book of Church Order, Chapter 3, Part II, Article 2, Section 7 [2018 edition, p. 128]):

The General Synod may receive overtures from a classis or a regional synod. It shall not receive overtures which deal with matters under adjudication or which make either direct or implied charges against persons. Overtures from classes shall be submitted to the General Synod office or postmarked not later than March 31. Overtures from regional synods shall be submitted to the General Synod office or postmarked within ten days of the close of the annual session of the regional synod.

Overtures shall have been approved by two regular stated sessions of the sending classis, and approved by a two-thirds majority at each of the two sessions. The clerk of the sending classis will certify the votes to the Office of the General Secretary of the General Synod.

Reasons:

1. The regional synods are gatherings of the classes, and while they have significant impact as programming bodies that are able to offer what individual classes may not be able to offer, legislatively speaking, they do not have an independent mandate to develop their own voice. While regional synods have “general superintendence” over their several classes, insofar as the BCO contains no discipline for a classis, the classis cannot be said to be “accountable” to the regional synod. The regional synod, therefore, as an assembly, is a derivative of the classes, and therefore, ought not be a separate, originating voice for overtures.
2. Overtures have become a means for altering the life of the entire denomination. They ought, therefore, to be cautiously and prayerfully considered by an assembly of office-bearers prior to being sent to the assembled body of classes (i.e., the General Synod). Provision that overtures be considered twice, and passed by super-majorities, will help guarantee that sufficient review has been done at the classis level.

The cover letter to this overture indicated that, in the spirit of the overture, the Classis of Delaware-Raritan approved the overture at two separate stated meetings by a two-thirds majority.

In response to Overture 3, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

ONB 19-2
To deny Overture 3. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. Given that some classes meet only once per year, these classes would need two years in order to make an overture. While we agree that it is important for classes to allow adequate time for thoughtful consideration of overtures, this requirement would place an unnecessarily heavy burden on classes that, due to a variety of circumstances, are unable to meet more frequently.
2. In some jurisdictions, the regional synod serves an important role as an overarching body that provides leadership and connection to the RCA for its classes. By removing the possibility for regional synods to make overtures, we would effectively be decreasing the likelihood that these voices would be heard.

ESTABLISH TASK FORCE ON NOMINATIONS PROCESS

5. The Regional Synod of Albany respectfully overtures the General Synod to establish a task force made up of one representative of each of the regional synods and one member each from the Commissions on Church Order and Judicial Business to review the practices of the Commission on Nominations regarding finding, vetting, and selecting nominees for the various commissions, boards, agencies, and councils of the General Synod, for report back to General Synod 2020. Such representatives shall not be currently serving on the Commission on Nominations, the General Synod Council, or the board of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency.

Reasons:
1. The Commission on Nominations refused to re-nominate two members of the board of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA), despite the fact that the MFCA board asked for them to serve a second term, and the individuals themselves asked to serve a second term. This decision by the Commission on Nominations “reflected the general secretary’s clear recommendation to our commission. He participated ex officio in our January meeting ... ” (letter from moderator of the Commission on Nominations, February 22, 2019). This, despite the fact that the general secretary is not an ex officio member of the Commission on Nominations, and, in fact, the Commission on Nominations is one of the two commissions prohibited from engaging consultants (BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 1c [2018 edition, p. 111]). The Book of Church Order notes that “The commission, in consultation with the general secretary, shall search the denomination for suitable nominees” (BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 8c(2) [2018 edition, p. 116]).
The consultation with the general secretary is for searching for suitable nominees, not determining who is to be nominated.

2. The *Book of Church Order* states, “In making nominations it shall consider the geographic location, occupation, and previous record of service to the denomination. … It shall consider this and other pertinent data in light of each commission’s or agency’s responsibilities, membership needs, suggested nominees … ” (*BCO*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 8c(2) [2018 edition, p. 116]). And further, “The Commission shall monitor the inclusiveness of the membership of the various commissions and agencies with respect to geography, gender, age, cultural and social differences, and academic and other appropriate expertise” (*BCO*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 8c(4) [2018 edition, p. 116]). The Commission on Nominations is charged with nominating individuals to boards and commissions that balance the experience and expertise of individuals with the breadth of diversity in the Reformed Church in America. The Commission on Nominations did not suggest any concerns with their qualifications, competence, fitness, or service on the MFCA board, but rather, a seemingly punitive measure is being imposed because the MFCA board made a decision with which the general secretary disagrees (letter from the moderator of the Commission on Nominations, February 22, 2019).

3. The questions and concerns that this action brings up are not only for this situation alone, but also cast a shroud of suspicion upon the Commission on Nominations and its ability to effectively and adequately make qualified nominations for the General Synod to consider.

4. Establishing a task force composed of representatives from the regional synods is the most natural way for the church to examine the functioning of the commission that effectively controls who serves on commissions, GSC, boards, and agencies.

*In response to Overtures 5, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:*

**ONB 19-3**  
To deny Overture 5. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. In light of the Vision 2020 process, we do not feel that the timing is right for the formation of a task force of this sort.

2. The spirit of this overture seems to suggest that there is a gap in accountability and oversight for the Commission on Nominations (and likewise, perhaps for other commissions that report directly to General Synod). The General Synod Council has decided to review the Commission on Nominations this year as part of its regular cycle of business, but the General Synod may want to more closely consider how this is done and what its timeline is, as well as perhaps other bodies or mechanisms whereby General Synod commissions are regularly reviewed and provided with feedback. Our recommendation would be, however, to not invest significant additional resources into this until Vision 2020 is complete.

A motion was made and supported from the floor to postpone discussion of ONB 19-3 until after the report of the Commission on Nominations was presented.

**VOTED:** To postpone discussion of ONB 19-3 until after the report of the Commission on Nominations was presented.

Discussion of ONB 19-3 resumed following the conclusion of the report of the Commission on Nominations.
A motion was made and supported to cease debate.

VOTED: To cease debate.

VOTED: To adopt ONB 19-3.

In response to Proposal 1 from the report of the president (see p. 22), the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended the following:

ONB 19-4
To create a volunteer-driven RCA media channel, hosted on commercial sites such as YouTube and Facebook, the purpose of which is to make content created by RCA entities publicly available for the advancement of the cause of Christ; and further,

To form a committee of interested volunteers, led by James Nakakihara, to drive and maintain this project at no cost to the denomination. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. This would be a way to show the gifts, passions, and many unique faces and stories of the RCA and to invite those within our denomination to see more fully who we are and embrace the diversity of our experiences and perspectives.
2. It has the potential, through the use of popular online platforms and media formats, to reach those who are outside the RCA or the broader Reformed tradition and provide a window into who we are that they might not otherwise have sought out or been interested in engaging. It might also, we hope, reach those who do not know Jesus.

In response to Proposal 2 from the report of the president (see p. 23), the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended the following:

ONB 19-5
To instruct the Commission on Theology, in consultation with the Commission on History and the professorate, to prepare or recommend a study on postmodernism and its history, beliefs, and relationship to Christianity as a resource for churches to understand the world we live in and to help devise ways to reach people for Christ who are living under this prevailing philosophy, for report to General Synod 2021. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. Given the rise of the “Nones” (the rapid decline of those who report having no particular religious affiliation) and the impact this reality is having on RCA churches, we agree with the president that deeper understanding of this phenomenon and its relationship to the rise of postmodernism could provide much-needed insight into the ways we are engaging the world as a church.
2. While many noteworthy and helpful resources (books, articles, etc.) on postmodernism are available already, having these resources vetted and curated through the lens and expertise of RCA General Synod professors and the Commissions on Theology and History would offer something uniquely suited to our context.