Report of the Professorate

The office of General Synod professor involves representing “the living tradition of the church in the preparation and certification of candidates for its ministry,” as well as exercising “the ministry of teaching within the RCA as a whole” (BCO, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 8, Section 1, [2018 edition, p. 72]). We fulfill this office both individually and collectively. Elected and installed by the General Synod, we remain amenable to the General Synod in matters of doctrine, striving at all times and in all ways to fulfill our calling faithfully, diligently, and cheerfully. This is the professorate’s eighth annual report to the General Synod.

There are presently six General Synod professors: Dr. Jaeseung Cha, from New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS); Drs. Carol Bechtel, Timothy Brown, and James Brownson from Western Theological Seminary (WTS); and Drs. Chad Pierce and Cornelis Kors from the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA). Each professor was nominated by a theological agent of the General Synod and then elected by the General Synod to exercise a substantial and continuing role in preparing candidates for ministry in the RCA under the authority of their nominating agency.

The General Synod professors are represented on the Pastoral Formation Oversight Board (PFOB), and we continue to be in dialogue with that group about matters pertaining to the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry (CFM). We are also represented on the committees of the MFCA that recommend the granting of the CFM to students at non-RCA seminaries and candidates pursuing the Approved Alternate Route (AAR) to ordination. We set and evaluate the written examinations for the AAR candidates.

As a body, the professorate has met twice in the past year. Our fall meeting was held November 9–10, 2018, at WTS in Holland, Michigan. In addition to our regular agenda, we discussed a paper by Tom Boogaart entitled, “A Theology of Leadership: Self-Disclosure and Self-Examination in the Drama of the Capture of the Ark.”

At our spring meeting, held March 1–2, 2019, at WTS, we discussed a paper on “The Certificate of Fitness for Ministry (CFM) and the Professorate” by Cornelis Kors. We also hosted an informational meeting with prospective members of the professorate. Finally, we discussed some issues related to the proposed reorganization of the denomination to be decided in 2020.

As a body and as individuals, we mark with sadness and appreciation the December 2018 retirement of our friend and colleague, the Rev. Dr. Tom Boogaart. Tom has served WTS and the RCA faithfully for the last 33 years, shaping generations of pastors and teachers “to preach and teach the good news of salvation in Christ, to build up and equip the church for mission in the world, to free the enslaved, to relieve the oppressed, to comfort the afflicted, and to walk humbly with God” (from the Declaration for Ministers of Word and Sacrament, BCO, Formulary 3 [2018 edition, p. 133]). We pray that God will continue to bless Tom and “prosper the work of [his] hands” (Psalm 90:17).

Conclusion

In all of our work, we continue to explore new possibilities for our collective role. We are grateful for having been charged with this call and are deeply sensible of our responsibility to the church. We solicit your prayers and your advice, and we are committed to engaging conversation at all levels of the RCA’s life and work.
Respectfully submitted,
Carol Bechtel, moderator, General Synod professorate,
together with the entire professorate, including Timothy Brown, James Brownson,
Jaeseung Cha, Cornelis Kors, and Chad Pierce