

**REPORT OF THE MULTI-RACIAL FUTURE FREED FROM RACISM
ADVISORY FORUM**

R-36 Advice:
(p. 227) To vote in favor of recommendation 36.

R-37
(p. 227-228) AMENDMENT:

To urgently direct the General Synod Council 1) to explore the current status of the relationship between the Reformed Church in America and Native American/First Nations congregations and communities, 2) to create a plan to restore the voices of Native American/First Nations congregations in the life, work, and ministry of the RCA, and 3) to fund these efforts with 5 percent of the Lilly Endowment grant, and 4) to report back to consult with the Commission on Race and Ethnicity by February 2010 October 2009 with its conclusions, intentions, and involved costs; and further,

to ensure the success of this project, one of the project leaders will be a Native American/First Nations person who is familiar with the goals and objectives of the Commission on Race and Ethnicity on this matter; and further,

to encourage all the regional synods of the Heartland, the Far West and Canada to implement plans to enrich and strengthen their relationships with existing Native American/First Nations congregations and ministries in their regions, and encourage new church development among Native American/First Nations peoples.

Reasons:

1. To include Canadian reference of “First Nations people.”
2. To suggest a more reasonable time frame for reporting.
3. General Synod lacks authority to re-direct the use of Lilly Endowment funds.
4. To encourage both the restoration of current RCA Native American/First Nations relationships and the development of new church and ministry opportunities among and wherever Native Americans/First Nations people live in the United States and Canada.

**REPORT OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
ON OVERTURES AND NEW BUSINESS**

In response to overture 1, the advisory committee recommends:

R-48 RECOMMENDATION:
(p. 103) **To deny overture 1.**

Reason:

A similar overture to the 2006 General Synod was forwarded to the Commission on Church Order, which studied the issue and did not recommend any change to the *Book of Church Order* at that time.

In response to overture 5, the advisory committee recommends:

R-51 RECOMMENDATION:
(p. 105) **To deny overture 5.**

Reasons:

1. The RCA's polity already assigns to classes oversight in revitalizing existing churches.
2. There are already informal means for providing resources beyond classis boundaries (e.g., the Program Coordination Team, or PACT, group) which is a regional and denominational staff gathering).

In response to overture 6, the advisory committee recommends:

R-52 RECOMMENDATION:
(p. 105) **To deny overture 6.**

Reason:

The requirement in the *Book of Church Order* that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper be administered, if possible, at least once every three months is sufficient as a minimum, and typically is already exceeded by most congregations.

In response to overture 7, the advisory committee recommends:

R-53 RECOMMENDATION:
(p. 105) **To direct the Commission on Christian Action to study the possible benefits of RCA support of legislation that would permit an adopted person, or the adoptive parent or guardian of a minor who was adopted, access to a copy of the adopted person's original birth**

certificate and related medical and cultural information, upon request, for report to a subsequent General Synod.

Reason:

Most national adoption and child welfare organizations support adoptee access, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Adoption Agency Council of New Jersey, the executive directors of Catholic Charities, the Child Welfare League of America, the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, the National Adoption Center, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the General Convention of the Episcopal Church.

From the Report of the Commission on Christian Action:

R-23
(p. 186)

AMENDMENT:

To affirm the value of continued dialogue and discernment on the topic of homosexuality within the church, to state that our dialogical and discerning work is not done, and that legislative and judicial steps ~~that wound the body of Christ and seek to coerce conformity~~ are not helpful at this time; and further,

to encourage assemblies to refrain from affirm and extend the decisions of the 2005 and 2006 General Synods to reject disciplinary proceedings as a way of dealing with minority viewpoints on this controversial issue; and further,

to recommend that officeholders and ministers avoid actions in violation of the policies of the earlier statements of General Synod on ordination and relevant state laws on marriage, with sensitivity to the pastoral needs of all involved.

Reasons:

1. The amendment eliminates unnecessary, inflammatory language.
2. The advisory committee was unable to locate in the 2005 and 2006 General Synod minutes references to *decisions* rejecting disciplinary proceedings as a way of dealing with minority viewpoints.

In response to overtures 15-18 and 20, the advisory committee recommends:

R-56
(pp. 108-110)

RECOMMENDATION:

To deny overtures 15 through 18 and 20.

Reason:

The substance of these overtures is adequately addressed by R-23 (as amended).

From P-1 (p. 4), from the Report of the President:

R-57 **To affirm that worship is a part of every dimension of Our Call, and therefore to encourage the General Synod Council to incorporate more explicit language about worship into its global end, ends, and sub-ends policies.**

Reason:

Worship is rightly an integral part of the denomination's identity.

From P-2 (p. 5), from the Report of the President:

R-58 **To instruct the officers of the General Synod to appoint a task force of no more than eight persons to explore the nature of and funding for a major worship initiative in the RCA; and further,**

to include on this task force persons with particular expertise and experience in the understanding and practice of Reformed worship, in worship education, in the unique worship needs of new and emerging congregations, and in funding development, so that any proposed initiative (and its aspects) might be multi-generational in scope, multi-faceted in approach, and affordable; and further,

to instruct the task force to report back to the next meeting of the General Synod with the results of its work and any relevant recommendations.

Reasons:

1. Worship is rightly an integral part of the denomination's identity.
2. Such an initiative would provide useful resources, particularly for new and emerging congregations.

From P-3 (p. 6), from the Report of the President:

R-59 **To direct the General Synod Council to engage in an anonymous electronic survey focused on 1) churches started in the RCA in the last ten years, and 2) a representative sample of other churches in the RCA. Questions should focus on the following:**

- a. **Is infant baptism an area of disagreement within the church? If so, where do the disagreements occur?**
- b. **Does the church practice infant baptism?**

- c. **How many infants were baptized in the last five years? How many adults?**
- d. **Has the church rebaptized anyone in the last five years?**
- e. **What percentage of parents in the church has not brought their infant children for infant baptism over the last five years?**
- f. **Has the church dedicated any infants in the last five years? If so, what percentage, in comparison to infant baptisms?**
- g. **Does the church allow baptized children to partake of the Lord's Supper before making a public profession of faith before the congregation?**

and further,

to instruct the General Synod Council to refer the survey results to the Commission on Theology for study and report back to the earliest possible General Synod.

Reason:

Such a survey would provide a clearer and more objective sense of the nature and extent of actual practice in the RCA surrounding infant baptism.

From P-4 (p. 7), from the Report of the President:

R-60

To commend to congregations, consistories, ministers, classes, and regional synod staff the following studies on baptism produced by the Commission on Theology, and to make them available on both the RCA website and in a printed packet through the RCA's distributor, Faith Alive Christian Resources:

- **1967 "A Statement on Infant Baptism,"** which argues that infant baptism is valid biblically, theologically, sociologically and historically.
- **1975 "Concerning Rebaptism,"** which explores why people may request rebaptism, rejects the practice of rebaptism on theological and pastoral grounds, and offers pastoral advice.
- **1977 and 1984 "Baptized Non-Communicants and the Celebration of the Lord's Supper,"** which argues that baptized children may be admitted to the Lord's Table.
- **1983 "Is Infant Dedication an Alternative to Infant Baptism?,"** which rejects dedication as an alternative to infant baptism and offers brief pastoral advice on working with parents around this issue.
- **2007 "Who May Present Children for Baptism?,"** which develops advice for elders dealing with unusual requests for infant baptism from Christians who may not be parents of the child (e.g., grandparents, caretakers, etc.);

and further,

to direct the Commission on Theology to offer a paper on the place and significance of baptism (both infant and adult) in the life of a missional congregation. The focus of the paper should fall on the range of flexibility and variance from established RCA baptismal practice that may be justified and appropriate for a church in mission. The paper should be presented to the earliest possible General Synod.

Reasons:

1. Existing resources regarding infant baptism would be made readily available.
2. A new resource appropriate to the RCA's current missional emphasis would be created.

From P-5 (p. 8), from the Report of the President:

R-61

To direct the moderator of the General Synod Council, in consultation with the officers of the General Synod, to appoint a task force of not more than fifteen members representing the Commission on Theology, the Commission on Church Order, the General Synod professors of theology, the leadership of the various regional synods, and commissioned pastors, to review the training for and the role of commissioned pastors in the RCA, and to bring a report and whatever recommendations they deem necessary to the next meeting of the General Synod.

Reason:

There is not consistency among classes as to what constitutes sufficient training for and the role of commissioned pastors.

REPORT OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHURCH ORDER AND GOVERNANCE

From the Report of the Commission on Church Order:

R-27 Advice:
(p. 210) To vote in favor of recommendation 27.

R-28 Advice:
(p. 211) To vote in favor of recommendation 28.

R-29 Advice:
(p. 211) To vote in favor of recommendation 29.

R-30 Advice:
(p. 212) To vote in favor of recommendation 30.

R-31 Advice:
(p. 215) To vote in favor of recommendation 31.

R-32 Advice:
(p. 216) To vote in favor of recommendation 32.

R-33 Advice:
(p. 217) To vote in favor of recommendation 33.

R-34 Advice:
(p. 218) To vote in favor of recommendation 34.

From the Report of New Brunswick Theological Seminary:

R-42 Advice:
(p. 241) To vote in favor of recommendation 42.

From the Report of the GSC Serving as the Executive Committee of the General Synod:

R-14 AMENDMENT (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken;
(p. 81) additions proposed by this amendment are double underlined; deletions
reinstated by this amendment are shaded):

Article 1. General Synod Defined

The General Synod is the highest assembly and judicatory of the Reformed Church in America. It consists of two minister delegates and two elder delegates from each of the classes having four thousand or fewer

confessing members on the roll of its churches, and one minister delegate and one elder delegate for each two thousand confessing members, or fraction thereof, from each of the classes having more than four thousand confessing members on the roll of its churches as computed in accordance with the Bylaws of the General Synod; one elder or minister delegate from each of the regional synods; two General Synod professor of theology delegates from each of the theological seminaries of the Reformed Church; a number of furloughing missionary and chaplain delegates; ~~five three~~ additional elder or minister delegates who are women, five three additional elder or minister delegates who are racial/ethnic minorities, and five three additional elder or minister delegates who are thirty years of age or younger; and corresponding delegates provided for in the Bylaws of the General Synod. Voting rights shall be limited to elder delegates and those minister delegates who are actively serving in ministries under the jurisdiction or with the approval of an assembly. The General Synod is a permanent, continuing body which functions between stated sessions through the General Synod Council, commissions, and agencies.

Article 3. *Delegates*

Sec. 7. ~~The five three additional delegates who are women, five three additional delegates who are racial/ethnic minorities, and five three additional delegates who are thirty years of age or younger shall be eligible for appointment as delegates to the General Synod from the classis of membership. A delegate shall be eligible once during each succeeding five year period as a representative of any of these categories. After a delegate from any of these categories has been appointed by a classis, that classis shall not have a delegate from that same category until such time as all other classes have had the opportunity to appoint a delegate in that category.~~

Reasons:

1. The amendment confirms the intention of the recommendation of the task force, yet with sensitivity to cost.
2. Securing a lesser number of delegates will be easier to implement.

Note: Adoption of R-14 and R-15 as amended would increase the assessment by \$.12 (12 cents) per confessing member. (One cent per delegate added per confessing member.)

R-15
(p. 82)

Sec. 11. Regional Synods

- a. Two women shall be appointed corresponding delegates by each regional synod; said appointments may be made in consultation with the Commission for Women.
- b. One young adult may be appointed as a corresponding delegate by each regional synod.

~~Regional Synods shall appoint two women, one young man and one young woman in high school or college, and two racial/ethnic minority members.~~

totaling six corresponding delegates; said appointments shall be made in consultation with appropriate constituent bodies.

Sec. 13. Specific Commission Additional Appointments

The Commission for Women shall appoint ~~three delegates who are women and are not members~~ **one delegate who is a woman and not a member** of the commission; the Commission on Race and Ethnicity shall appoint ~~three delegates who are racial/ethnic minority members and are not members~~ **one delegate who is a racial/ethnic minority member and not a member** of the commission; the Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship shall appoint ~~three delegates who are young adults and are not members~~ **one delegate who is a young adult and not a member** of the commission.

Reasons:

1. The amendment confirms the intention of the recommendation of the task force, yet with sensitivity to cost.
2. Securing a lesser number of delegates will be easier to implement.

Note: Adoption of R-14 and R-15 would result in an addition of \$.01 (one cent) per additional delegate, per confessing member, for a total of \$.12 (12 cents).

R-49
(p. 104)
Overture 3

RECOMMENDATION:
To deny overture 3.

Reason:

1. Because of our support of R-34, approval of this overture would limit continuing conversation around bounds, which we believe is beneficial to the RCA at this time.

R-50
(p. 104)
Overture 4

RECOMMENDATION:
To deny overture 4.

Reason:

1. Because of the advisory committee's support of R-34, approval of this overture would limit continuing conversation around bounds, which the advisory committee believes is beneficial to the RCA at this time.
2. The seating of delegates from a so called "affinity classis" should not be challenged until this matter is decided within the RCA.
3. Delegates to the 2009 General Synod have already been seated, and this action was not challenged.

REPORT OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR WOMEN'S MINISTRIES

From the Report of the Commission for Women:

R-39 AMENDMENT:
(p. 238) **To instruct the General Synod Council to develop and hold a training event for all RCA staff that addresses issues of gender and power, assumptions about women as leaders, the use of language with regard to gender, and specific ways to fully include women in the life of the church; and further,**

to encourage the regional synods and classes to hold similar events, with the intention of increasing advocacy for women.

Reason:

The advisory committee affirms the Commission for Women's finding that this training is necessary for denominational staff. The presumed benefits of such a training event should be extended to all levels of our governance.

R-40 AMENDMENT:
(p. 238) **To direct the General Synod Council to develop ~~the funding~~ a plan for a future Office for Women that would ~~allow~~ not be charged with raising its own support, enabling the RCA to live out its stated commitment to the full inclusion of women at all levels of the church's leadership and ministry; and further,**

to present the report to the 2010 General Synod and to have a staff member in place by January 2011 ~~2010~~ or as soon as possible thereafter.

Reasons:

1. The RCA has regularly affirmed the need for a strong and active advocacy role for women in the church.
2. The current self-funded model has had the opposite effect of its original intention, which was to ensure the continuation of the Office for Women.
3. Fundraising would be burdensome and would take away from the important ministry responsibilities of the office.
4. The current momentum around women's ministries and the tone of many of the overtures call for immediate attention with regard to continuation of the Office for Women.
5. Full inclusion of women in the life of the RCA continues to be an issue of justice.
6. The General Synod Council has initiated a consultation process that will include wide denominational representation and give direction to the future of the Office for Women. This advisory committee affirms this consultation process with a sense of urgency.
7. This assessment increase would provide funding comparable to the current funding for each office of the RCA's racial-ethnic ministries.

Note: This would increase the current per-confessing-member assessment by \$1.30.

R-55
(pp.
106-
108,
110a)

RECOMMENDATION:

To deny overtures 9 through 14 and 19.

Reason:

The concerns expressed in the overtures are addressed by R-40.

**REPORT OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND BENEFITS**

From the Report of the GSC Serving as the Executive Committee of the General Synod:

R-7
(p. 51) AMENDMENT:
To reduce the proposed 2010 General Synod Council assessment by ~~\$225,000~~ \$1 per confessing member contingent upon approval of R-6 by two-thirds of the classes.

Reasons:

1. To be consistent with the method with which assessments are calculated, the amount must be converted to a per-member figure.
2. This allows a sufficient reserve in 2010 for half the average cost of synod over the past five years.

R-8
(p. 51) Advice:
To vote in favor of recommendation 8.

R-9
(p. 51) AMENDMENT:
To instruct the General Synod Council, acting in its capacity as the General Synod Executive Committee, contingent upon approval of R-6 by two-thirds of the classes, to:

- **Adopt not later than June 2010 a total per-member assessment increase for calendar year 2011 that does not exceed the U.S. rate of inflation as reported in May 2010 in the Consumer Price Index provided by the United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics; and further, that the 2011 assessment include an amount sufficient to support 50 percent of the average cost of each General Synod meeting over the past five years, to be applied to the cost of the 2011 General Synod.**
- **On the advice and approval of the Commission on Nominations to appoint ad interim members of the various commissions, agencies, and institutions sufficient to address vacancies as per the *Book of Church Order*.**
- **Act on behalf of the General Synod in such other matters that cannot reasonably be delayed until the next stated session of the General Synod.**

Reason:

It is necessary to clarify that this recommendation refers to all assessments and to limit the potential assessment increase in 2010.

R-10 Advice:
(p. 69) To vote in favor of recommendation 10.

R-11 Advice:
(p. 69) To vote in favor recommendation 11.

R-12 Advice:
(p. 72) To vote in favor of recommendation 12.

R-13 Advice:
(p. 72) To vote in favor of recommendation 13.

R-54 In response to overture 8, the advisory committee recommends:
(p. 106)

RECOMMENDATION:

To deny overture 8.

Reasons:

1. Passage of this overture, without revision to the Formulary 5 agreement, would require all full-time pastors under call or contract and spouses to enroll in the current RCA medical program.
2. Passage would create adverse claim selection for the plan, which could threaten its financial viability.
3. Our denomination is committed to the Covenant of Care for all pastors and their families at all ages during their lives.

From the Report of the Board of Benefits Services:

R-21 AMENDMENT:
(p. 180) **To increase the per-member assessment for classes in which consistories that, as of June 30, 2009, are in arrears in the payment of benefits required in Formulary 5 (Call to a Minister of Word and Sacrament), including the Covenant of Care premium, for all of its ministers serving full-time in congregations under call or contract, unless the minister is covered through the Canadian portion of the RCA plan or the plan of the communion where the minister's membership is held (BCO I.II.12, Sec. 3, and 1.I.2, Sec. 7), with one-third of the total arrears due by the May date for regular assessments in the subsequent three years; and further,**

~~that the 2010 assessment be set for each classis in which there are consistories in arrears based on the amount of the current arrearage for the consistories in that classis.~~

To require that for all years subsequent to 2009, all benefit premiums required in Formulary 5, including the Covenant of Care premium if applicable, that are unpaid as of June 30 will increase the per-member assessment for the classes in which consistories are over ninety days in arrears and that the amount in arrears must be paid by the May due date for regular assessments in each of the subsequent years.

Reasons:

1. Consistories are required to fulfill the provisions of Formulary 5 for all full-time pastors under call or contract.
2. Formulary 5 requires payment to the Board of Benefits Services (BOBS) for medical insurance or the Covenant of Care premium, life insurance, and long-term disability premiums for all full-time called or contracted pastors. BOBS implemented the Covenant of Care contribution policy as of January 1, 2006.
3. Classes shall assure provisions of the call form (Formulary 5) for retirement and insurance (medical, life, and long-term disability) are fulfilled.
4. Therefore, implementation of this recommendation provides means by which classes can fulfill the obligations of the call form (Formulary 5).