

## GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL REPORTS

### Report of the General Synod Council on Church Multiplication

*But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that the sower and reaper may rejoice together (John 4:35-36).*

Appreciating the effectiveness of church planting and its biblical precedent in the book of Acts, the Reformed Church in America has committed itself to church multiplication. And the heart of church multiplication is a passion for changed lives.

God's people across the RCA are imagining new ways to show and tell the good news of life in Christ. In renewing their commitment to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20), many congregations and church leaders are discovering new life and energy—and plenty of challenges—as they plant new churches in their neighborhoods and communities.

New churches reach new people. In fact, the most effective way to reach spiritually lost people is by starting a new church. The ministry of a new church looks and feels different from that of an established church. A new church naturally attracts people across cultural boundaries and in rural, urban, and suburban settings.

#### Church Planter Reaches Out to Immigrants

“I have a vision and burden to establish Reformed churches among immigrants from Southeast Asia in major North American cities,” says Ram Nepal, who came from Nepal to live in the U.S. just a few years ago.

Ram Nepal's new partnership with RCA Church Multiplication is the beginning of an exciting outreach to Southeast Asian people right here in North America.

Ram currently lives in Dallas. “One look around stores and businesses reveals the explosion of Asian immigrants into North Texas,” he says. “A great number of these people are from India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Burma, Sri Lanka, and Bhutan. The vast majority are from Hindu, Muslim, and Buddhist backgrounds.”

If all goes as planned, the churches Ram plants throughout North America eventually will partner with churches in Nepal and other Asian countries to extend their mission outreach overseas. “When we reach Asians here, they will in turn influence their extended families back in their own countries,” he says. “It takes fellow Asians who have been saved out of pagan religions to bridge the gaps between eastern and western worldviews.”

Ram Nepal received Christ as a high school student in 1975. “Due to my Hindu background, I knew that persecution lay ahead in my new life as Jesus' disciple,” he says. “Four years later I answered God's call to full-time Christian ministry, and ever since I have devoted my life to reaching non-believers with the message of salvation through a personal relationship with Christ and bringing them together for growth and fellowship in Bible-believing churches.” In the early days of his ministry, Ram was often arrested; once he was imprisoned and beaten for two weeks.

By 1990, when prison terms for Christians were finally abolished, the underground church in Nepal had grown to 15,000 believers. Today half a million Nepalese say they are Christian—1.7 percent of Nepal's population of 29 million. But people who become Christians are still persecuted and lose their social standing. “I had to leave about four years ago due to serious threats against my life and my family,” says Ram.

However, his zeal to plant churches that will reach Nepalese and other Southeast Asian people burns as brightly as ever. “It is our Christian duty to make sure that these people have a chance to hear about Jesus when they are right at our doorstep,” he says.

#### GSC MULTIPLICATION ENDS MONITORING REPORT

Each spring the RCA's general secretary is required to report to the General Synod Council (GSC) on progress on the various ends policies established by the GSC. The monitoring report for church multiplication follows.

### **Church Multiplication Ends Policy**

The RCA will foster a sustainable movement of church multiplication through starting new congregations.

#### **General Secretary's Interpretation**

**Goal:** To begin four hundred new congregations by 2013 with one-third of these churches to be multicultural plants or racial/ethnic congregations different than the Anglo majority culture. This represents a tenfold increase in church planting from 2003, when approximately ten new congregations were birthed each year in the RCA, as witnessed by our 98 by '98 decade challenge. In 2013, we seek to start ninety-eight new congregations in one year, thus creating a sustainable movement of church multiplication.

#### *Strategies*

Previous monitoring reports have identified five key strategies employed in the church multiplication effort to build four hundred new and reproducing congregations. They are described at length in the two previous monitoring reports; they are briefly listed here as background for our work.

- Exponential funding: creative exponential funding vehicles that can take us into the next decade.
- Exponential leadership: a dynamic reproduction of new leadership must occur to reach the quality and quantity needed to supply the increasing number of new congregations.
- Doubling the number of parenting churches (primary initiating and directive partners) in the RCA every two years.
- Every church plant is born with an intentional plan and accountability to reproduce.
- Having three times the number of emerging planting leaders in the "pipeline" (identified and nurtured) as the number of plants the RCA is starting each year.

#### **Building a Church in Calling Lake**

Norm McCallum is laying the groundwork for a new church by building relationships with First Nations people in Calling Lake, Alberta.

The First Nations people in Calling Lake are Woodland Cree—the same tribe McCallum belongs to. "I come from Saskatchewan; I grew up and became a Christian here," he says. "I can relate to a lot of what's going on.

"All across this land, in my experience working with aboriginals, there's such a need for the gospel to be brought to them. There's poor housing, poor water, high suicide and assault rates, alcohol and drugs, syncretism—there's so much that plagues our people.

"I know that God is the only hope; he's the only way to get them out of these third-world conditions. We no longer depend on the Creator, but on creation, on man. We no longer look to God. We have to come back to our first love, Jesus Christ. Then and only then will we get out of the mess we're in."

To get to know people from the reservation, McCallum and his wife, Maria, visit the local food bank and participate in Bible studies. A summer vacation Bible school program drew 63 children, and about 20 parents showed up for a special graduation ceremony at the end of the week. McCallum also leads worship services in local homes for 12 to 15 people each week.

"They're already talking about a church," he says. "I'm excited because I think it would be the first RCA church on aboriginal land!" While the RCA has several Native American Indian congregations on reservations in the U.S., it has none in Canada.

### **Mentoring Program Leads to New Church**

Alas de Aguila (Eagle's Wings), a Hispanic church plant on the north side of Holland, Michigan, has experienced dramatic growth during its short life. The church held its first formal meeting in April 2007. Since then, 41 people have made new commitments to Christ, and worship services now average 70 to 75 people each week.

Alas de Aguila's parent church is Beechwood Reformed Church in Holland. The idea to plant a Hispanic church on the north side of Holland was born out of Beechwood's partnership with Woodside Elementary School through Kids Hope U.S.A. Kids Hope is a national program that matches at-risk kids with Christian mentors from a local church.

"We had more than thirty mentors who were involved with kids at that school through Kids Hope," says Jim Lankheet, Beechwood's senior pastor. "We began to study the Kids Hope kids at the Woodside School and discovered that a large percentage were from Latino families. Eventually, we realized that there were very few churches or groups reaching the large and growing population of Spanish-speaking people on the north side of Holland. We knew then we had found the next group of people the Lord was asking us to reach."

Alas de Aguila's pastor, Hugo Vasquez, believes that the church's emphasis on fellowship draws in new believers. "Our goal is to create a community of faith where we can live our Christianity throughout the week, not just on Sundays," he says. "We get to know each other. My goal is to have the DNA of the church be reaching out."

### **Korean Churches Support Atlanta Area Church Plant**

Atlanta, Georgia, is home to the fastest-growing Korean community in the United States, and Korean churches in the Synod of New York have begun sponsoring church plants there.

In May 2003, about six months before he graduated from New Brunswick Theological Seminary, Kyunghoon Suh met three families in Marietta, the largest suburb of Atlanta. "They wanted to begin a new spiritual journey with a new pastor," he says.

"Suh began commuting to Atlanta every week while still a student," says Thomas Song, who provides pastoral care for Suh on behalf of the Synod of New York and Nassau-Suffolk Classis. After graduation, Suh moved to Marietta with his family, and he is now pastor of a church plant called New Church of Marietta.

"The New York Synod and the Classis of Nassau-Suffolk have been helping us with not only financial support but also with communication and prayers," says Suh. "And the New Church of New York, which is my mother church, has helped us with prayers and materials. Many Korean pastors in New York and New Jersey are also a great supporting group to our ministry.

"There are now about ten families with twenty-five adult members and fifteen youth and children. The adult members are all first generation Korean immigrants, and most of the children are Korean Americans." Suh says they use the church facilities of a local Baptist church that is located in a suburban neighborhood, and most members live near the church, although one person drives more than two hours to attend.

### **Data**

The chart below details the year-by-year projections made by the Church Multiplication Team concerning the number of new congregations needed each year to reach the goal of four hundred new congregations by 2013:

2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
12	8	11	15	20	25	33	43	55	80	98

- The RCA ended 2008 with 114 New Congregation Plans approved, which is beyond the 91 projected for the first five years of Our Call.
- Regional synods are reporting worship attendance numbers for more than 180 new congregations in the U.S. and Canada.
- The Church Multiplication Team approved 30 New Congregation Plans in 2008.
- The Parenting Church Network included 101 parent churches at the end of 2008. This number is on track to double again every two years throughout Our Call. The goal is to reach 150 reproducing churches by the end of 2009.

- Various regional and local strategies are being developed for increasing the number of potential parent churches who hear God’s call to reproduce and have the courage to overcome the challenges, with competency and coaching support.
- There are more than 123 emerging leaders in the “planter’s pipeline,” with new assessments to find qualified planters typically performed each week.
- More than one-third of new congregations are multiracial or ethnically/racially different from the RCA’s historically Anglo majority.

#### **Congregations Organized**

**Wayfarer Community Church**, Caledonia, Michigan; Joshua E. Blunt, pastor, organized January 2008

**North Ridge Community Church**, Eldridge, Iowa; Douglas Evenhouse, pastor, organized February 2008

**CenterPoint Church**, Lewis Center, Ohio; David J. Jansen, pastor, organized April 2008

**Within Reach Ministries**, Parchment, Michigan; Richard R. Patterson, pastor, organized April 2008

**Grace and Peace Reformed Church**, Englewood, New Jersey; Jai Hun Jung, pastor, organized May 2008

**North Point Community**, Plainwell, Michigan; Jason Zimmer, pastor, organized June 2008

**City Church Denver**, Denver, Colorado; Samuel Downing, pastor, organized June 2008

**St. Paul’s Reformed Church**, Ohio City, Ohio; Chad M. Strabbing, pastor, received from UCC October 2008

**Lighthouse Korean Reformed Church**, Kent, Washington; John Park, pastor, organized November 2008

**Highbridge Community Church**, Bronx, New York; Cora Taitt, pastor, organized January 2009

**Crossroads Church**, Norwalk, Iowa; Glen Blumer, pastor, organized April 2009

<b>Church Plant Name</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Parent Church</b>	<b>Planting Pastor</b>
Greenville, MI, Church Plant TBD	Greenville, MI	North Grand Rapids Classis	Eric John Branch
The Urban Church	Oakland, CA	New Hope Community Church, Fremont, CA	Ron Nunez
Iglesia Nicktao	Danvers, MA	Iglesia La Senda, Corona, CA	Nuvia Chanlatte
Skyline Church	Holland, MI	Fellowship Reformed, Hudsonville, MI	Don DeVlieger
Lighthouses of Philadelphia	Philadelphia, PA	Lighthouses of Oxford Valley, Fairless Hills, PA	Heidi Butterworth/Bob Jones
City Hope	Grand Rapids, MI	South Grand Rapids Classis	Dante Venegas
Comunidad Cristiana Maranatha	Sibley, IA	First Reformed Church, Sibley, IA	Arturo Gomez
Blackberry Ridge Church	Medina, OH	Brunswick Reformed Church, Brunswick, OH	Roger Biada
North River Reformed Church	North River, WA	Faith Reformed, Lynden, WA	John Haas
Mountain View Church Plant-TBD	Denver, CO	Faith Community Church, Littleton, CO	TBD
Vanguard	Kalamazoo, MI	The River, Kalamazoo, MI	Nate Bull and Keith Platte
Great Oaks Church-TBD	Rochester Hills, MI	Kensington Community, Detroit, MI	Paul Bradford
Elevation	Grand Valley State Univ.	Water of Life Community Church, Jenison, MI	Troy Nanninga
Denver Metro Area Plant-TBD	Denver Metro Area	Rocky Mountain Classis	Will Forsythe
Faith Church-Valparaiso Campus	Valparaiso, IN	Faith Church, Dyer, IN	Jason DeVries
The NuCommunity	Olympia/Lacey, WA	Cascades Classis	Brandon Beebe
The Crossing	Davis Junction, IL	Elim Reformed, Kings, IL	Kurt Kruger
Church on the Ridge	Pine Ridge, CA	Tulare Community Church, Tulare, CA	Allyn Bell
Sequoia Community Church	Fresno, CA	Tulare Community Church, Tulare, CA	Nicholas Pope
Iglesia Alas de Aguila-Wyoming	Wyoming, MI	Iglesia Alas de Aguila, Holland, MI	Hugo A. Vasquez
Libert-South Philadelphia	Philadelphia, PA	City Church of San Francisco, San Francisco, CA	Jared Ayers
The Bridge	Allegan, MI	Gun Lake Community Church, Wayland, MI	Roger Bird
International Christian Fellowship (South Asian Reformed Church)	Fairfax, VA	Third Reformed Church, Kalamazoo, MI	Ram and Meena Nepal
Incarnation	Loomis, CA	Oak Hills Community Church, Clovis, CA	Joshua E. Lickter
HRC Journey (Hopewell Reformed Church-Journey)	Union Vale, NY	Hopewell Reformed Church, Hopewell Junction, NY	Mark E. Mast
Common Ground	Poughkeepsie, NY	Hopewell Reformed Church, Hopewell Junction, NY	Mark E. Mast
Northside-Holland	Holland, MI	Christ Memorial Reformed Church, Holland, MI	Toby Gruppen
Angel Community Church	Muskegon, MI	Muskegon Classis	Jeff Hough

## Report of the Reformed Church in America Church Growth Fund, Inc.

The Reformed Church in America Church Growth Fund, Inc. (CGF) supports the work and witness of the RCA by making loans to RCA churches, classes, and other agencies and affiliates so they can purchase, construct, or improve church property or facilities. The CGF (formerly known as The Reformed Church in America Building and Extension Fund) also provides funds for Church Growth Fund matching grants. Loans of up to \$25,000 are made on an unsecured basis. Larger loans (up to the current loan limit of \$2,000,000) are secured.

Detailed information regarding the CGF (such as the amounts that can be borrowed, the purposes for which funds may be borrowed, the requirements that must be satisfied in order to borrow funds, and how one may invest in the CGF) is available through the RCA's website ([www.rca.org/cgf](http://www.rca.org/cgf)). Following this report is a list of all churches that are borrowers from the CGF (or for whom loans have been approved) as of the end of fiscal year 2008.

Funds in the CGF come from gifts and bequests from members and friends of the RCA, the sale of investment notes, and earnings on CGF assets. Investment notes are offered in fixed maturities of one, two, five, and ten years. The notes are securities, and therefore are offered for sale through an offering circular. The offering circular is also available on the RCA's website under the heading "Church Growth Fund" and subheading "How to invest in RCACGF investment notes." Presently the CGF offers investment notes for sale in nineteen states—Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Dakota, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin. The rates of interest paid on investment notes are established periodically by a subcommittee of the CGF board and are posted on the RCA's website.

As of the end of fiscal year 2008 the total amount invested in notes with the CGF by individuals and churches was nearly \$10.3 million. This is an increase of approximately \$1 million over fiscal year 2007 and \$2 million over fiscal year 2006. These increases are the result of sales of investment notes to new investors as well as "rollovers" of maturing investment notes into newly issued investment notes. The CGF believes that this increase in investments is due to a number of factors, including the interest rates offered, the purposes for which the funds are used, the CGF's strong balance sheet, and—more generally—the overall manner in which the CGF continues to operate.

The CGF's total assets, net assets, investment notes outstanding, loans outstanding, and loan commitments issued for fiscal year 2008 (and with comparisons to fiscal year 2007) are as follows:

	FY 2008	FY 2007
Total Assets	\$45.27 million	\$43.07 million
Net Assets	\$34.85 million	\$33.60 million
Investment Notes Outstanding	\$10.30 million	\$9.28 million
Loans Outstanding or Committed	128	135
Loans Outstanding or Committed	\$36.65 million	\$37.53 million
Loan Commitments Issued	7	4
Loan Commitments Issued	\$2.13 million	\$1 million
Total Funds Disbursed	\$2.04 million	\$4.92 million

Of the seven loan commitments issued in fiscal year 2008, two were for short-term unsecured loans, and the others were for larger, secured loans. The CGF prays that the facilities that are purchased, built, or remodeled will enable the congregations to fulfill their call to ministry in their communities.

The CGF continues its efforts to attract more funds through the sale of investment notes and the receipt of charitable contributions. Ads are running in the *Church Herald* and in *RCA Today* magazine. The CGF covets your prayers as it seeks to maintain an adequate level of funds for loans to RCA churches that are renewing and expanding their ministries,

and encourages each of you to consider how you and your church, classis, and regional synod may support the CGF financially through gifts or investments.

As noted above, the CGF continues to provide resources to fund matching grants for new RCA ministries. Since the inception of this program in 1999 and continuing through the end of fiscal year 2008, 103 commitments for such grants (totaling \$2,481,500) have been issued. The CGF is grateful that it can provide such funding for new ministries, and prays that through them hurts may be healed, the lost may be found, the hungry may be fed, peace may heal brokenness, hope may replace despair, and lives may be transformed by the love of Jesus Christ.

As in prior years, much has been accomplished, and yet much remains to be done, all for the purpose of equipping congregations for ministry—a thousand churches in a million ways doing one thing—following Christ in mission, in a lost and broken world so loved by God.

As the CGF continues its work, the board of directors and staff ask for your continued support and prayers.

## **CANADA**

### ***Alberta***

Christ Community Church, St. Albert, Alberta

### ***British Columbia***

Powell River Reformed Church, Powell River, British Columbia

### ***Manitoba***

Elmwood Community Reformed Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba

### ***Ontario***

Drayton Reformed Church, Drayton, Ontario

Forestview Community Church, Grimsby, Ontario

First Reformed Church, St. Catharines, Ontario

Classis of Ontario (New Life Reformed Church), Toronto, Ontario

Classis of Ontario and Christ Community Church, Welland, Ontario

## **UNITED STATES**

### ***Arizona***

New Hope Community Church, Gilbert, Arizona

Desert Haven Community Church, Mesa, Arizona

Hope Community Church, Scottsdale, Arizona

### ***California***

Canyon Lake Community Church, Canyon Lake, California

Cornerstone Community Church, Chowchilla, California

New Hope Community Church, Fremont, California

CrossWinds Community Church, Hesperia, California

Park Hills Community Church, Los Angeles, California

Living Faith Community Church, Modesto, California

Palm Canyon Community Church, Moreno Valley, California

Lincoln Avenue Community Church, Pomona, California

East Hills Community Church, Riverside, California

Sunrise Community Church, Tulare, California

### ***Colorado***

New Hope Community Church, Aurora, Colorado

Springs Community Church, Colorado Springs, Colorado

Christ Community Church, Denver, Colorado

### ***Florida***

West Broward Community Church, Fort Lauderdale, Florida

Classis of Florida (Korean Choong Hyun Church), Orlando, Florida

Christ Community Church, Palm Springs, Florida

First Reformed Church, Tampa, Florida

Rolling Hills Community Church, Zellwood, Florida

### ***Georgia***

North Atlanta Community Church, Roswell, Georgia

### ***Idaho***

Valley Life Community Church, Meridian, Idaho

### ***Illinois***

Christ Community Church, Lemont, Illinois

Bethel Reformed Church, Sterling, Illinois

**Indiana**

Christ's Community Church, Fishers, Indiana  
 Christ's Community Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana  
 Community Reformed Church, Lafayette, Indiana

**Iowa**

Classis of Central Iowa (Bridgeway Church), Ames, Iowa  
 Crossroads Community Church, Estherville, Iowa, and East Sioux Classis  
 Hope Reformed Church, George, Iowa  
 Classis of West Sioux and Rejoice! Community Church, LeMars, Iowa  
 Crossroads Church, Norwalk, Iowa, and Classis of Central Iowa  
 Good News Community Church, Okoboji, Iowa  
 First Reformed Church, Prairie City, Iowa  
 Classis of West Sioux (New Hope Community Church), Sioux City, Iowa  
 Hope Reformed Church, Spencer, Iowa  
 Westview Church, Waukee, Iowa

**Kansas**

Crossroads Church, Overland Park, Kansas  
 Harvest Community Church, Wichita, Kansas

**Maryland**

Monocacy Valley Church, Ijamsville, Maryland

**Michigan**

RiverTree Community Church, Byron Center, Michigan  
 Wayfarer Community Church, Caledonia, Michigan  
 CrossWinds Community Church, Canton, Michigan  
 Open Door Reformed Church, Dorr, Michigan  
 First Reformed Church, Grand Haven, Michigan  
 Classis of North Grand Rapids and Clancy Street Ministries, Grand Rapids, Michigan  
 Grace Reformed Church, Holland, Michigan  
 Second Reformed Church, Kalamazoo, Michigan  
 Crossroad Chapel Reformed Church, Holland, Michigan, and Classis of Holland  
 Twin Lakes Reformed Church, Kalamazoo, Michigan  
 Within Reach Ministries, Kalamazoo, Michigan  
 Martin Reformed Church, Martin, Michigan  
 Calvary Reformed Church, Mattawan, Michigan  
 Laketon Bethel Reformed Church, Muskegon, Michigan  
 Covenant Community Church, Muskegon Heights, Michigan  
 Rockford Reformed Church, Rockford, Michigan  
 Classis of Northern Michigan (for New Hope Community Church), Shelby, Michigan  
 Community of Joy, Traverse City, Michigan  
 LifeTree Community Church, West Olive, Michigan, and Classis of Holland

**Minnesota**

Church of the Savior, Rochester, Minnesota

**Missouri**

Christ's Church, St. Peter's, Missouri

**Nebraska**

Hope Community Church, Lincoln, Nebraska

**New Jersey**

Blawenburg Reformed Church, Blawenburg, New Jersey  
 Han Sung Church, Cresskill, New Jersey  
 Old Bergen Church, Jersey City, New Jersey  
 The Reformed Church in Kinnelon, Kinnelon, New Jersey  
 First Reformed Church, Lincoln Park, New Jersey  
 Ocean Community Church, Manahawkin, New Jersey  
 Trinity Reformed (Dutch) Church, Newark, New Jersey  
 First Reformed Church, Rocky Hill, New Jersey

**New York**

Fordham Manor Reformed Church, Bronx, New York  
 Old First Reformed Church, Brooklyn, New York  
 Clarksville Community Church, Clarksville, New York  
 Community Reformed Church of Colonie, Colonie, New York  
 Greenbush Reformed Church, East Greenbush, New York  
 Siloam Church, Flushing, New York  
 Helderberg Reformed Church, Guilderland Center, New York  
 Fair Street Reformed Church, Kingston, New York  
 Levittown Community Church, Levittown, New York  
 Korean Philippo Presbyterian Church, Long Island, New York  
 Pitcher Hill Community Church, North Syracuse, New York  
 Arlington Reformed Church, Poughkeepsie, New York

The Reformed Church, Poughkeepsie, New York  
Pultneyville Reformed Church, Pultneyville, New York  
Queens Reformed Church, Queens Village, New York  
The New Church of Greater New York, Roslyn Heights, New York  
Niskayuna Reformed Church, Schenectady, New York  
First Reformed Church, Scotia, New York  
First Reformed Church of Bethlehem, Selkirk, New York  
Grace Christian Church, Staten Island, New York  
New Hackensack Reformed Church, Wappingers Falls, New York  
New Hope Reformed Church, Yonkers, New York

***North Carolina***

First Reformed Church of Cary, Cary, North Carolina

***North Dakota***

Red River Reformed Church, West Fargo, North Dakota

***Ohio***

New Hope Reformed Church, Powell, Ohio

***Pennsylvania***

Newtown Reformed Church, Newtown, Pennsylvania

The Reformed Church, Willow Grove, Pennsylvania

***South Dakota***

Bethany Reformed Church, Canton, South Dakota

Valley Springs Reformed Church, Valley Springs, South Dakota

***Tennessee***

Franklin Fellowship Church, Franklin, Tennessee

***U.S. Virgin Islands***

St. Thomas Reformed Church, St. Thomas, U. S. Virgin Islands

***Washington***

Trinity Reformed Church, Kent, Washington

Church of the Good Shepherd, Lynnwood, Washington

East Valley Reformed Church, Yakima, Washington

***Wisconsin***

Bethany Reformed Church, Sheboygan, Wisconsin

Hope Community Reformed Church, West Bend, Wisconsin

## **Report of the General Synod Council on Revitalization and RCA Congregations**

*[Jesus said,] "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20).*

That command of our risen Lord calls the Reformed Church in America to renewed obedience in a new day. It recalls us to our deep, historical commitment to constantly be reformed according to the Word of God, which is also the foundation for our deep, historic commitment to church revitalization. The Great Commission calls every congregation to re-form its ministry and mission by God's grace and with God's direction.

### **What is a revitalizing congregation?**

A revitalizing congregation is a body of believers, responsive to God's call, developing a faithful and fruitful life through new mission, new ministries, and new members.

Each congregation brings this call to renewal to life in its unique setting as it:

- Nurtures a missional mindset resulting in externally focused ministry.
- Multiplies new disciples, new leaders, new teams, new mission, new ministries, new worship services, new sites, and new congregations.
- Intentionally develops a growing community of servant leaders who are equipped and empowered for ministry.
- Grows deeper in its love of God and wider in its love of the people among whom God has called it to serve—living by grace; practicing radically inclusive love; showing Christ-like hospitality; embracing the gifts of every person, race, and cul-

ture; seeking to become increasingly diverse as a reflection of the kingdom of God; and intentionally developing a growing community of servant leaders who are equipped and empowered for ministry.

The result is that lives are transformed by the love of Jesus Christ, the hungry are fed, the broken are made whole, hurts are healed, and hope overcomes despair. Neighborhoods, villages, towns, and cities become healthier, more just, and more gracious for all people as they experience God's expanding realm of grace, mercy, love, and justice.

#### **Forty-Year Commitment Transforms Church and Community**

In 1980, Paramount, California, was voted the fourth worst city in the U.S. among cities with a population of fewer than fifty thousand. The ranking was based on ratings for crime, gang activity, schools, businesses, and local neighborhoods done by the Rand Corporation.

But a few years earlier, Emmanuel Reformed Church in Paramount had made a commitment to stay in the city for forty years. The church became part of the effort to turn the city around.

"In the late '80s and early '90s, we painted about five hundred homes in our city, and that led to three or four thousand homes being painted by neighbors," says Ken Korver, now the senior pastor at Emmanuel. "Our own area of the town changed as we stayed and did faithful ministry."

In 1991, Paramount earned the "All-American City" designation. "We give God the glory, and we give a lot of credit to our city staff and our city council. God used them powerfully," Korver says. The city manager of Paramount called Emmanuel Reformed the catalyst for the transformation that took place.

Paramount's population has been changing for five decades. "In 1960, there was a strong Dutch community in Paramount; in 1970, there was a strong European American community; by 1980 it was beginning to shift rapidly to being primarily a Latino community. By 1990, it was strongly Latino along with every other ethnic group, and whites were a minority," says Korver.

"The trick is to keep loving your original people while embracing the community fully. We continually seek to do both at the same time."

At Emmanuel, that means preserving tradition while reaching out in new ways. At two of the five Sunday worship services, for instance, the "original" people feel like it's their church. "They're still hearing songs from back in the day, still in the same building, still have some of the same pastors—we honor our prior senior pastor [Ken's father, Harold Korver], our Reformed roots, our Dutch people," Korver says. But, he adds, the church has started three other services—contemporary, Spanish, and multicultural. Korver says the original people don't always feel comfortable participating in these services, but they still rejoice in them.

On an average Sunday in 2008, about 1,750 people worship at Emmanuel. Just over 1,000 are white—still 200 of Dutch descent, with about 800 of other European ancestry—and 750 are people of color. Korver estimates that 610 are Latino, 120 are black, and 20 are Asian.

"Sometimes things come up because our cultures are different. I had to learn to preach differently at the different services. If I preach at the noon service the same way I preach at [the traditional] 9:00 and 10:30 services, they don't think I care. If I preach at 9:00 or 10:30 the same way I preach at the noon service, they think I'm shouting at them.

"You have to make slight adjustments. Are there ever tensions? Sometimes. But mostly there's celebration."

#### **Sustaining Pastoral Excellence Grant from the Lilly Endowment Supports Revitalization Efforts**

In November 2003 the RCA was notified that it was the recipient of a grant through the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence Initiative of the Lilly Endowment, Inc., in Indianapolis, Indiana. In January 2004 the denomination received the \$2 million grant.

The major components of the grant are:

- Formation of pastoral networks (now called coached revitalizing networks) for pastoral renewal, congregational revitalization, and increased ministry and mission effectiveness.
- Intentional interaction between pastors in networks and the leaders of the congregations the pastors serve.
- Up to six hundred RCA pastors will receive a \$1,000 Sustaining Pastoral Excellence grant. Grant proposals must demonstrate a partnership between the pastor and congregation and indicate how the grant will be used in the congregation's revitalization efforts. The intent is to encourage the pastor and consistory to discern congregational needs and opportunities together.
- Training of coaches throughout the RCA, both Natural Church Development coaches and network coach/facilitators.
- An RCA staff position, coordinator of leader renewal and networks, and partial funding for the coordinator of church health and coaching along with administrative support for this office and all other attendant costs.

In November 2008, the RCA received a \$1 million continuing funding grant from the Lilly Endowment, Inc. for the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence program. This grant will support the program and allow it to continue through 2013.

### **Working Together to Revitalize Existing Congregations**

Initiatives designed to encourage, resource, equip, and empower congregational revitalization have begun in a number of key areas.

#### **Natural Church Development**

The Natural Church Development (NCD) process is like an annual physical that results in a change in eating habits, exercise commitments, or sleep patterns. It isn't like a diet to achieve a short-term goal; it's an ongoing, long-term process.

After carefully studying 32,000 congregations, pastor and researcher Christian Schwarz identified eight "quality characteristics"—eight factors that affect the life, effectiveness, and growth of congregations. Each characteristic also reflects an important dimension of how the Bible describes a fruitful church. The eight characteristics are:

- Empowering leadership
- Gift-oriented ministry
- Passionate spirituality
- Functional structures
- Inspiring worship
- Holistic small groups
- Need-oriented evangelism
- Loving relationships

Research shows that if any of these eight quality characteristics is underdeveloped, it limits the fruitfulness of the congregation. After a congregation takes the NCD survey, it forms a church health team and works with an NCD coach to use its strengths to address its lowest-scoring characteristic in an organic and systemic way. The goal is to use the NCD process or another health assessment tool to release the potential God has implanted in the congregation.

#### **Congregational Ownership Is Crucial to Revitalization**

"Congregational ownership of the NCD process is vital," says pastor Randy Knoll. "If it's just the pastor doing it, 99 percent of the time it will fail."

"I want to give a lot of credit to the congregation for the success we are experiencing. I'm strong on recognizing your talents, which ones you have and which you don't. I realized that some of the things that needed to be done to engage NCD didn't fall in my range of talents. I asked for volunteers to get the NCD team together."

Silver Creek Reformed Church, where Knoll has been pastor for over thirteen years, is located in German Valley, Illinois, a farming community of around six hundred people. They began NCD a little over a year ago. Through the NCD survey, they learned that their "minimum factor" was inspiring worship.

Recently they began implementing what they had learned through the NCD process. Members of the congregation's NCD team came up with a list of people they believed had gifts in the area of worship and asked them if they would be interested in forming a worship team. Now nine members of the congregation meet as a worship team.

"Right now we're semi-blended," Knoll says of Silver Creek's worship service. "We sing traditional hymns with an organ and also some praise songs that incorporate drums and a bass. Our goal is to make worship more inspiring to all age groups."

Knoll believes NCD is superior to another revitalization process that his congregation and others in his classis were involved in years ago. He says churches put a lot of work into that earlier attempt, but that it was confusing and they got little out of it.

"Since then, my church is the only one in this area that actually went into NCD, because other churches had such a negative experience," he says.

### Coached Revitalizing Networks

A coached revitalizing network is a way to involve four to seven pastors in developing deep, sustaining friendships that will help them live on the front lines of ministry. A network offers a safe community where pastors receive encouragement, coaching, and accountability to help them:

- Grow deeper in Christlike character.
- Gain increasing clarity and focus in their calling.
- Develop new leadership and ministry competencies.
- Lead their congregations with courage.

Three elements that help sustain pastoral excellence are essential to coached revitalizing networks:

- **Transformational learning** in relationship with peers under the guidance of a network facilitator provides an essential foundation for the lifelong learning required of pastoral leaders today.
- **Covenantal accountability** helps pastors translate good intentions into concrete action, apply new learning in their own lives and the lives of congregations, and integrate their sense of calling into their calendars.
- **Collegial support** by a pastor's peers builds trust and creates a safe space for pastors to pray for one another, care for and encourage one another, raise questions, express doubts, celebrate God-given successes, and learn from failures.

Coached revitalizing networks are places where pastors clarify their personal mission and are equipped with knowledge and skills to serve their congregations as transformational leaders. When pastors participate in a coached revitalizing network, we expect that both pastors and congregations will:

- Deepen their discipleship through intentional spiritual formation.
- Grow more passionate about new mission, new ministry, and new disciples as they become more externally focused.
- Develop increasing competence as transformational leaders and intentionally multiply leadership.

It's called a "coached" network because coaching is central to coached revitalizing networks. An ongoing coaching relationship built around regular coaching sessions helps pastors address their specific opportunities, challenges, and issues with the assistance of a trained coach. Through coaching, pastors and congregational leaders are empowered in their ministry; are helped to discern how God is calling them to serve their community and world; and are equipped to multiply new disciples, leaders, ministries, mission, and congregations.

### Pastoral Network Draws Congregations Together for Ministry

Pastor Brian Taylor is involved in a network of pastors that has changed the way he does ministry.

"There's more of a sense of cooperation," he says. "Prior to our network, we were all kind of doing our own thing. Now there's more of a sense that we're all in this for the sake of the kingdom."

Taylor is associate pastor at First Reformed Church in Oostburg, Wisconsin. His network includes eleven other pastors from Sheboygan and Washington Counties, and once a month they gather over lunch at the Pizza Ranch in Oostburg to catch up, pray, share ideas, and talk through the joys and frustrations of ministry.

Taylor values the sense of camaraderie in the network, and he says it's been helpful to share ideas and resources. The network has been meeting for nearly four years, and it includes pastoral staff from nine RCA churches: Bethany and Hope Reformed in Sheboygan, Hingham Reformed in Hingham, First and Faith Reformed in Cedar Grove, Hope Community Reformed in West Bend, Gibbsville Reformed in Gibbsville, First Reformed in Sheboygan Falls, and First Oostburg.

Pastor networks are a critical component of RCA efforts to revitalize congregations. "Pastors are put on a pedestal," says Rodger Price, the RCA's coordinator of leader renewal and networks. "It's about perfection, yet they're humans. Networks give them a place to be real; the other pastors are in the same boat. They're healthy places to grow and be renewed."

Jonathan Meester, pastor of Hope Community Reformed Church, echoes the need for the support that comes from meeting together. "As a new pastor with less than three years in ministry, being able to share with colleagues about the joys and struggles is a necessity," he says. "It's been a tremendous gift to know that I don't walk this path alone, that like Paul and Timothy I have more experienced ministers to turn to in times of difficulty."

### **Coaching**

Coaching is a central discipline within Our Call. Trained coaches support and enhance coached revitalizing networks by empowering congregational leaders for ministry and helping them discern how God is calling them.

Trained Natural Church Development coaches work with a local congregation's church health team to help them receive the maximum benefit from the NCD process. Other coaches are trained to work with networks as coach/facilitators.

Across the RCA people are being identified who have the passion and the aptitude to coach. Once they are identified, the coordinator of church health and coaching trains them in coaching skills and skills related to networks or to NCD. Other coaching applications will also be developed as the RCA continues on the journey of revitalization. You can learn more about coaching in the leadership section of the GSC report to the General Synod.

### **Accepting the Challenges of Deep Change for the Sake of the World God Loves**

At the heart of congregational revitalization is the reality that missional engagement with the world God loves requires challenging choices and deep change. This is why pastors and congregational leaders are encouraged to come together for learning, accountability, and support in networks and to enter into the deeper reflection and more intentional action that comes through a coaching relationship.

The revitalization journey is challenging, but the stories that emerge from that journey are exciting.

### **GSC REVITALIZATION ENDS MONITORING REPORT**

Each spring the general secretary is required to report to the General Synod Council (GSC) on progress on the various ends policies established by the GSC. The monitoring report for revitalization follows:

#### **Revitalization Ends Policy**

The RCA will be a fellowship of externally focused congregations where lives are being transformed and communities are being renewed.

#### **General Secretary's Interpretation**

This ends policy calls the GSC staff to collaborate with regional synods and classes in ways specific to each region to make a difference in three distinct ways:

- Help congregations become healthier and more missionally focused.
- Empower healthy, missionally focused congregations to be a means by which lives are transformed.
- Support healthy, missionally focused congregations as they work with a wide variety of partners to renew their communities.

This ends policy is focused on the long-term horizon—2013 and beyond. It is my responsibility as general secretary to ensure that measurable outcomes for 2013 are established and yearly benchmarks between the years 2009 and 2013 are developed and monitored. To that end I have established the following goals, outcomes, and strategies.

***Goal for Congregational Fruitfulness: By 2013, at least five hundred RCA congregations already existing in 2005 will:***

- *Exhibit missional fruitfulness through stories of transformed lives.*
- *Show clear evidence of impact on their communities.*
- *Employ statistical criteria that confirm that they are making more and better disciples.*
- *Further, among these five hundred congregations:*
  - *At least forty percent will celebrate a cultural and racial mix of congregational members that closely resembles their communities.*
  - *At least three hundred will have made a commitment to multiplication.*

#### ***Outcomes***

- Between 2009 and 2013 the number of adult confessions of faith and adult baptisms per one hundred confirmed RCA members will increase by 25 percent in at least five hundred RCA congregations and by 10 percent in the RCA as a whole.
- Between 2009 and 2013 new ministry and new mission activities as reported in the annual consistorial report will increase by 30 percent in at least five hundred RCA congregations and by 10 percent in the RCA as a whole.
- By 2013, at least 20 percent of RCA congregations (existing and new) will meet the generally accepted criteria of a multiracial congregation.
- By 2013, at least 75 percent of all RCA pastoral leaders will be multiculturally competent.
- By 2013, at least three hundred RCA congregations that existed in 2005 will either have already planted a church or will be actively involved in the multiplication movement and will be ready to be a parent church.

#### ***Strategies***

- The strategies that will lead to these fruitful outcomes are described in the goals and strategies for revitalization below and in the GSC leadership ends monitoring report, so they won't all be enumerated here.
- In partnership with our racial/ethnic and multicultural ministry staff we will develop a variety of means to help RCA pastoral leaders gain a deep biblical grounding in the multiracial, multicultural future God is bringing to the RCA and to equip them to be multiculturally competent.
- We will work with the coordinator for multiracial initiatives and social justice and the Multiracial Congregational Team to develop training processes in cultural competence.
- In partnership with Global Mission we will draw on the experience and expertise of our mission partners in cross-cultural ministry.
- We will continually ask appreciative questions about what is happening when we are at our best and develop ways to measure our outcomes so we learn and adapt our activity as we go.

#### ***Data***

- The data required to assess our strategies and measure the achievement of our outcomes is not yet available. This is primarily because there is not enough data collected in Part II of the consistorial report and other data-collection processes aren't yet in place. Some early data for this goal will be available in the 2010 revitalization ends monitoring report.

#### **Revitalization at Faith Chapel Reformed Church**

What's going on at Faith Chapel Reformed Church in Paterson, New Jersey, can only be described as congregational revitalization. Under the leadership of pastor Raymond David Timms, this little church with a big heart is experiencing spiritual revitalization through its worship experience. Focusing on the spiritual growth of its members rather than on numerical growth has led to both spiritual and numerical growth.

The church's worship experience has had a positive effect on youth, the young in Christ, and lifelong members alike. In response to the increase of new members, the church installed a baptismal pool a little over a year ago. Since the installation of the baptismal pool, Timms has baptized fourteen new Christians. Faith Chapel's dance ministry and choir have united to enhance the praise and worship experience. This development in the worship experience has spread throughout other church ministries. Faith Chapel Reformed Church is truly demonstrating Scripture in action.

***Goal for Congregational Faithfulness:*** *By 2013, at least five hundred RCA congregations already existing in 2005 will have clear and compelling statements of mission, vision, and values and will be prayerfully orienting their congregational lives and imaginations toward faithful and collaborative participation in the mission of God.*

#### ***Outcomes***

- By 2013, at least five hundred RCA congregations will be engaged in ministry partnerships aimed at community impact with other RCA congregations, other Christian congregations and faith groups, or other community partners God provides.
- By 2013, members in at least five hundred RCA congregations will be equipped to engage in incarnational ministries through which they serve people who aren't yet disciples of Christ and are trained to engage in spiritual conversations with them.
- By 2013, at least one hundred previously declining RCA congregations will have become "turn-around" congregations.
- By 2013, at least five hundred RCA congregations will be active, vital houses of prayer.

#### ***Strategies***

- Collaborate with the coordinator for discipleship to develop a variety of ways to help deepen discipleship among congregational leaders and members.
- Collaborate with the HOPE Team to develop and support more RCA congregations as houses of prayer.
- Develop processes that will equip congregations to see their communities through God's eyes, to creatively join Jesus in ministry in their communities, and to remain open to new opportunities the Holy Spirit will reveal to them.
- Develop and empower processes that will equip congregational and pastoral leaders to discern their congregation's mission, vision, and values and to develop the missional imaginations and faithfulness needed to be vital outposts of the reign of God.
- Initiate an online assessment to identify pastors with the gifts, passion, and drive for "turn-around" or "redevelopment" ministry, with the goal of identifying one hundred such current and emerging pastoral leaders.
- Develop a training process for turn-around pastors and congregational leadership teams similar to "Thrive," to be called "Revive."
- Encourage classes to evaluate their lives together in light of our shared mission in order to discern how God is calling them to work together to renew lives and transform their communities.

#### ***Data***

- More than three hundred RCA congregations have identified a prayer coordinator.
- The HOPE prayer team is working with congregations across the RCA to form networks of congregations that desire to become houses of prayer.
- In collaboration with the Gallup organization and a group of ecumenical partners, an online assessment for people with the gifts to be "redevelopers" or "turn-around pastors" was launched on April 1, 2009.
- "Revive" is being designed for churches that have been declining at a five-year rate of 10 to 50 percent. It will be piloted in the fall of 2009. Revive will include a bus trip with several stops at places where both the need for revitalization and revitalization itself may be experienced. Similar in style to multiracial ministries' Sankofa (a bus trip focused on racial justice), time on the bus will be used as classroom and processing time.
- We are collecting stories of classes that are examining their lives and ministries through the eyes of mission; various models are being shared as requested.

***Goal for Pastoral Networks:*** *By 2013, at least five hundred ordained or commissioned pastoral leaders of congregations will participate in a coached revitalizing network for at least five years as a way to equip them to lead revitalizing, missional congregations.*

**Outcomes**

- Five hundred pastoral leaders will develop a personal calling statement that informs and guides their ministries.
- Five hundred pastoral leaders will have coaches helping them live out the mission, vision, and values God revealed to them in their personal calling statement.
- Five hundred pastoral leaders will be in clear and explicit covenantal partnership with their congregational leaders for missional engagement.
- Five hundred pastoral leaders, in covenant partnership with their congregational leaders, will be committed to do what is needed to place participation in God's mission at the center of their personal and congregational lives and ministries.

**Strategies**

- Seven hundred pastoral leaders will participate in networks for at least one year in order to retain five hundred who participate in a coached revitalizing network for five years.
- One hundred twenty five high-quality network coach/facilitators will be trained, supported, and held accountable for their work.
- One hundred twenty five additional pastors will be trained to share coaching skills in networks.

**Data**

- Three hundred ninety-eight pastors are currently involved in sixty-two networks led by RCA-trained and supported facilitators.
- Fifty-two pastors who took part in networks at one time have stopped for various reasons.
- Ten networks have stopped meeting.
- One hundred eighty five people have been trained to serve as coached revitalizing network coach/facilitators.
- A recent survey of network participation indicates that less than 50 percent of network participants have a clear covenant for revitalization with their consistories.
- Three hundred eighty people have received an orientation to coaching through Foundational Coach Training; 150 of those people returned for a follow-up training day six months later.
- Data is not yet available on how many pastors throughout the RCA receive regular coaching, whether through NCD, their network, or by some other means.
- A new affinity network is beginning to meet, made up of first-year pastors serving in the Synods of the Heartland, Great Lakes, and New York.
- Facilitator training has been redesigned with the intent of increasing the impact while reducing the resources used.
- Two facilitator forums are planned each year, in which network facilitators will have the opportunity to learn through webinar technology. In the first webinar, Woody Bedell will speak on the topic of pastors' health. In the second, Steve Smallegan will speak about best practices for networks.
- A multiracial affinity network facilitator training of five coaches took place in May of 2009.
- The Leadership Development Journey is an online course offering network facilitators the opportunity to develop their leadership identity and skills; nine pastors are currently taking part in two courses and five pastors took part in the pilot course.
- A book entitled *All Things New* is in production. The book is a resource to inspire pastors to join networks and/or enter a coaching relationship.

***Goal for Natural Church Development (NCD): By 2013, two hundred RCA congregations will have completed two cycles of a coached NCD process and 150 churches will have completed three or more cycles of a coached NCD process.*** (This goal is significantly revised from a general church health goal to a goal concerning NCD. This change comes because of what we have learned and because NCD is the specific church health process the RCA is equipped to support.)

**Outcomes**

- By 2013, at least three hundred RCA congregations that were in existence in 2005 will have become healthy enough to become a parent congregation and at least two hundred will have multiplied or begun the process of planting a new congregation.

**Strategies**

- Continue to train and retrain NCD coaches so all congregations engaging in NCD for the first time have a well-trained NCD coach and all second-cycle congregations have access to a coach if they desire one.

- Partner intentionally with the regional synods in recruiting high quality coaches and share in the costs of training and supporting those coaches.
- Offer high quality coaches inter-regionally when regional coaches are not available.
- Tell NCD stories where greater health has resulted in increased missional faithfulness and God-blessed fruitfulness.
- Compare and contrast the data from the annual consistorial reports between congregations that improve their NCD scores and those that do not participate or do not show improvement.
- Offer opportunities for trained NCD coaches to refresh and continue to develop their coaching and content skills.

#### **Data**

- Since 2004, when the RCA coached NCD process began, eighty-seven congregations have taken the survey more than once.
  - Thirty-five have taken the survey two times.
  - Forty-six have taken the survey three times.
  - Six have taken the survey four times.
- The NCD training material has been rewritten to make it more accessible to both coaches and congregations. Training occurs in a workshop format, which is hands-on and allows for more relevant and timely interaction with other participants and trainers. Intentional conversations with regional staff about the use of NCD, the development of quality coaches, and sharing the cost of training have begun.
- NCD stories are being told through the *Church Herald*, the *RCA Today* magazine, the RCA website, RCA communication resources, and video clips at General Synod.
- IT staff and revitalization staff are developing a plan for accessing data that will correlate NCD scores with responses to certain questions in parts I and II of the annual consistorial report.

***Goal for Direct Impact and Learning with Specific Congregations: By 2013, forty RCA congregations that were plateauing (growing less than 10 percent in five years) or declining will enter into covenantal partnership with staff from the congregational mission cluster and will be growing spiritually, missionally, and numerically through their participation in Churches on the Grow.***

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#### **Outcomes**

- By 2013, forty RCA congregations participating in a new program called Churches on the Grow will have clear focus for their participation in God's mission and will have developed and implemented processes to measure their outcomes.
- By 2013, forty RCA congregations participating in Churches on the Grow will have developed processes to deepen their discipleship and develop leaders, resulting in greater missional capacity.
- By 2013, forty RCA congregations participating in Churches on the Grow that were previously plateauing or declining will be growing numerically.
- By 2013, forty RCA congregations participating in Churches on the Grow will be equipped to share some of what they have learned with other congregations.

#### **Strategies**

- Staff in the congregational leadership cluster will serve as point persons in relationships with at least forty RCA congregations to help guide the Churches on the Grow initiative, with thirteen or fourteen new relationships initiated each year.
- The RCA staff point person, the consistory, and the pastor will enter into a comprehensive covenantal relationship for the duration of the initiative.
- Staff from the congregational mission cluster will offer services, equipping, and expertise as determined by the missional engagement of the congregation and at the request of congregational and pastoral leadership.
- Churches on the Grow congregations are invited into this process by RCA staff (usually in consultation with regional synod staff) with the goal of having participating congregations in all eight regional synods.

#### **Data**

- As of February 25, 2009, covenants have been initiated with six congregations and conversations have been started with six others.

#### **Youth Outreach Begins at the Mall**

Six years ago, Reformed Church of Cortlandtown had 20 people in worship on Sunday and tens of thousands of dollars in unpaid bills.

As part of a rebuilding and revitalizing process, the congregation called a new pastor, Doug Leonard, and studied the community to find the most underserved groups of people.

The survey revealed that youth should be a major priority for the church, especially middle class kids who were caught up in dealing and using heroin—but the church’s first attempt at reaching youth failed miserably. “Our youth committee sponsored a pizza and movie night,” Leonard says. “Only one student came, and she was already a member of our church!”

One day when he was dropping off his dry cleaning, Leonard had a breakthrough idea. “I noticed that there was a group of about forty kids at this strip mall pretending to be gangsters. Some of them were talking with the woman who worked at the dry cleaner’s. They were sharing their problems with her and she was offering a listening ear.”

June O’Dell, the woman at the dry cleaner’s, also happened to be a member of Leonard’s congregation. She offered to tell the youth about the new pastor and introduce him to them. The first time that Leonard spoke with them, the students said that they wanted to meet with him that day to talk about relationships.

The group, dubbed Kavana Kids after the name of the strip mall, has met every Tuesday since. In six years, more than 150 youth have been involved.

“During the first year we met at a bagel shop, but then we moved our meetings to the church, which was only a few blocks away. Every meeting starts with a check-in time, which is an opportunity for students to express whatever might be on their hearts and minds. We also invite speakers to come in and address various topics. These kids are dealing with pregnancy, domestic abuse, incarceration, and substance abuse. Our students say that they enjoy the check-in time the most because they feel like someone is really listening.”

Leonard attributes the ongoing synergy in the group to the acceptance students find there. “We don’t judge the kids. We treat them the way I think Jesus would have treated them—we accept them as they are.”

The youth program is carrying out the legacy of lifelong Cortlandtown members John and Eleanor Kavana, who owned the Kavana strip mall for years. “Their life mission during the 1940s was to adopt at-risk youth. Three of their four children were adopted. Our work is like their legacy,” Leonard says.

“It’s about looking at what God is already doing and serving with his other partners in the community like the Methodist church, the fire station, the Lion’s Club, and the local high school. Forget about building our church. The question is, are we being faithful?”

## Report of the General Synod Council on Discipleship

*“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:16-17).*

Discipleship changes people, communities, and institutions as disciples commit to making disciples and more people become more like Jesus, embodying his teachings in their daily lives.

### GSC DISCIPLESHIP ENDS MONITORING REPORT

Each spring the general secretary is required to report to the General Synod Council (GSC) on progress on the various ends policies established by the GSC. The monitoring report for discipleship follows.

#### **Discipleship Policy Ends**

The RCA will be a fellowship of congregations filled with disciples, nurtured inwardly, focused outwardly, becoming like Jesus in all they think, say, and do in order to show the love of God in all circumstances to all people.

## General Secretary's Interpretation

Disciples making disciples is the clearest and most precise way to state the vision and values of the discipleship office. Each disciple of Christ is committed to internalizing the gospel in his or her individual life, which results in a compelling desire to disciple another person. Through empowering, connecting, encouraging, and sustaining, leaders, teachers, pastors, youth, and children will be disciplined and will disciple others, and this will result in transformed lives.

This is also reflected in the mission statement of the discipleship team: "Christian discipleship is the practice of following Jesus Christ, becoming like him in all we think, say, and do, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to be the very presence of Christ in a lost and broken world so loved by God." The youth team, the Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship, the HOPE prayer team, and the discipleship team are collaboratively strategizing methods to live into the definition that we have stated.

Disciples making disciples embodies the inward nature of growing in Christ as an individual and it incorporates the outward focus of discipling others. It is relational in its approach, missional in its nature, educational in its practice, incarnational in its witness, and transformational in its outcome. It is integral to all we do as the body of Christ. Discipleship is one of the foundations of the ten-year goal, and with that comes the urgency and necessity of working with revitalization and multiplication to equip and empower disciples for faithful and fruitful ministry.

### **Goal: To implement and provide training for a relational model of discipleship, using reproducing triads and small groups.**

The RCA believes that discipleship is relational and done best in community. What are the relational techniques and models that help form disciples that emulate Jesus Christ in all they think, say, and do?

#### *Strategies*

- Design, through the discipleship team and with Greg Ogden, a training process by which local leaders will be equipped to lead a triad approach to disciple making.
- Train regional leaders, who can in turn work with and train congregational leaders, in a relational model for discipleship.
- After year two, to gather the discipleship team and regional trainers for evaluation, follow-up training, and revision of the process.
- Offer venues and training for small group leadership.
- Continue to use the language and practice of people development versus program development.

#### *Outcomes*

- By 2013, at least one hundred persons will be trained in the triad approach, and in turn will provide training in at least three congregations annually.
- By 2013, at least three hundred congregational leaders will have received training in relational discipleship.
- By 2013, at least one thousand congregational leaders will be involved in triads that provide accountability, trust, and biblical engagement as a means by which to strengthen their discipleship ministry.

#### *Data*

- The discipleship staff has designed the triad training process. At a November conference featuring Greg Ogden, the first group of people will be trained as trainers in the triad approach.
- Discipleship staff has initiated triads in one of the RCA offices among staff members; presently eight triads are meeting.

### **Goal: To see our consistories, leadership, and congregations transformed as they are challenged to participate in an intentional form of discipleship that results in life change.**

The RCA is focusing on transformation. What does life change look like as a disciple and how is that measured?

**Strategies**

- To develop a spiritual assessment tool for leaders to use as a way to examine their lives as disciples of Jesus Christ.
- To work with the revitalization staff in developing coaching techniques and strategies for leader-based discipleship.
- To collaborate with the HOPE prayer team in developing and supporting more RCA congregations as houses of prayer.
- To encourage the leaders in our churches to invest in the lives of youth and children and new believers as they walk with them in a discipling relationship and as they encourage the leaders and teachers in the church who are teaching Sunday school, Children and Worship, vacation Bible school, or Wednesday night programs or mentoring.
- To continue to raise up new leaders who experience transformation and are being called to use their gifts in fruitful and faithful ways.
- To work with the coordinator of multiracial initiatives and social justice in developing methods and ways to live out our discipleship by seeking justice in our churches and communities.

**Outcomes**

- By 2013, at least five hundred RCA congregations will be active houses of prayer.
- By 2013, the number of Children and Worship centers in RCA congregations and non-RCA congregations will increase by 10 percent, allowing for increased nurturing and transformation of young children.
- By 2013, the number of young people exposed to missional leadership opportunities through programs and institutions will be 20 percent higher.
- By 2013, one hundred discipleship leaders will have participated in Foundational Coach Training.
- By 2013, three hundred discipleship leaders will be active in networks.
- Annually, discipleship staff will work directly with forty congregations as a consultant.

**Data**

- Discipleship staff has written a spiritual assessment tool around the six key areas of discipleship. The tool assesses how churches and leaders are working towards discipleship that is missional, relational, educational, transformational, incarnational, and foundational.
- RCA staff, in collaboration with a discipleship coaching task force, has developed coaching techniques and strategies for leader-based discipleship. The pilot training event was held in March 2009.
- The HOPE prayer team is in a time of transition as it seeks new ways to equip and empower people to pray.
- The updated youth website has provided new resources for youth pastors. A youth leaders training event was held in May 2009. The youth team has encouraged churches to think more broadly about how they incorporate youth and children in worship, service, discipleship, and leadership.
- The coordinator for discipleship has worked with camps and colleges to coordinate efforts on fostering leadership in the RCA.
- RCA staff has worked with the R-11 committee in trying to get younger delegates at General Synod. They are also seeking opportunities for further leadership as it emerges from General Synod.
- Networks are growing; presently about 120 discipleship leaders are active in networks.
- Discipleship staff acted as consultants for approximately nine churches in 2008.

**Children and Worship Program Expands in Mexico**

Children and Worship International is expanding in Mexico. The first Children and Worship center in Mexico opened six years ago; RCA missionaries Martha and Jaime Amaro report that more than 200 churches have been trained in the Children and Worship program, with 45 worship centers running each week. Sometimes the worship centers are located in churches; in other cases, they are the only Christian presence in a particular area. One of the worship centers travels to hospitals and runs a program for terminally ill children. Another center works with orphans.

This year, the Amaros trained 40 churches in the program, and eight new centers were opened.

Children and Worship is an interactive worship experience for kids, who learn Bible sto-

ries using wooden figures and other materials. The program is used throughout the U.S. and Canada and has recently expanded into Japan and South Africa as well as Mexico.

**Goal: To continue to offer Reformed and missional resources for empowering and equipping local congregations.**

The RCA is working toward a form of missional discipleship. How are we preparing disciples to make other disciples?

**Strategies**

- Work with Faith Alive and other ecumenical partners on the creation of resources for congregational use that supports our commitment to be Reformed and missional.
- Continue to highlight opportunities in the denomination that lead people into mission in a Reformed context.
- Collaborate with the Mission Volunteer Program, Project Timothy, and Leaders on the Horizon in order to call youth into mission, service, and leadership.
- Work with revitalization staff to equip congregational members to engage in incarnational ministries through which they serve people who are not yet disciples of Christ and are trained to engage in spiritual conversations with them.
- Work with the seminaries in providing lifelong learning opportunities that are both Reformed and missional.

**Outcomes**

- By 2009, to have a fully functioning, three-year online training course (Opening Doors to Discipleship) available to all RCA congregational leaders in discipleship.
- By 2010, to have one hundred churches participating in Opening Doors to Discipleship.
- Annually, to provide complete and updated resource lists of curriculum for children, youth, and adults that support our commitment to be Reformed and missional.
- By 2013, youth from every region will be participating in Project Timothy.
- To participate in at least two collaborative lifelong learning events with both New Brunswick Theological Seminary and Western Theological Seminary in order to train and empower fifty local leaders who will be models of lifelong learning and voices of discipleship in their regions.
- By 2013, resource networks will be using discussion forums or blogs so that Reformed disciples may share Reformed and missional resources and best practices with one another in order to grow disciples, nurture them inwardly, and focus them outwardly.

**Data**

- Opening Doors to Discipleship, a three-year online training program, is complete and currently has eighty-nine participants. Year four is being developed on a discipleship theme.
- The RCA website has complete and updated resource lists of curriculum for children, youth, and adults that support our commitment to be Reformed and missional.
- The discipleship office has had two successful events in partnership with Journey and Western Seminary. It is still pursuing opportunities at New Brunswick.
- The discipleship team has set up a blog and members from the team post items regularly.

**Summer Camps Grow Faith**

At Inspiration Hills, an RCA camp near Inwood, Iowa, summer campers experience a week filled with not only fun and games but also with meaningful discipleship. “I see camp as my mission field,” says Cal Ver Mulm, director of ministries at Inspiration Hills. “We’re helping to start kids on their faith journey.”

The theme at Inspiration Hills this summer was “Ready to Live,” drawn from Ephesians 5:1-2: “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” During their week at camp, campers learned to imitate Christ in their lives by following his example.

Ver Mulm says kids grow in their faith during daily Bible studies and chapels, but also through every activity during the camp week. As they watch staff members imitate Christ in their daily lives, they learn how to react and relate to one another in a Christlike manner. Ver Mulm says that the Inspiration Hills staff works to instill in campers the reality that when they leave camp, they need to take what they’ve learned back with them and make it a part of their lives at home.

Inspiration Hills is one of eight RCA camps that collectively hosted 14,000 kids this summer. The others are Countryside Camp in Cambridge, Ontario; Camp Fowler in Speculator, New York; Camp Geneva in Holland, Michigan; Camp Warwick in Warwick, New York; Cran-Hill Ranch in Rodney, Michigan; Laurel Pines Christian Camp in Big Bear City, California; and Manitoqua Ministries in Frankfort, Illinois.

**Goal: To educate and empower our children, youth, and leaders as they seek to grow as disciples of Christ.**

The RCA is focused on education and examining how the resources we are presently using are helping us to grow disciples that are nurtured inwardly and focused outwardly. What new and creative resources and methods will help us educate disciples, and what present methods are still effective?

#### **Strategies**

- To gather data about what methods and curriculum are being used to educate our children, youth, and adults.
- To offer a scope and sequence of what adults, children, and youth should be learning.
- To educate leaders, teachers, and pastors on teaching techniques, methodology, discipleship training, and spiritual disciplines.
- To develop Christ-centered followers, teachers, and leaders who are connected and sustained in community and who live out their faith in all they think, say, and do.

#### **Outcomes**

- By 2010, a training session will be offered in every region for children's ministries and adult discipleship.
- By 2010, training events for *I Wonder* and *Following Jesus* will be developed and implemented so that local Children and Worship leaders will be further equipped and empowered for faithful and fruitful ministry.
- By 2011, an online Children and Worship introduction workshop will be available.
- By 2013, the number of Children and Worship basic trainings, introductions, enrichment, and specialized events will increase by 20 percent in order to strengthen local Children and Worship ministry.
- By 2013, discussion forums and blogs for Children and Worship trainers and local leaders will provide communication and a means for sharing questions and best practices. New Children and Worship networks will also be created.
- By 2013, a network for educators will exist in each region to keep them connected, revitalized, and sustained.
- By 2010, the Season of Discipleship task force will bring a proposal to General Synod outlining how disciples can be fully embraced in the life and mission of the local church.

#### **Data**

- A consortium of experts in the field of education was held to discuss the future of and trends in children's ministry.
- In 2008 and 2009 the discipleship office held trainings in every region for adult discipleship. RCA discipleship staff work in partnership with Faith Alive for children's ministry and numerous Children and Worship trainings were offered.
- The discipleship team has been empowered to develop a discipleship team in each region.
- A Season of Discipleship task force has been formed to create new resources and methods that will help churches engage in developing disciples of Jesus Christ for all ages.

## **Report of the General Synod Council on Leadership throughout the RCA**

*"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I, send me!'" (Isaiah 6:8).*

God is still calling people into relationship and sending them to participate in and witness to the reign of God. By God's grace, the Reformed Church in America is joining in that work by identifying, forming, deploying, nurturing, and renewing people with gifts for

leadership. Throughout the denomination, this occurs by:

- Forming a new generation of pastoral leaders
- Training elders and deacons in their ministry
- Assisting leaders to discern God’s direction
- Connecting ministers of Word and sacrament and congregations
- Creating pastoral networks for support and learning
- Coaching and mentoring pastors in their work
- Nurturing the unique gifts and ministry of women

The GSC nurtures congregational leadership—deacons, elders, ministers, emerging leaders, and longtime leaders—through programs and ministries around four themes: calling people to ministry, forming people for ministry, nurturing people in ministry, and renewing people for changing ministry.

### **Calling People to Ministry**

The major initiative in this area of focus is Call Waiting, a program that helps men and women discern the call to ministry and nurtures them along the way. Call Waiting includes a cooperative program with RCA camps and conference centers.

Call Waiting has led to the initiation of a Fund for Ministerial Leadership, which actively seeks contributions for scholarships to assist RCA members who are called to attend seminary. Call Waiting resulted in the creation of a program of care and nurture for college students who attend General Synod as corresponding delegates, to assist them in their vocational development. It is clear that God’s call in the lives of RCA members is at the heart of raising up a new generation of leaders to serve a world in need and a denomination eager to serve.

Call Waiting led to the development of an initiative called “Gracious Welcome.” Through this initiative the RCA intends to learn how to most warmly and effectively reach out to and welcome ordained ministers from other denominations as they come to assist the RCA in the revitalization and multiplication of RCA congregations.

### **Forming People for Ministry**

**Consistory Training:** Our congregational leaders are hungry for tools that can move their congregations toward health and growth. In response to this challenge, the coordinator for consistory training and Ministry Services provides support and training to equip and develop the gifts of pastors, elders, and deacons as they move toward a fuller understanding of being faithful consistories.

Specific training is provided for the effective use of an RCA resource, *Companions on the Way*, which supports the ministry of elders as they tend to the spiritual needs of people who are exploring or rediscovering the Christian faith. This resource, led by elders, supported by pastors, and adaptable for any congregation, has the potential to enliven the whole faith community.

In some regions of the RCA clusters of consistories come together for learning, shared ministry, and support. These consistory clusters provide a way for consistories to learn from one another how they shape ministries in their various congregations. In addition as they become aware of one another’s ministry goals, they pray for and support one another.

### **Nurturing People in Ministry**

A primary way the RCA nurtures people in ministry is through a growing emphasis on coaching. Within the RCA, coaching is understood to be the process of coming alongside a person to help her or him discover God’s agenda for her or his life and ministry, while seeking the Holy Spirit’s guidance to see that agenda become reality. Coaching helps a person listen to God about where change is needed and then equips and empowers a person to make the necessary changes.

The increased awareness and accountability that comes along with coaching will help them be more faithful as we participate in and witness to the realm of God. By God’s grace, and through the Holy Spirit’s power, the outcome will be more fruitful ministry. This is true for at least three reasons:

1. **Coaching is focused on the present.** Coaches help others understand their present situation in order to discover and implement meaningful actions to address that situation.
2. **Coaching helps people discover their own answers.** Coaches assume that the person closest to the issue typically has the best answers, but that she or he will discover those answers with the help of someone skilled in asking the right questions.
3. **Coaching leads to intentional action.** Coaches help people take inventory of their values and desires by listening to them, asking questions, and speaking the truth, and then helping them develop and take intentional steps toward more faithful action in the future.

Coach training has been offered to pastoral leaders in all the regional synods of the RCA and to some congregational leaders as well. A current goal is to develop the means to train more elders, deacons, and other congregational leaders in coaching skills as a way to nurture existing leadership and develop new leadership in congregations throughout the RCA.

### **The Call Process within the RCA**

The direction of leadership in the office of Ministry Services has shifted focus in the last year in efforts to improve the entire ministerial call process. Major work continues through conversations and meetings with pastoral candidates and search committees. Every church profile and ministerial profile is personally handled by the coordinator of pastoral services, who works with candidates and search committees until a call is accepted. *Kaizen* is probably the best word to describe the philosophy driving this office. It is Japanese for “continual improvement” and speaks directly to our openness in learning and understanding the needs of pastors and churches and in building levels of excellence into every aspect of the call process.

### **Chaplains**

A large number of RCA ministers do not serve congregations. Their ministry takes place in hospitals, mental health institutions, nursing homes, prisons, and the armed forces. They are endorsed by the RCA to the specialized ministry of chaplain. Every year all who have been endorsed and certified by the Ministry Services office to exercise the ministry of chaplain by the Reformed Church in America are invited to attend an annual conference. This gathering, which takes place prior to General Synod, provides a nurturing place of mutual support and accountability as well as renewal and networking possibilities for participants. The conference provides a place to experience a variety of learning models through theological reflection, and participants identify the experiences as transformative and challenging. They return to their workplaces not only refreshed but better equipped for their various ministries.

#### **Chaplain and Clients Make a Joyful Noise**

Jim De Hoog’s enthusiasm for his work comes through loud and clear, just like the loving responses he gets from the people he serves. “I’ll walk through a room and get greeted with boisterous cheers. People call out ‘Hi, Jim!’ I’m accepted, and they’re excited to see me. I may have seen them just an hour before, and still, they’re excited to see me again.”

De Hoog serves full-time as chaplain with Mission Road Developmental Center, a home for people of all ages with developmental disabilities in San Antonio, Texas. “The children, adults—the customers we serve—are so warm and welcoming and accepting,” he says. “They accept someone for who they are, not what they are or how important they are.”

Mission Road Developmental Center is part of Mission Road Ministries, which serves nearly 700 children and adults with mental retardation and other developmental disabilities with residential and day services and vocational programs.

“I serve the children, adults, and staff,” De Hoog says. “I am pastor, counselor, and encourager for our kids; I organize worship services and network people into community churches; I make sure those churches are warm and welcoming and able to provide programming for our clients.”

De Hoog says the most rewarding aspect of his work is interacting with the center’s clients and seeing them know, experience, and share God’s love. “I’m the Bible and song-time leader,” he says. “I play guitar. The kids or adults have rhythm instruments and we sing

songs, and then I give a message. Right now we're talking about time—that's our theme. It's based on the passage in Ecclesiastes about there being a time for everything."

### **Commissioned Pastors**

"The vision of the Reformed Church in America in the twenty-first century is to see a new reformation of lay people equipped and inspired to serve Christ and his church." —Report on the summit to study lay pastoral ministry in the RCA, MGS 2002, p. 293

A commissioned pastor is an elder commissioned by a classis to serve in a specific role within a congregation, the classis, or a specialized ministry. Commissioned pastors are church planters, Christian educators, youth leaders, and executive pastors and serve in many other significant ministry roles. They are valuable ministry partners as the RCA identifies, equips, and empowers the leadership necessary to live into Our Call.

The commissioned pastors program works with leaders for whom a seminary education is not practical or possible. A personalized training program is designed around each person's gifts and calling and usually includes mentoring, coaching, college or university classes, distance learning classes through a seminary, and hands-on ministry experiences. The program equips each participant to serve in his or her specific classis. Training programs vary by region and are coordinated and contextualized by classis. Eighty-two commissioned pastors are currently serving in ministry; an additional eighty-six are in training.

The General Synod Council has created a Commissioned Pastor Advisory Team to facilitate the sharing of learning and best practices; oversight of standards; and coordination of efforts.

### **Specialized Interim Ministers**

Interim ministry continues to be a useful specialty within the RCA. Ministry Services maintains a roster of qualified interims, monitors their current availability, and provides their names upon request. The specialized interim ministers are invited to an annual gathering which provides time for strengthening ties, sharing stories and resources, as well as rest and a renewing awareness of God's calling.

### ***Commissioned Pastor Program Equips for Ministry***

Steve Struikmans, pastor of Rancho Community Reformed Church in Temecula, California, for 38 years, has seen his church grow from seven families in 1969 to a ministry that includes a Christian preschool, elementary, and middle school on a 35-acre campus. Thousands of people attend worship services at Rancho Community each week.

Struikmans believes that the RCA's commissioned pastor program is critical to revitalization. It has been a central part of Rancho Community since 2005, when youth pastor Scott Treadway asked Struikmans about his succession plan.

"Scott Treadway grew up in our church and had been on staff for several years," says Struikmans. "I believed that he had the right combination of gifts to take over my position after seeing his work with youth and at our Saturday evening services, but he had never been to seminary."

Treadway became involved in the commissioned pastor program and was installed at Rancho Community in August 2005. "I have my doctorate, so I certainly see the value of education for pastors," says Struikmans, "but I also believe in a rapid response to the giftedness that people have."

Rancho Community offers Equip classes designed to help people recognize and develop leadership skills. "As we see people's passions emerge," Struikmans relates, "we encourage them to enjoy the great adventure of pursuing those passions. For some, that means becoming commissioned pastors."

Struikmans emphasizes the excitement of how the Holy Spirit has moved at Rancho Community. "God's timing is perfect. We are focusing on equipping people for the work God wants them to do by helping them recognize their giftedness. It's about positioning ourselves to receive God's blessings by being faithful."

### **Renewing People for Changing Ministry**

A major opportunity before the revitalization and leadership staff of the RCA is to listen to God and discern how the powerful and transformative movement of coached revitalizing networks can be extended to more pastors throughout the denomination, and how the benefits of networks be made available to congregational leaders as well.

Already, throughout the Reformed Church in America, elders, deacons, and other congregational leaders are experiencing the benefits of participating in the Purposeful Living process. Purposeful Living is a primary tool being used by pastoral leaders as they develop their personal calling statements in their coached revitalizing networks. As an extension of their work in networks, pastors and network coach/facilitators are guiding congregational leaders through the same process. The result is a growing group of leaders who have a clearer sense of who God created them to be, what God is shaping them to do, and where God is challenging them to go. In this way, renewed leadership contributes to revitalizing existing congregations and multiplying new ministries and congregations.

The Reformed Church in America offers a comprehensive program throughout the denomination that calls, forms, nurtures, and renews ministers, elders, deacons, and other congregational leaders, encouraging them to focus outward in mission toward a world eager to hear and embrace good news.

### **GSC LEADERSHIP ENDS MONITORING REPORT**

Each spring the general secretary is required to report to the General Synod Council (GSC) on progress on the various ends policies established by the GSC. The monitoring report for leadership follows:

#### **Leadership Ends Policy**

The RCA will be a fellowship of congregations that are building a healthy, growing future by renewing existing leadership and identifying, calling forth, and training people with gifts for leadership.

#### **General Secretary's Interpretation**

This ends policy calls the GSC staff to collaborate with regional synods and classes in ways specific to each region to make a difference in the experience of three distinct recipients in order that:

- Congregations are resourced for their work of leadership development.
- Existing leadership experiences ongoing renewal.
- Emerging leadership (congregational and pastoral) is identified, called forth, and trained to exercise leadership in the life of the congregation in the world God loves.

This end policy has a long-term time horizon—2013 and beyond—and therefore requires intermediate benchmarks for the years between 2009 and 2013. Those benchmarks must delineate

- Specific leadership development processes and tools the GSC offers congregations and a means to account for the use of those processes by leaders.
- The number of congregational leaders intentionally seeking renewal and the impact of those efforts on their lives and leadership.
- The number of emerging pastoral leaders identified, the type of leadership that is needed, and the equipping processes employed to develop, nurture, and support these leaders.

To that end, I and the appropriate GSC staff have identified the following goals.

#### **Objectives and Strategies in Leadership**

**Goal for Congregational Leader Renewal: *By 2013, congregational leaders (whether in an ordained office and not) in at least four hundred RCA congregations have developed and are guided by a personal calling statement and are drawing on training that helps them lead congregations more faithfully and fruitfully.***

#### **Outcomes**

- At least ten to fifteen congregational leaders in each of at least four hundred RCA congregations will have developed their own personal calling statement.

- At least 250 RCA congregations will have a clear plan for nurturing existing leaders; and for identifying, calling, equipping, and supporting new leaders.
- Congregational leaders in 250 congregations, in partnership with their pastoral leaders, will have collaboratively led a process through which they discerned their congregation's mission, vision, and values and have taken specific steps to place God's mission at the center of their life and ministry.
- Consistories in at least 250 RCA congregations will have adopted a governance model that:
- Is consistent with their discernment concerning God's mission for their congregations.
- They use to lead their congregations in missional engagement.
- Draws on an RCA understanding of the parity of the offices.
- Elders and deacons in 50 percent of RCA congregations, when surveyed, will say that they are equipped for their specific role.

### *Strategies*

- Develop a facilitator's guide for the Purposeful Living process and use it to:
  - Equip and empower all coached revitalizing network coach/facilitators to launch the Purposeful Living process in the congregations of all network members, accompanied by a plan to multiply its use in those congregations.
  - Train people in every regional synod to lead Purposeful Living retreats for clusters of congregational leaders and/or to coach individual congregations through the process.
- Equip coach trainers who are trained and provided the resources needed to train coaches to serve within various types of congregational ministries.
- Develop a coached congregational revitalization process that will:
  - Help congregations prayerfully discern God's mission, vision, values, and future story for them.
  - Take specific steps to move toward their full redemptive potential.
  - Be supported by coaches trained to support this process.
- Develop a resource or process that will help congregations identify, develop, and elect strong spiritual leaders who will place God's mission at the heart of their work as leaders—especially in consistories.
- Develop consistory training materials that equip and empower consistories for their role of collaborative leadership with their pastoral leader(s) and that focus on their shared role as representatives of Christ and Christ's mission in and through their congregations.
- Continue to refine, distribute, and employ existing RCA materials that help deacons and elders claim their distinctive roles.

### *Data*

- The Cluster Leadership Team is inviting and training elders and deacons who have completed the Purposeful Living process and developed their own personal calling statement to use this resource within their congregations.
- A supplement to the Purposeful Living process is being developed to assist elders and deacons as they lead this process. Christ Memorial Church in Holland, Michigan, will pilot this resource this year. It will be useful in training participants in the *Companions on the Way* process.
- The Fresh Wind letter, which came from a gathering of elders and deacons in May 2008, provided a providential opening in the middle of Our Call to invite every congregation in the RCA to join a church-wide conversation about the vibrant future that might unfold when RCA elders, deacons, lay people, and pastors all work together as equal partners in ministry, following Christ in mission. The coordinator for consistory training is working with the Fresh Wind Task Force to propose ways for the Reformed Church in America to better select, equip, empower, encourage, and nurture growth in leaders throughout the RCA.
- Through a partnership between the RCA, Western Theological Seminary, the Synods of Mid-America and the Great Lakes, and seventeen congregations:
  - Twenty pastors are participating in Purposeful Living.
  - Leadership teams from seventeen congregations representing 115 congregational leaders are working through the Purposeful Living process.
  - Pastors and leaders together in these congregations are being equipped to lead long-term, deep, and ongoing congregational transformation.
- During the last year, regional leadership training events as well as consistory workshops and retreats have provided opportunities for the coordinator of consistory training to nurture and encourage existing leaders throughout the RCA.
- A training resource for RCA consistories, *Deacons and Elders: Called to Serve*, is

widely used to equip deacons and elders to be better prepared to serve as leaders in their congregations.

- The coordinator of consistory training is partnering with the coordinator for discipleship to introduce the concept of triad discipleship and discipling as a mutual process of peer mentoring for congregational leaders. Using Greg Ogden's book *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time*, they are encouraging church leaders to get serious about making disciples Jesus' way.
- The coordinator for multiracial initiatives and social justice collaborated with the coordinator for consistory training to develop the Church-Based Community Outreach Resource Guide, which is available on the RCA website.
- An initiative to develop regional trainers for consistories is underway.
- Through prayer workshops, discipleship training, and the initiatives of the HOPE team, intentional processes for discernment will be introduced to consistories and other church leaders. The coordinator of consistory training will make this a priority in the next year, collaborating with other GSC and regional staff.
- We will design and begin to conduct surveys of elders, deacons, and consistories concerning their current levels of training and what they still require.

***Goal:*** *By 2013, every pastor in the RCA who desires a coaching relationship will have available a choice of coaches who are well equipped and qualified to provide excellent coaching.*

#### ***Outcomes***

- By 2013 the RCA will have more than 150 well equipped, qualified, and supported coaches available to come alongside pastors and other key denominational leaders.
- By 2013 more than four hundred RCA pastors will be in a coaching relationship that they will self-identify as helping them be more faithful and fruitful in their ministry.

#### ***Strategies***

- The Foundational Coach Training process will continue to be offered twice a year in three geographic areas of the denomination: East, Midwest, and Far West.
- From the current list of people who have been trained as coaches, twenty-five each year will be selected to become lead coaches.
- The lead coach development process is being instituted to insure that excellent coaches are available to RCA pastors. Lead coaches will form a pool of people who are being coached by excellent coaches, are constantly developing as coaches, and are being evaluated in order to provide excellent coaching for others.

#### ***Data***

- Three hundred eighty people have received an orientation to coaching through Foundational Coach Training.
- One hundred fifty people completed the entire Foundational Coach Training process and are prepared to coach.
- Approximately 150 other people have been exposed to coach training in earlier versions of network facilitator training and Natural Church Development coach training.
- Twenty-four people have been invited into the lead coach development process. The director of congregational mission, the coordinator of leader renewal and networks, and the coordinator of church health and coaching will provide coaching and training for them during the first year.

#### **Coaching Relationship Strengthens Ministry**

Anna Jackson, pastor of Queens Reformed Church in Queens, New York, met her coach in person for the first time at the RCA's One Thing conference in San Antonio, Texas, in January 2008. At that point, they'd already been in a coaching relationship for six months.

That coaching takes place over the phone, because Jackson lives in New York and her coach, Elizabeth Potter, lives in Michigan. They spend an hour to an hour and a half each month talking about Jackson's ministry.

"Mostly it's been about me and my leadership style," says Jackson. "She helps me to hone in on what I'm sensing or to better discern what needs to be done or what actions need to be taken. It's been great in terms of accountability. We'll come to decisions about certain things, and I know that the next time I talk to her, her first question is going to be 'So, how'd it go?'"

The coaching experience is helping to strengthen Jackson's ministry by affirming and clarifying her gifts for ministry. "It has helped me in two ways. One has been to really help me sharpen my spiritual antenna, to help me zero in on where the Holy Spirit is moving and where life is happening, rather than getting caught up in the negative. It helps to be able to talk it out and begin to start seeing things in a different way. The other thing is that I've come to a keener sense of where my gifts are and where I'm not as gifted, and I'm figuring out how to complement that."

Along the way, Jackson has picked up some coaching skills, both from Potter and at an RCA coaching seminar she attended, and she has been putting them to work in her everyday ministry. "That's one of the nice things about being coached. I've been using some of the coaching skills with the people that I'm ministering with. It really is a helpful tool, even with the children I work with," she says.

**Goal for Development of New Pastoral Leadership: By 2013:**

- *At least one hundred new ordained or commissioned pastoral leaders will be entering the RCA annually.*
- *Every new leader who desires it will be supported during at least the first five years of ministry with a coach and a coached revitalizing network.*
- *Pastoral leaders with a clear sense of calling to turnaround ministry or church planting will receive specialized training for those roles.*
- *The RCA's pool of new pastoral leadership will include 35 percent racial/ethnic minorities.*

***Outcomes***

- By 2013 we will actively nurture openness to God's call into pastoral ministry in the lives of at least five hundred RCA young people from high school through college, and at least 150 of these young people will be racial/ethnic minorities.
- By 2013, of the 150 racial/ethnic minority young people discerning or answering a call to ministry with whom we are in relationship, at least fifty will come from within the RCA.
- By 2013, every new pastoral leader entering RCA ministry who desires it will have been assessed as a potential church planter, and at least twenty-five of these emerging leaders will have received specialized training, coaching, and experience in church planting as part of their preparation for ministry.
- By 2013, every new pastoral leader entering RCA ministry who desires it will have been assessed as a potential turnaround or redevelopment pastor, and by 2013 at least fifty new leaders, in partnership with their congregational leadership, will have received specialized training and coaching for leading a congregational turnaround.
- By 2013, at least 25 percent of the new pastoral leaders entering RCA ministry will have specialized training in multicultural ministry—either as a planter or as a revitalizing leader.
- The percentage of RCA pastoral leaders leaving the ministry in their first five years of ministry will be 10 percent or less than the percentage in 2007.
- Seventy-five percent of pastors who accept a second call after four to ten years will be equipped to discern a potential new call through the lens of a personal calling statement and with the increased self-awareness that comes through coaching and participation in a network.

***Strategies***

- Continue to improve our Call Waiting program and in that way improve our ability to communicate with and pray for people with leadership potential whom God may be calling into ministry and connect this program with initiatives such as Still Small Voice, Leaders on the Horizon, the Youth Ministry Team, and others which may emerge.
- Assist consistories with ways to use the fourth question in the annual consistorial inquiry concerning nurturing call in the lives of young people in more faithful, intentional, and fruitful ways.
- Evaluate the Seminarian Seminar in order to clarify its unique contributions, and build on the relationships begun there in the years following the seminar.
- Nurture a healthier and more consistent climate for candidate care throughout the forty-five classes of the RCA.
- GSC discipleship, leadership, and racial/ethnic staff will collaborate to develop African American/black, Hispanic, and Pacific-Asian youth as current and future leaders in order to develop more pastoral leaders from within RCA racial/ethnic congregations.

- Deepen our relationship with Western Theological Seminary (WTS) and develop fruitful relationships with New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS) and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA) through which we continuously improve leadership development during students' seminary years and proactively support development of new leaders during the first five years of ministry through coaching, networks, and other means still to be developed.
- Work with WTS to develop specialized training for church planters and turnaround leaders and embed the skills of leading a revitalizing congregation deeply into the curriculum for all candidates.
- Work with NBTS to more fully develop ministry development tracks in multiracial and multicultural ministry and missional urban ministry.
- Work with MFCA to include new pastoral leaders in networks and coaching relationships as these leaders enter ministry.
- Share best practices for training and developing commissioned pastors throughout the RCA and include them in networks and coaching relationships.
- Work with various partners in the translation and/or program development of commissioned pastor training materials, resources, courses, and processes for people for whom English is not the first or primary language.
- Practice continuous improvement in congregational transitions, pastoral placement, and congregational search services so the percentage of pastoral dissolutions that occur under stress or duress is less than 5 percent.

#### **Data**

- Call Waiting, Still Small Voice, and Seminarian Seminar have been brought together under the leadership of the coordinator for pastoral services and a more complete database of young leaders is being constructed.
- The RCA and WTS have conducted an in-depth survey of all RCA seminary graduates in the last five years (from NBTS, the MFCA, and WTS) and will use the information from that survey to shape future leadership development efforts. The report was completed in May 2009.
- The MFCA, NBTS, WTS, and the RCA funded a pilot effort to study and improve the process of candidate care. A part-time regional coordinator for candidate care carries out this work in ten RCA classes drawn from three regional synods. What is learned through this contract will be shared more widely.
- The RCA's director of congregational mission, the coordinator of leader renewal and networks, and the coordinator of church health and coaching are active team members in the Cooper Missional Leadership program and the Ridder Leadership Initiative at WTS.
- The director of congregational mission convenes the Commissioned Pastor Advisory Team and has initiated conversations about more complete ways to include commissioned pastors in RCA life and ministry.
- The director of communication has assumed responsibility for the translation of significant RCA materials into the major RCA constituencies for which English is not the primary language.

#### **Fresh Wind Letter Energizes Congregation**

Reformed Church of Fort Plain in Fort Plain, New York, studied the Fresh Wind Letter at a November congregational meeting, and it has infused the congregation with new energy for ministry. The Fresh Wind Letter was written by a group of RCA elders and deacons, detailing how they felt the Holy Spirit calling the RCA in the area of leadership.

At Fort Plain, church members read the letter before the congregational meeting. "This letter was just authentic," says pastor Nancy Ryan. "It didn't feel like or sound like a dictate from on high—it sounded grassroots, and it resonated with folks." The congregation reviewed the letter and studied related Scripture at its meeting. There was also a presentation by the church's Finding Our Way committee, which had been studying community demographics, cultural shifts, and missional outreach in an effort to re-envision what ministry in Fort Plain should look like today.

The meeting, according to Ryan, created new energy throughout the congregation. "It's good to have that kind of energy flowing in more than just committees and consistory, but through a whole congregation," she says. "It's really empowered people to do ministry. People are seeing themselves as missionaries. They're seeing how their lives are affected by the Holy Spirit and how that affects others."

One thing that has been impacted is the congregation's involvement with Manna House Meals, a community food ministry that's hosted by the church and other community organizations. When the ministry started in 2000, Ryan says, "We said that we wanted to feed not just their bellies, but their spirits. We got into a rut of just feeding bellies."

But since the congregational meeting, Fort Plain has begun offering a worship service once a month as part of Manna House Meals. "We've got Scripture, and songs, and prayer, and people who meet and greet the people who come. It's vital right now. People are hungry; people are lonely. We've got a whole spectrum of people who come with a whole variety of needs, and it's not just about their bellies.

"People have really loved it. It's a different kind of congregation that we serve, but vitally important to our outreach in the community."

## **RETIRED MINISTERS OF WORD AND SACRAMENT**

During 2008 twenty-eight RCA ministers of Word and sacrament retired from active service. Those who retired are being recognized by a display of their photographs and service records as well as by General Synod's endorsement of appreciation for their years of faithful and dedicated ministry in the church.

### **R-17**

**To adopt the following resolution:**

**These have loved Christ and fed his sheep. They have devoted themselves to spreading the Word and equipping the saints for the work of ministry.**

**Their contribution to a needy world is rich beyond measure; their record is on high.**

**The Reformed Church in America, with admiration, deep affection, and overflowing thanks to God, celebrates their lifelong service.**

**Richard Baukema  
Grand Rapids, Michigan**

**Warren Bovenkerk  
Modesto, California**

**Kenneth Cumberbatch  
Brooklyn, New York**

**Leon Draayer  
Mira Loma, California**

**John Elliott  
Oro Valley, Arizona**

**Dennis Ferguson  
Clinton, Tennessee**

**Barbara Fillette  
Churchville, Pennsylvania**

**Judith Gorsuch  
New York, New York**

**Kenneth Gorsuch  
New York, New York**

**William Henkel**  
Secaucus, New Jersey

**James Ikerd**  
Hudsonville, Michigan

**Richard Koerselman**  
Gilbert, Arizona

**Mark Kraai**  
Basking Ridge, New Jersey

**Rufus McClendon**  
Plainfield, New Jersey

**John Nodop**  
Wallkill, New York

**John Oldenburger**  
Sacramento, California

**Donald Peet**  
Gloversville, New York

**Daniel Ramaker**  
Branson, Missouri

**Ralph Robrahn**  
Lowell, Michigan

**Lewis Scudder**  
Apaisia Village, Cyprus

**Steven Stam**  
Holland, Michigan

**William Steele**  
Waterbury Center, Vermont

**Warren Thompson**  
Sun City West, Arizona

**Donald Veltman**  
Brownstown, Michigan

**Kenneth Westrate**  
Gary, Indiana

**Kenneth Working**  
Santa Barbara, California

**Jerry Zandstra**  
Safat, Kuwait

**Arthur Zeilstra**  
Kitchener, Ontario

## **NECROLOGY**

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### **Carolyn Holloway**

Carolyn Holloway was born on September 22, 1942, at Mount Olive, North Carolina. She studied at the College of New Rochelle, from which she graduated in 1988. Her theological education was received at New York Theological Seminary, from which she obtained a certificate in Christian ministry in 1987 and a master of divinity degree in 1992. She received a doctor of ministry degree from New Brunswick Theological Seminary in 2001.

Ms. Holloway was licensed by the Baptist Church in 1986 and ordained in 1990. She was received by the Classis of New York in 1995. She pastored Dewitt Reformed Church in New York City from 1995 until her death.

Ms. Holloway died on January 12, 2008. She was sixty-five years old.

### **Folkert “Red” Faber**

Folkert “Red” Faber was born in 1946, at Sneek, the Netherlands. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1969. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1972.

Mr. Faber was licensed by the Classis of Ontario in 1970 and ordained by that classis in 1972. He pastored the following congregations: Second, Jamestown, Michigan, from 1972 to 1979; Grace, Holland, Michigan, from 1979 to 1990; and Peace, Middleville, Michigan, from 1990 to 2002.

Mr. Faber died on January 19, 2008. He was sixty-one years old.

### **Walter Kline**

Walter Kline was born on May 27, 1923, at Chicago, Illinois. He began his undergraduate education at Muskegon Junior College in 1946 and then studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1950. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1953.

Mr. Kline was licensed by the Classis of Muskegon in 1952 and ordained by the Classis of Schoharie the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Berne, Beaverdam, New York, and West Berne, Beaverdam, New York, from 1953 to 1958; Brunswick, Ohio, from 1958 to 1967; Sanborn, Iowa, from 1967 to 1971; and Faith, Kankakee, Illinois, from 1971 to 1975. He served as a chaplain at the hospital in Oak Forest, Illinois, from 1975 to 1992 and was president of the Particular Synod of Chicago in 1977.

Mr. Kline died on January 22, 2008. He was eighty-four years old.

### **Raymond Arthur Van Beek**

Raymond Arthur Van Beek was born on January 17, 1921, at Westfield, North Dakota. He studied at Ellendale State Teachers College, from which he graduated in 1964. His theo-

logical education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1967.

Mr. Van Beek was licensed by the Classis of Dakota in 1967 and ordained by the Classis of Wisconsin the same year. He pastored New Hope Community Reformed Church in Wausau, Wisconsin, from 1967 to 1985. Following his retirement he was engaged in prison ministry as a member of the staff of the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California, from 1985 to 1996.

Mr. Van Beek died on February 16, 2008. He was eighty-seven years old.

#### **Joyce Carroll**

Joyce Ann Carroll was born on May 2, 1950, at Newark, New Jersey. Ms. Carroll was director of religious education at First Reformed Church in Fremont, Michigan, from 1987 to 1991. She served as pastor of discipleship at North Branch Reformed Church in Bridgewater, New Jersey. At the time of her death she was a volunteer coordinator for Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children (CASA), a national organization that helps abused and neglected children who are in foster care. She was responsible for a three-county area in north-central New Jersey, recruiting, training, and supporting volunteers who worked one-on-one with foster children.

Ms. Carroll died on February 23, 2008. She was fifty-seven years old.

#### **Clarence Greving**

Clarence F. Greving was born on August 3, 1915, at Prairie View, Kansas. He studied at Central College, from which he graduated in 1947. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1950.

Mr. Greving was licensed and ordained by the Classis of East Sioux in 1950. He pastored the following congregations: Newkirk, Iowa, from 1950 to 1956; Overisel, Michigan, from 1956 to 1959; Hollandale, Minnesota, from 1959 to 1965; and Alton, Iowa, from 1965 to 1980. Following his retirement he served as minister of calling at First Reformed Church in Sioux Center, Iowa, from 1980 to 1985.

Mr. Greving died on February 29, 2008. He was ninety-two years old.

#### **Albertha Jeanette Biegel**

Albertha Jeanette Biegel was born on September 9, 1917, at Grand Haven, Michigan. She studied at Wilson Junior College in 1938 and received her registered nurse degree from West Suburban Hospital in 1942. She completed her undergraduate education at Wheaton College in 1946.

Ms. Biegel entered the RCA's missionary service and served as a nurse in India from 1946 to 1960 and 1963 to 1982.

Ms. Biegel died on March 3, 2008. She was ninety years old.

#### **Steven Brooks**

Steven Brooks was born on June 14, 1951, at Holland, Michigan. He studied at Ohio Wesleyan University, from which he graduated in 1973. His theological education was received at Fuller Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1976.

Mr. Brooks was licensed by the Classis of Holland in 1977 and ordained by the Classis of West Central the same year. He served as minister for youth and families at Westwood Community Church in Omaha, Nebraska, from 1977 to 1985. He then served as senior pastor at Springs Community Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado, from 1985 until illness forced his retirement in 2007. He was president of the General Synod from 2001 to 2002.

Mr. Brooks died on March 11, 2008. He was fifty-six years old.

### **Joseph Bliss**

Joseph Bliss was born on June 2, 1937, at Columbus, Ohio. He studied at Reformed Bible College, from which he graduated in 1980. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1983.

Mr. Bliss was licensed and ordained by the Classis of South Grand Rapids in 1983. He pastored the following congregations: Thousand Isles, Alexandria Bay, New York, from 1983 to 1985 and Closter, New Jersey, from 1985 to 1990. He served in specialized ministry at St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1996 to 1998.

Mr. Bliss died on March 15, 2008. He was seventy years old.

### **Raymond Van Heukelom**

Raymond Van Heukelom was born on July 13, 1914, at Pella, Iowa. He studied at Central College, from which he graduated in 1937. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1940. He earned a master of theology degree from Calvin Seminary in 1943 and a doctor of theology degree from Northern Baptist Seminary. He was awarded a doctor of divinity degree from Central College in 1968.

Mr. Van Heukelom was licensed by the Classis of Pella in 1940 and ordained by the Classis of Grand Rapids the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Community, Corinth, Michigan, from 1940 to 1947; Emmanuel, Chicago, Illinois, from 1947 to 1953; First, Holland, Michigan, from 1953 to 1961; and First, Orange City, Iowa, from 1961 to 1979. He also served as a chaplain in the U.S. Army from 1943 to 1946. Mr. Van Heukelom served as the president of General Synod from 1968 to 1969.

Mr. Van Heukelom died on April 18, 2008. He was ninety-three years old.

### **Corstian Klein**

Corstian Klein was born on January 28, 1926, at Armour, South Dakota. He studied at Seattle Pacific College, from which he graduated in 1955. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1958. He studied at the University of Utrecht from 1958 to 1959.

Mr. Klein was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Holland in 1958. He pastored the following congregations: Maranatha, Wainfleet, Ontario, from 1959 to 1962; First, Winnipeg, Manitoba, from 1962 to 1964; Hope, Vancouver, British Columbia, from 1964 to 1969; and Prairie View, Kansas, from 1969 to 1970. He demitted the ministry in 1976. He was reinstated by the Classis of Cascades in 1982.

Mr. Klein died on April 27, 2008. He was eighty-two years old.

### **Donald F. Crowhurst**

Donald F. Crowhurst was received from the United Church of Canada in 1991. He served as pastor at the United Church, Athabasca, Alberta, from 1991 to 1993 and at Ebenezer, Mississauga, Ontario, in 1996. He was also the contract pastor at Maple Leaf Drive, Toronto, Ontario, in 1996.

Mr. Crowhurst died on May 17, 2008. He was eighty-one years old.

### **Merle Brouwer**

Merle Brouwer was born on December 19, 1937, at Chandler, Minnesota. He studied at Central College, from which he graduated in 1959. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1962.

Mr. Brouwer was licensed by the Classis of Minnesota in 1962 and ordained by the Classis of Schoharie the same year. He pastored Schoharie, New York, from 1962 to 1966 and Church of the Master, Warren, Michigan, from 1966 to 1969. Mr. Brouwer was dismissed to the United Church of Christ in 1969.

Mr. Brouwer died on May 20, 2008. He was seventy years old.

**Auriel Mae Aalberts**

Auriel Mae Aalberts was born on December 20, 1914, at West Olive, Michigan.

Ms. Aalberts served with RCA missions at Winnebago, Nebraska, from 1942 to 1958 and from 1964 to 1970. She was engaged in work among Native Americans in Minneapolis, Minnesota, from 1958 to 1964. She also served as a house mother at Annville Institute in Annville, Kentucky, following the death of her husband in 1970.

Ms. Aalberts died on June 2, 2008. She was ninety-three years old.

**Daniel Oltman Reeverts**

Daniel Oltman Reeverts was born on March 12, 1918, at Oregon, Illinois. He studied at Central College, from which he graduated in 1939. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1942.

Mr. Reeverts was licensed by the Classis of Pleasant Prairie in 1942 and ordained by the Classis of Germania the same year. He pastored the following congregations: First, Monroe, South Dakota, from 1942 to 1945; Trinity, Sibley, Iowa, from 1949 to 1957; Bethel, Leota, Minnesota, from 1957 to 1966; and Trinity, Ridgewood, New York, from 1966 to 1983. Mr. Reeverts also served as director of the Lay Leadership Department and a teacher at Pleasant Prairie Academy in German Valley, Illinois, from 1945 to 1949. He was stated clerk of the Classis of Philadelphia from 1985 to 1992.

Mr. Reeverts died on June 7, 2008. He was ninety years old.

**Imre George Bertalan**

Imre George Bertalan was born on June 3, 1918, at Nyírtass, Hungary. He completed his undergraduate and theological education at the Kollegium in Sarospatak, Hungary, in 1940. He also undertook postgraduate studies at Halle, Germany; in Basel, Switzerland; and at Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, New Jersey. He received honorary doctoral degrees from the University of Debrecen and Hope College.

Mr. Bertalan was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Miskolc in Hungary in 1940. After arriving in the United States, he pastored the following congregations: Magyar, Staten Island, New York, from 1946 to 1954; Magyar, Manville, New Jersey, from 1948 to 1954; the Hungarian Reformed Church, Passaic, New Jersey, from 1954 to 1963; and Magyar, New Brunswick, New Jersey, from 1963 to 1980. He also served as president of the Hungarian Reformed Federation of America in Washington, D.C., from 1980 to 1992.

Mr. Bertalan died on July 10, 2008. He was ninety years old.

**John Edward Lucius**

John Edward Lucius was born on June 13, 1917, at Long Island City, New York. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1944. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1947. He also earned a masters degree in counseling from Arizona State University in 1973.

Mr. Lucius was licensed by the Classis of North Long Island in 1947 and ordained by the Classis of Schoharie the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Prattsville, New York, from 1947 to 1949; Second, Astoria, New York, from 1949 to 1953; Macy, Nebraska, from 1953 to 1957; and Dulce, New Mexico, from 1957 to 1961. He was director of Phoenix Indian School in Phoenix, Arizona, from 1961 to 1983 and served as assistant pastor at Christ's Community Church in Glendale, Arizona, from 1984 to 1985.

Mr. Lucius died on July 23, 2008. He was ninety-one years old.

**James David Boyce**

David Boyce was born on January 26, 1922, in Santiago, Chile. He studied at Western Reserve University, from which he graduated in 1947. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1960. He also earned a master of sacred theology degree from New York Theological Seminary in 1972.

Mr. Boyce was licensed by the Classis of Paramus in 1959 and ordained by the Classis of Raritan in 1960. He served as the student pastor at Fourth Raritan in Somerville, New Jersey, from 1957 to 1960. He then served the church in Glenmont, New York, from 1962 to 1969 and the Newtown Church in Elmhurst, Queens, New York, from 1969 to 1987.

Mr. Boyce died on August 19, 2008. He was eighty-six years old.

#### **Cornelis Keith Geense**

Cornelis Keith Geense was born on March 6, 1948, at Hoedekenskerke, the Netherlands. He studied at Northwestern College, from which he graduated in 1974. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1977. He earned a certificate from the Blanton-Peale Graduate Institute in 1990.

Mr. Geense was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Ontario in 1977. He pastored the church in Rhinebeck, New York, from 1977 to 1991 and the Servants of Christ Church in Federal Way, Washington, from 1991 to 1999. He was a bereavement services coordinator at Mountain View Funeral Home and Memorial Park in Tacoma, Washington, from 1999 until his death.

Mr. Geense died on September 10, 2008. He was sixty years old.

#### **John Hains**

John Hains was born on April 12, 1921, at Detroit, Michigan. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1942. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1945.

Mr. Hains was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Muskegon in 1945. He pastored the following congregations: First, Fremont, Michigan, from 1945 to 1951; Trinity, Holland, Michigan, from 1951 to 1957; Beverly, Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1957 to 1961; Faith, Zeeland, Michigan, from 1961 to 1972; Bethel, Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1972 to 1978; and Beverly, Wyoming, Michigan, from 1978 to 1983. He served interim pastorates at Laketon-Bethel, Muskegon, Michigan, in 1984 and at Ebenezer, Holland, Michigan, in 1985. He was associate pastor at Fourth, Holland, Michigan, from 1986 to 1990 and minister of calling at Faith, Zeeland, Michigan in 1999. Mr. Hains served as the president of the Particular Synod of Michigan in 1962.

Mr. Haines died on October 7, 2008. He was eighty-seven years old.

#### **Florence Pert**

Florence Pert was born on March 22, 1930, at Birmingham, Alabama. She studied at Birmingham Southern College, from which she graduated in 1951. Her theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which she graduated in 1987.

Ms. Pert was licensed and ordained by the Classis of New York in 1987. She served as assistant pastor at Marble Collegiate Church in New York City from 1987 to 2003.

Ms. Pert died on December 9, 2008. She was seventy-eight years old.

#### **John James Arnold**

John James Arnold was born on April 13, 1928, at Paterson, New Jersey. He studied at Rutgers University, from which he graduated in 1949. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1952. He earned a master of sacred theology degree at Hartford Seminary in 1959 and a doctor of philosophy degree in 1967. He also earned a law degree from Capital University in 1975.

Mr. Arnold was licensed by the Classis of Paramus in 1952 and ordained by the Classis of Montgomery the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Owasco, New York, from 1952 to 1953; Rhinebeck, New York, from 1956 to 1958; Trinity, Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1960 to 1968. Mr. Arnold served as a chaplain in the U.S. Navy from 1953 to 1955. He became a professor of philosophy at Ohio University in Zanesville, Ohio, in 1968.

Mr. Arnold died on December 11, 2008. He was eighty years old.

**Frederick Hearn Musson**

Frederick Hearn Musson was born on December 16, 1916, at Woodcliff Lake, New Jersey. He began his undergraduate education at the National Bible Institute in 1936, then studied at the University of California in 1949. He completed his undergraduate studies at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, California, from which he graduated in 1951. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1964.

Mr. Musson was licensed by the Classis of Newark in 1964 and ordained by the Classis of Columbia-Greene the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Gallatin, New York, from 1964 to 1969; West Copake, New York, from 1964 to 1975; and First, West Coxsackie, New York, from 1975 to 1982. He was also the stated supply at Annville, Kentucky, from 1983 to 1987.

Mr. Musson died on December 15, 2008. He was ninety-two years old.

**Barbara Ann Pekich**

Barbara Ann Pekich was born on March 23, 1950, at South Amboy, New Jersey. She studied at Alma College, from which she graduated in 1972. Her theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which she graduated in 1992. She earned a master of arts degree from Southern Illinois University in 1973.

Ms. Pekich was licensed and ordained by the Classis of North Grand Rapids in 1992. Beginning in 1992 and until her death, she served as executive director and pastor of Heartside Ministry in Grand Rapids, Michigan,

Ms. Pekich died on December 29, 2008. She was fifty-eight years old.

**Report of the General Synod Council on Global Mission**

*“Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God” (Colossians 1:6).*

The Reformed Church in America is a fellowship of congregations called by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be the very presence of Jesus Christ in the world.

Our shared task is to equip congregations for ministry—a thousand churches in a million ways doing one thing—following Christ in mission, in a lost and broken world so loved by God.

The church, led by the Holy Spirit, is called to bear witness through God’s unconditional love to those who are among the poor, who are strangers, and who have become outcasts.

The vision of the Global Mission staff of the RCA is to support congregations and members as they personally, prayerfully, and financially support mission personnel, mission partners, and mission teams to do the following:

- Bring the good news of God’s grace in Jesus Christ to those who have never heard its joyful message.
- Increase the leadership, education, and technology capacities of mission partners.
- Transform the local mission engagement of congregations and members through global connections.
- Respond to disasters and injustice with actions of relief, development, and advocacy.

**A Tradition of Mission**

RCA Global Mission has engaged in cross-cultural mission for more than 150 years and has a record of excellence that is well known both within the RCA and throughout the ecumenical mission world. Missionaries who sign on for long-term assignments have been the backbone of RCA global missions. These career missionaries make a lasting and sustainable difference in the lives of people, communities, and indigenous churches. Emerging global churches are born, disciplined, trained, sustained, and sent in mission through long-

term missionaries. The RCA remains committed to long-term mission assignments as the most effective approach to the sustainable development of indigenous churches around the globe.

### **Volunteers and Mission Teams**

RCA Global Mission is also committed to short-term volunteers and mission teams. In the last thirty years, the sending of short-term mission teams both locally and globally has escalated rapidly. RCA Global Mission is committed to facilitating mission trips that accomplish meaningful and sustainable work but, more importantly, that transform the lives of the participants, the people “on the ground,” and the sending church.

RCA Global Mission is committed to long-term missionaries and short-term volunteers and mission teams. In today’s world of mission, the two approaches are not in conflict. Rather each contributes a distinctive role in God’s mission to reconcile the world to himself in Jesus Christ.

### **Growing Global Mission Opportunities**

As Christians we are called to bring the whole gospel to the whole world. We also believe that focus is critical to effective mission work. All new RCA global mission projects must clearly address one or more of the following critical priorities:

- Evangelizing unreached peoples
- Empowering global partners
- Equipping RCA churches and leaders for mission
- Embracing compassion and justice

#### Evangelizing Unreached Peoples

RCA missionaries and funding enable the spread of the gospel to unreached peoples around the globe:

- In Chile with the Christian Presbyterian Church.
- In Honduras with the Moravians.
- In Alaska with the services of Mission Aviation Repair Center.
- In Italy with the Waldensians.
- In Niger with the Evangelical Church of the Republic of Niger.
- In Kenya with the Africa Inland Church.
- In China with the China Christian Council and the Yanbian and Rajin Foundation.
- In Myanmar with the Reformed Evangelical Church in Myanmar.
- Through Scripture translation and dissemination by RCA mission personnel assigned to Wycliffe, United Bible Societies, and Audio Scripture Ministries.

#### Empowering Global Partners

RCA Global Mission most often works in partnership with indigenous churches. The number one priority of our global partners is leadership development. RCA missionaries and mission grants equip leaders:

- In a doctoral program based in Latin America.
- At Bible schools in Honduras; Chiapas, Mexico; and Niger.
- Through worship and discipling of believers of international congregations in Oman and Bahrain.
- At the Al Amana Centre in Oman.
- At St. Paul’s United Theological College in Kenya.
- At the Evangelical Theological Seminary and Reformed Christian Church in Croatia.
- With the Ukrainian Center for Christian Cooperation.
- In Albania with the Albanian Evangelical Alliance.
- At Tokyo Union Theological Seminary in Japan.
- In Estonia with Union of Free Evangelical and Baptist Churches of Estonia.
- At the Evangelical Seminary of Caracas in Venezuela.
- Through the Quiché Evangelical Church in Guatemala.
- At Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary in Ethiopia.
- At seminaries of the China Christian Council in Heifei and Shenyang.
- At Tainan Theological College and Seminary and Yu-Shan Theological College and Seminary in Taiwan.
- Through the diaconal program of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa and the Dutch Reformed churches of southern Africa.

- Through the Church Planting Center of the Reformed Evangelical Church in Myanmar.

#### Equipping RCA Churches and Leaders for Mission

Mutual mission describes a two-way relationship between mission partners, each of them both sending and receiving. The gifts of the global church are precious treasures for the church in the West as we seek to understand local mission in a racially diverse and religiously pluralistic world. RCA Global Mission facilitates mutual mission in several ways.

For the past several years RCA Global Mission has partnered—first with Western Theological Seminary and later expanding to include the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency and New Brunswick Theological Seminary—in providing seminary students with cross-cultural immersion experiences that develop their skills to communicate the gospel effectively across cultural lines. Global Mission also sponsors experiential journeys for RCA pastors to key mission sites around the world.

RCA Global Mission is in a good position to partner in these learning experiences, since that is what it has been doing effectively for over 150 years: crossing cultural lines with the good news of the gospel in ways that are sensitive to cultures and true to the gospel. Working with RCA pastors and seminaries, Global Mission hopes to contribute to the competencies of future church leaders while building a partnership in ministry and mission with them that will last a lifetime.

#### Embracing Compassion and Justice

Through Global Mission missionaries and grants to mission partners, the Reformed Church in America participates in the compassion and justice proclaimed by Jesus in Luke 4: “Today this scripture [Isaiah 61] has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

- The sick are healed in Nicaragua, Honduras, Chiapas, South India, Niger, Mozambique, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Bahrain.
- The broken and oppressed find wholeness and peace in Hungary, Italy, Egypt, South Korea, the United States, South India, Sudan, Palestine, and Malawi.
- Sustainable development supports brothers and sisters in Christ in Niger, Mozambique, South India, Ethiopia, Malawi, Kenya, and South Africa.
- Children are lovingly cared for and educated in Japan; Nicaragua; Malawi; Argentina; Ecuador; Hawaiian Gardens, California; Sioux Falls, South Dakota; Grand Rapids, Michigan; Staten Island, New York; Mescalero and Dulce, New Mexico; and Jackson County, Kentucky.
- Through Reformed Church World Service (RCWS), RCA members continue a ministry of compassion and hope throughout our lost and broken world. Gifts to One Great Hour of Sharing and in response to crisis appeals provide emergency relief to disaster survivors, grants for rehabilitation, the development of long-term solutions, and advocacy for justice for people who are poor and hungry.

#### GSC GLOBAL MISSION ENDS MONITORING REPORT

Each spring the RCA’s general secretary is required to report to the General Synod Council (GSC) on progress on the various ends policies established by the GSC. The monitoring report for Global Mission follows.

#### **Global Mission Ends Policy**

The RCA will be a fellowship of congregations intentionally crossing boundaries in word and deed with the love of God known in Jesus Christ resulting in:

- Evangelizing unreached peoples
- Empowering global partners
- Equipping RCA churches for mission
- Embracing compassion and justice

#### **General Secretary’s Interpretation**

This policy calls upon the GSC to make a difference through RCA Global Mission by connecting RCA churches and members in mutuality to the global church through mission personnel, projects, and partners. Global mission is a continuing focus of the RCA. With the support of Global Mission staff, RCA congregations and members will personally, prayerfully, and financially support mission personnel, mission partners, and mission teams to do the following:

- Bring the good news of God’s grace in Jesus Christ to those who have never heard its joyful message.
- Increase the leadership, education, and technology capacities of mission partners.
- Transform the local mission engagement of congregations and members through global connections.
- Respond to disasters and injustice with actions of relief, development, and advocacy.

**Statistics on RCA Church and Member Giving**

<b>Churches</b>	2008	2007	2002
RCA church pledges to Global Mission	\$6,084,743	\$6,276,909	\$6,373,893
Churches with no pledge	357	340	286
Average amount of church pledge	\$12,121	\$10,621	\$9,716
Per-member average through churches	\$28.18	\$37.60	\$35.95
<b>Individuals</b>			
Total Global Mission pledges by individuals	\$496,462	\$256,550	\$105,800
Total number of individuals holding pledges	287	195	75
Average pledge per person	1,729	\$1,315	\$1,411
<b>Reformed Church World Service</b>			
Donations by individuals*	59,468	\$38,438	\$24,482
Total number of individual donors	210	85	134
Average gift per person	284	\$452	\$183
Donations by churches*	\$213,188	\$222,487	\$204,809
Total number of church donors	158	169	170
Average gift per church	\$1,349	\$1,318	\$1,204

\*Does not include contributions to disaster appeals.

**Global Mission Funding Challenges**

The financial crisis gripping the United States, Canada, and the rest of the world has significantly and negatively impacted giving at all levels of the church. RCA members are no less generous, but lost jobs, lost income, and lost investments have had an obvious bearing on contributions. In the current fiscal year of 2009 Global Mission, faced with a probable revenue shortfall in excess of \$800,000, has taken unprecedented measures to cut costs and increase savings. With no end to the economic crisis in sight, these economizing efforts have been translated into the 2010 budget as well. There is no doubt that these measures somewhat restrict the work of RCA missionaries, mission partners, and Global Mission staff. Salaries of Global Mission staff and missionaries will be frozen for 2010. Travel budgets will be restricted. However, this is the pain of belt-tightening with which the whole of the church is struggling.

The RCA Global Mission program does not receive any portion of the assessments paid by congregations. Investment interest income has always been a small source of income and it has slowed to a trickle. Partnership-in-Mission pledges by congregations and individuals are virtually the only source of revenue to carry Global Mission through these very challenging times. With great appreciation for the faithfulness of churches and individuals that support RCA missionaries, and with every intention to be faithful stewards of the gifts of God’s people, the following recommendation is offered.

**R-18**  
**To retain the Partnership-in-Mission (PIM) share for 2010 at the 2009 value of \$6,000; and further,**  
**to encourage all RCA churches—and particularly the 364 RCA churches who do not support RCA missionaries through PIM shares—to take a collection for Global Mission in 2010.**

**Categories and Numbers of Mission Personnel**

**RCA mission personnel** are appointed by RCA Global Mission for specific ministry. Global Mission establishes their salaries and benefits and supervises these missionaries. **Mission partner personnel** are employed by partners’ organizations. They are under the supervision of the partner, who also establishes and regulates salaries and benefits. **Volunteers** are appointed by the RCA Mission Volunteer Program to specific job responsibilities; they generally receive housing and a stipend.

**Number of Mission Personnel by Category, 1996-2008**

YEAR	MISSYS	MPP	VOLUNTEERS	TOTAL
1996	89	25	30	144
1997	83	24	31	138
1998	80	40	35	155
1999	74	45	34	153
2000	77	52	41	170
2001	85	45	35	165
2002	79	49	41	169
2003	75	41	46	162
2004	69	57	38	164
2005	72	62	31	165
2006	70	54	29	153
2007	74	58	21	153
2008	70	60	17	147
2009	71	56	19	146

**Mission Personnel Changes**

New missionaries have been assigned to work with the Kurdish people, a marginalized ethnic group in the Middle East. They will work to establish a local, indigenous church that is both uniquely Kurdish and distinctly Christian.

Jack Buteyn has been appointed to be the RCA interim co-chaplain at the Protestant Church in Oman, replacing Edward and Tamera Schreur, whose mission assignment was completed. Jack's wife, Linda, is hoping to teach during their term of service in Oman.

Marlin and Sally Vis have returned to the United States to continue ministry related to Israel after the Israeli government denied the renewal of their visa to live and work in the country. Marlin and Sally will continue to present issues facing Israel and Palestinian Christians to RCA congregations and lead pilgrimages to Israel/Palestine.

Agshin Jafalow has been appointed as an RCA missionary in the area of Christian-Muslim relations. His work will include increasing the awareness and involvement of RCA churches in Islamic mission by helping them understand Islam and helping to prepare, teach, and consult with missionaries who want to work in Islamic settings. Jafalow will obtain a master of divinity degree in June of 2009. He is from the Republic of Azerbaijan and is multilingual and a trained lawyer. He is currently a member of First Reformed Church in Portage, Michigan.

**Mission Partner Personnel**

David Ford has been appointed to work as a linguistic analyst with SIL International. This is a joint appointment with Wycliffe Bible Translators. Ford will be working in Sudan. He is currently fundraising for his appointment and will graduate in June 2009 with a master's degree in applied linguistics. After graduation he will move back to Sudan, where he spent ten years of his life with his parents, RCA missionaries Peter and Patty Ford.

Atef Ageib Londi, RCA mission partner personnel serving as coordinator of the Theological Education by Extension program with the Presbyterian Church of Sudan, passed away in October 2008 after suffering from heart disease. Stephen Kulang Jiech, who has been appointed to replace Londi, is an ordained pastor in the Presbyterian Church of Sudan.

**Completion of Assignment**

Vern and Carla Sterk have retired from missionary service in Chiapas. The Sterks served in Chiapas for over forty years in the areas of teaching, nursing, and Bible translation. They continue to serve by teaching at Western Theological Seminary and leading groups of seminarians to Chiapas to experience the culture and mission of the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico in Chiapas.

### Volunteer Services Assignments

Bahrain:	Jena Helmus Alicia Pashby Jennifer Yeske
Ethiopia:	Joe and Sara Blevins
Honduras:	Merle Vander Sluis
Japan:	Robyn Anderson Nathan Blakeslee Nicholas Boyes Myra Cubos Tabitha Ekvall Anna Herzog Josephine Kimura Elizabeth King Tonya Nelson Kevin Oosting Maribeth Voss
Niger:	Elizabeth Wierengo
United States:	Dan Whalen

### Deaths

Albertha J. Biegel, an RCA missionary to India, passed away on March 4, 2008. Biegel served from 1946 to 1982 as the nursing superintendent at Mary Lott Lyles Hospital in Madanpalle and also taught Bible classes.

### The Retirement of Vern and Carla Sterk

The Reformed Church in America does not have a global mission program. In reality, the RCA has people in global mission. We do not send programs. We send people who give their lives on behalf of the RCA in service to the world and the global church. We support them in their ministries, and celebrate with them in retirement.

In 1966 while a student at Western Theological Seminary, Vern Sterk and his wife Carla spent a life-changing year of internship in Chiapas, Mexico. What has rightly been called the “charm of Chiapas” turned into the calling of a lifetime of ministry. From the beginning the charm was also filled with challenge.

After being commissioned as RCA missionaries in 1969 and studying linguistics and Spanish, Vern and Carla began their on-the-job training for reaching the unevangelized Zinacantecos by living ten years in Navenchauc, a village without one Christian believer.

Later, Vern and Carla moved to San Cristobal de las Casas to assist in the translation of the Old Testament into the Tzotzil language. This was also a time of persecution of evangelical Christians in Chiapas.

In 1992, Vern was awarded a doctorate degree from the School of Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary. His thesis, “The Dynamics of Persecution,” explored the relationship between persecution and the growth of the church. His study tells how the translation of the Scriptures into the “heart language” of persecuted Christians can mitigate the forces of persecution and enable new believers to stand fast in the face of oppression.

In 1997, Vern and Carla began to teach courses in missiology part-time at Western Theological Seminary (WTS) while continuing to serve in Chiapas. In 2005, they became full-time professors at WTS, returning to Chiapas during the summers to teach and encourage the church. They were instrumental in the founding of AMICH, the global mission agency of the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico in Chiapas, and in the mentoring and sending of the agency’s first missionary.

The Sterks’ retirement after forty years of commitment to the people of Chiapas in service of the gospel of Jesus Christ coincides with the 2009 meeting of the General Synod.

**R-19**

Whereas Vern and Carla Sterk responded to the call of God to ministry and mission by entering seminary in 1964 and being commissioned as RCA missionaries to Chiapas in 1969; and

Whereas Vern and Carla Sterk committed themselves to an incarnational presence among the Tzotzil tribes of Chiapas, learning their language, customs, and culture; and,

Whereas Vern and Carla Sterk used their gifts of teaching, nursing, translation, and administration in the proclamation of the gospel in Chiapas; and,

Whereas Vern and Carla Sterk stood in solidarity with the persecuted church in Chiapas, made the plight of the church known, and marshaled the prayers and encouragement of the RCA for the church in Chiapas; and,

Whereas Vern Sterk almost single-handedly raised the level of basketball skills and competition in the city of San Cristobal de las Casas, and in so doing represented the RCA with hard fought yet, it is hoped, good sportsmanship; and,

Whereas Vern and Carla Sterk, along with eighty-five years of RCA missionary presence in Chiapas, contributed to the growth and maturation of the evangelical church among the Tzotzil tribes, and in so doing were also forever privileged and transformed by joining hands and hearts with these sisters and brothers of the faith;

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the two hundred and third session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting June 4 through 9, 2009, at Hope College and Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, with gratitude to God for their lives and witness, honors Vern and Carla Sterk with a prayer of thanksgiving and a token of our esteem.

**Global Mission Consultation**

The demographics of the RCA are changing. We are racially and ethnically far more diverse than we were two decades ago. And, the rate of this change will increase—perhaps dramatically—in the next twenty years. With new ethnicities and cultures come new ways of worship, fresh biblical perspectives, and different methods of mission. This has become very apparent over the last few years in conversations with both Korean and Hispanic leaders and pastors. Rather than engaging in individual conversations scattered throughout the denomination, what emerged was the need for a mission consultation.

Here's how the event was announced in the letter of invitation that was sent to thirty-five potential participants including Hispanics, Koreans, African Americans, missiologists (Chuck Van Engen and Vern Sterk), young RCA pastors, global partners, RCA missionaries (J.P. Sundararajan, Bertalan Tamas, and Brad Olson) and Global Mission staff.

For over 150 years the RCA has participated faithfully and fruitfully in God's mission in Jesus Christ. We've made contributions to global mission beyond our size because we know that "together is better." However, early in the twenty-first century, we need to discern anew what "together is better" means for RCA Global Mission.

Though the RCA Global Mission program has a long and strong history, our historic principles and strategies do not resonate with our increasingly diverse RCA constituency. Because of our different cultural contexts and histories, it has been a challenge for some within the RCA family to find their place as full partners at the RCA Global Mission table. In order to address this concern, RCA Global Mission is hosting a Mission Consultation in November 2008.

The purpose of the consultation is to create a Global Mission program for the twenty-first century that all constituencies in our increasingly diverse RCA family will embrace and engage. The strategy is to build a broad based consensus regarding the principles that will guide RCA Global Mission into the future.

Thirty-two participants gathered to build community centered in worship, tell stories of how culture and experience shaped their understanding of mission, hear each other's perspectives, and discern how all of these components of their lives related to the RCA's mission principles, and in particular the principle of working in partnership with indigenous global churches.

After considerable conversation about the RCA's mission principles, the following patterns of thought were discerned.

#### **Affirmations**

- There is a shift of mission partnership to North America.
- The RCA's mission principles are affirmed, but they also need to be revisited.
- Partnerships need to be highly relational rather than simply based on budgets and paper agreements.
- Partnerships are not optional; none of the groups proposed doing away with the partnership principle.

#### **What to add or amend**

- Revisit and rewrite the definition of the principles.
- Teach RCA students and churches the reality of missions.
- Mutuality/reciprocity; both giving and receiving. The "we" in the principles is too one-sided.
- Expand the definition of partnership, including who may be included in such partnerships.

This is raw data from the consultation that needs further refining and the development of strategies going forward. In addition to suggesting trajectories for RCA Global Mission in the future, the consultation helped establish rich relationships through which to work in the future.

#### **Japan Mission 150th Anniversary**

In July 2009, Global Mission will celebrate the 150th anniversary of RCA mission in Japan. The celebration is being organized by the Church of Christ in Japan, the Japan Bible Society, and the United Church of Christ in Japan, the RCA's mission partner.

The Reformed Church in America entered Japan in 1859, just a short time after the ports of Yokohama and Nagasaki were opened to Western powers by the Treaty of 1858. Three missionaries arrived from the RCA: Samuel R. Brown, Guido F. Verbeck, and Dr. Duane B. Simmons (who left the mission in 1860). James Ballagh joined the mission in 1861. The life and ministry of that mission exemplified three foundations of RCA mission: evangelism, education, and ecumenism.

At the start, direct evangelism was impossible due to 250 years of Christian prohibition and persecution following earlier Roman Catholic missionary activity. It was a delicate and difficult situation into which the missionaries entered. In spite of the difficulties, Ballagh was able to perform the first Protestant baptism in 1864. Brown was instrumental in the theological training of several of the earliest converts, who later became leaders in the Christian movement in Japan.

Like other early missionaries, the early pioneers to Japan engaged in intense language study and then Bible translation. Brown and Verbeck worked to provide language learning materials for future generations of missionaries and played key roles in the translation of the Bible into Japanese. The New Testament was published in 1880, and in 1888 the completed translation of the entire Bible was published.

In 1872, the government retracted the prohibitions against Christianity. The publication of Christian literature also became possible. While not completely free of restrictions, the missionaries were able to do more than was previously permitted. The first Protestant Christian church in Japan was organized at Yokohama on March 10, 1872, under the leadership of Ballagh of the RCA Japan Mission.

Following the successful example of the missionaries in China about twenty years earlier, the RCA worked in cooperation with other missions for the purpose of creating a unified, evangelical, and independent church in Japan. Three missions cooperated with the early Japanese Christians, and on October 3, 1877, nine congregations were organized as the United Church of Christ in Japan. Japanese Christians quickly assumed responsibilities in

the life and ministry of the churches, and also cooperated with the missionaries in the development of theological education.

In the early years, missionaries engaged in teaching both boys and girls in their homes or wherever the opportunity presented itself. Henry Stout arrived in 1869 and immediately engaged in teaching. Verbeck, working with the government schools, was influential in helping to establish the modern Japanese educational system. His name is still well-known throughout Japanese education circles. Mary E. Kidder formed Ferris Seminary, the first Christian school for girls in Japan in 1870. The RCA Japan Mission founded three mission schools, Steele Academy for boys and Ferris Seminary and Sturges Seminary for girls, and also cofounded Meiji Gakuin University with a Presbyterian mission.

Throughout the nineteenth century and up until World War II, the RCA Japan Mission assisted in the development of Japanese churches that are not only self-governing but also self-supporting and self-propagating. Since the war, and into the twenty-first century, the Reformed Church has continued to serve as a partner in mission with Japanese Christians in evangelism, Christian education, and leadership development.

**R-20**

**Whereas the Protestant Christian movement in Japan has reached the significant milestone of one hundred and fifty years since the arrival of the first Protestant missionaries on Japan's shores; and**

**Whereas the Reformed Church in America, in response to God's call, was privileged to send three of the first six missionary families to enter Japan in 1859, the year in which Protestant mission was commenced; and**

**Whereas more than three hundred of the sons and daughters of the Reformed Church in America have served as missionaries in Japan alongside Japanese Christians; and**

**Whereas the United Church of Christ in Japan, as an independent, evangelical, self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating body of Christ, shares today with the Reformed Church in America in the mission of proclaiming Christ as the only hope for a lost and broken world; and**

**Whereas the United Church of Christ in Japan and the Reformed Church in America are united by a mutual agreement as partners in mission;**

**Therefore be it resolved that the two hundred and third session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting June 4 through 9, 2009, at Hope College and Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, with gratitude to God for the faithfulness of the United Church of Christ in Japan, hereby offers its heartfelt congratulations upon this anniversary occasion, with the prayer that the Holy Spirit of power may strengthen and uphold and guide and embolden the church in Japan for mission in the days to come.**

**Solidarity with Christians in the Middle East**

The 2008 General Synod approved the following recommendations from the Commission on Christian Action, and the General Synod Council assigned them to Global Mission for implementation.

**R-51**

To encourage the congregations of the RCA to uphold indigenous historic Christian churches of the Middle East in their prayers, specifically asking members to join the prayers of efforts such as the Covenant of Prayer by the Iraq Network and the Presbyterian Week of Prayer and Witness, and of the blog by RCA mission associates Marlin and Sally Vis.

**R-52**

To direct the General Synod Council to gather, share, develop, and distribute materials on the situations faced by Middle Eastern Christians to RCA agencies and congregations.

To encourage congregations and individuals to support Reformed Church in America, Christian Reformed Church, and Formula of Agreement partner denomination programs to support Middle Eastern Christians in their struggles, specifically such projects as the Mount of Olives Housing Project, which provides Christian Palestinians living in Jerusalem with housing.

In March 2009, in fulfillment of these recommendations, the following resources were made available through the RCA's website.

- *The Cradle of Our Faith* DVD and PowerPoint presentation chronicling the history and plight of Christians in countries of the Middle East.
- A link to the booklet and study guide that complement *The Cradle of Our Faith*, published by the PCUSA Palestine/Israel Network.
- A liturgy by John Paarlberg on related themes.
- A list of ministries appropriate for donations in support of Christians and peace in the Middle East.

### **Global Mission Stories**

The following stories help bring the four elements of Global Mission's ends policy to life. They provide a snapshot of ways God has blessed the RCA's commitment to global mission.

#### **1. Evangelizing Unreached Peoples**

##### **Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus—Gumuz Initiative**

From a report by Derrick Jones, supervisor of RCA mission in Africa:

The RCA has been working with the outreach department of its partner, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), to share the gospel with the Gumuz people, an unreached people group in northwestern Ethiopia. Their population is estimated to be over 120,000 in Ethiopia and Sudan. The Gumuz have been marginalized by the Amhara and other larger people groups for centuries.

The EECMY evangelist and church planter Birhanu, who is Amhar, said God gave him a vision to go share the gospel with the Gumuz. This defies the normal communal and tribal dynamic because traditionally the Amhara and the Gumuz are still considered enemies.

After a year and a half of this vision, in February 2006, when Derrick Jones visited the Gumuz people with EECMY outreach coordinator Beredo Bekalo, 140 people in three villages gathered under trees to hear the gospel. Several people were coming to faith in Christ. Wonde, one village leader, in expressing his thanks to EECMY and the RCA said, "All of us want to believe in Jesus. We need change, change of life. We were in darkness. With the teaching of Jesus, now we are in the light. We will not be in darkness again. God bless you."

On his second visit to the Gumuz, Jones preached and assisted Bekalo in worship. Sixty people gathered under a temporary facility of wood and grass built on property donated by the local government. Seven adults and eleven children were baptized.

With God's leading, the obedience of evangelist Birhanu, and RCA Global Mission working in partnership with the EECMY in holistic mission, the "least of these" in Ethiopia—the Gumuz people north of the Blue Nile River—are being reached with the gospel of Jesus the Christ.

#### **2. Empowering Global Partners**

##### **Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus—Christian-Muslim Relations**

RCA missionaries Peter and Patty Ford also work with the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). Peter directs the program in Christian-Muslim relations at the Mekane Yesus Seminary in Addis Ababa. (In 2009, the Fords will move to St. Paul's Theological College in Limuru, Kenya, to establish and build a similar program.) The following excerpts are from the Fords' 2008 report to supporting churches.

My primary goal is to train a growing number of committed theological students to serve their church as evangelists among Muslims and as teachers of congregations, helping them to better understand Islam in Ethiopia and to bear witness to Christ among their Muslim neighbors. This training has taken shape in the program in Christian-Muslim Relations (CMR) at Mekane Yesus Seminary. In this I work closely with two Ethiopian seminary teachers who have been specially trained in teaching CMR. I also teach graduate courses in Islam as part of the missions program at the Ethiopian graduate school of theology.

In the past we took in a new group of CMR students every two years for the two-year CMR program. Last August we accepted a new group of eleven students, even though the existing group of nine students had completed only one year of the program. Teaching two separate groups at different levels has been challenging for me and my two Ethiopian colleagues, but manageable by God's grace.

Remember our CMR graduates serving in various locations around Ethiopia and in other nearby African countries, that the knowledge and attitudes they gained in the CMR program may help them share their faith lovingly yet effectively among Muslims in their areas.

### **Dominican Reformed Church**

The RCA is partnering with and assisting the emergence of the Dominican Reformed Church (Iglesia Reformada Dominicana, or IRD). On January 11-12, 2009, director of operations for the RCA Ken Bradsell and RCA general secretary Wes Granberg-Michaelson joined members of the RCA-IRD Coaching Team in a meeting with IRD officers in Santo Domingo. The following excerpts are from Granberg-Michaelson's "Monday Morning" reflections for January 12, 2009.

I've been privileged to witness a group of congregations joining together on the beautiful island that contains the Dominican Republic to form the Dominican Reformed Church. It's a story that began five years ago when RCA pastors Andres Serrano and Brigido Cabrera, together with Ken Bradsell and other RCA staff, met with a group of pastors in the Dominican Republic who shared their enthusiasm for the Reformed faith. Andres and Brigido were both born in the Dominican Republic and have long had a vision and passion for the witness of faith in the Reformed tradition in their native land of ten million people. From his base in southern California, Andres established a Christian radio station, then built a transmitter in the Dominican Republic through which his broadcasts reach 80 percent of the island. The radio station's preaching, teaching, and call-in programs include the sharing of the Heidelberg Catechism.

What I found fascinating was the genuine thirst and interest among pastors here for Reformed theology, polity, and organizational structure. It's hard to recall when I've seen more interest and heard more probing questions about how the Reformed Church in America is structured and governed than I saw in the Dominican Republic. Things that we take for granted, such as assemblies (consistory, classis, synod) that provide for the orderly governance of churches that are linked together in covenantal commitments, are explored here like a welcome breath of fresh ecclesiological air.

Further, a theology that begins with the primacy of grace—stressing that we can't earn our salvation—and that values serious theological foundations is embraced with enthusiasm and gratitude. That's why Andres' teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism on the radio draws many interested listeners.

At least thirty-five Dominican pastors are interested in partnering with the Reformed Church in America. They've been sharing this journey with the RCA for the past five years, and the RCA has committed to form a genuine partnership with them. In the afternoon and evening on Sunday, January 11, Ken Bradsell, Luis Perez, Jon Norton, Andres Serrano, Brigido Cabrera, and I met with the executive committee of the IRD to work out a partnership agreement between the RCA and the IRD. This is a new form of missional partnership for the RCA, one that will draw us closer together.

As we sat outside in a circle, discussing our partnership agreement, I said that this would be compared to other times in RCA history, such as when David Abeel first went to China, when Ida Scudder first went to India, and when the first RCA missionaries went to Bahrain and Oman. The difference is that, in this case, we are coming alongside a church that already is emerging and deeply desires to learn and be mutually

enriched through our own journey. It's a promising new chapter as we discover together what it means to be missional and Reformed in the Dominican Republic.

### **3. Equipping RCA Churches for Mission**

#### **The Evangelical Church of the Republic of Niger**

Bruce and Laurie Hawley are RCA missionaries working with RCA volunteers in long term mission projects both in the United States and internationally. The following excerpts are taken from reports written by Laurie Hawley from Niger where the RCA mission partner is the Evangelical Church of the Republic of Niger (EERN). RCA missionaries in Niger include Tom and Aïchatou Johnson, and Jeremy and Susan Beebout.

Our project is to build a guesthouse for the EERN. Our dorm will return to office space once this guesthouse is in place. No other church has a guesthouse and they think it will be well used. Permits have taken time to secure so the foundation was not in place when we arrived. We will get to see it from below the ground and going up. The first week we made a concrete pad about 12 by 15 feet that the cement blocks are being made on. A local crew of three are out there now mixing sand, cement, and water and making solid blocks for the foundation. The architect is here laying out string to mark the foundation wall area and I believe we will get to start digging this afternoon.

Outside our compound on a wide dusty dirt street pass big trucks loaded with one-hundred-pound sacks of grain, rice, millet, etc. from a port in Nigeria and coming to a very large storehouse just up the street. Also on the street are donkeys pulling heavy carts, camels loaded with huge straw mats (used in some instances as sides for buildings), goats by the dozens, guinea fowl, chickens, kids, women carrying anything and everything on their heads and in colorful garb, and dusty cars as well as motorbikes. But the people we see begging on the street who are maimed, crippled, or hungry are the ones that tear at our hearts. I was so struck by a woman walking across the street on her hands and knees. On her hands were flip-flops, and her feet dragged behind her. Also by a woman who came up to the car window carrying her little girl without one arm. Blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the poor, blessed are the meek. I am without words. Prayer helps.

There is so much to tell from just our first week here but I shall end with just one story we heard the Wednesday when we had a groundbreaking, stone laying ceremony for the guesthouse with the heads of the EERN and our team and church pastors and leaders in attendance. A pastor told the story about the vice president of EERN. Years ago when he was the coordinator for development for the church nationwide, he was responsible for getting wells dug in villages. Many of those villages are totally Christian today because of that one blessing, that one good deed done for the people. What a witness Christians are here. The EERN is committed to serving the people of Niger with health care, education about growing things, teaching good agriculture practices, and training youth for a job...

...Chako is the director of development for EERN. His father died last week and he has been in Maradi for the funeral. His father was a beloved pastor and founding past president of EERN. Chako came for lunch today and while talking with us afterwards his son came in and he introduced him to all of us. He said Sandee was from New York, Sue and Kay from New Jersey, Wanda and Karen from Iowa, Loren from California, Elmer from New York, and Jimi from Grand Rapids, Michigan. He continued to tell him that all these people came because they belong to the family of Christ. The color of our skin, the language we speak, the range in our ages, from 26 to 76, the places we came from all did not matter because we are from the same family. He said it was his son's grandfather, the man who had just passed away, who was the first Christian in the family and taught Chako to love the Lord. Chako told his son that we had all come here to work with people from the church because God had first loved us.

### **4. Embracing Compassion and Justice**

#### **Resource Centre for Civil Leadership in Sudan**

RCA missionaries Deb and Del Braaksma work with the Resource Centre for Civil Leadership (RECONCILE) program in Yei, Sudan. The following excerpts are from the Braaksmas' 2008 report to supporting congregations.

The primary goal of RECONCILE is to build peace in Sudan. The country has experienced only twelve years of peace since independence in 1956 and thus a “culture of war” has developed. The New Sudan Council of Churches created RECONCILE to provide Christian-based training in trauma healing, reconciliation, conflict transformation, and civic education through workshops held in areas experiencing inter-ethnic conflicts, as well as longer term courses held at the RECONCILE training center where we are based in Yei, Sudan.

In 2008 Del oversaw the completion of five staff houses, enabling us to move out of tents. Hardly an evening goes by that we don’t sit on our couch and look around our 420-square-foot home and say, ‘Isn’t this wonderful!’ It’s been a joy for Del to see our Sudanese colleagues build their capacity whether it’s in providing training or learning a computer program. Del was in charge of organizing and teaching a three-week Key Mobilizer Training, equipping volunteers to minister to communities experiencing severe inter-ethnic conflicts. We were inspired by their commitment and enthusiasm to heal the wounds of war and teach peace and forgiveness.

Debbie co-led ten workshops on trauma healing and reconciliation in Liberia, remote areas of Sudan, Northern Uganda, and at the Yei Training Centre. It was a joy to hear and see:

- A chief/evangelist who came to a workshop ready to “finish” another tribe commit himself to making peace.
- Children in Liberia begin to heal the wounds of their hearts by writing laments.
- Women in Magwi organize to spread the word through their churches about how to stop rape.
- One of the Key Mobilizers tell how he personally intervened to stop inter-ethnic fighting.

Almost nothing comes easily in Sudan—the infrastructure is so broken from the war that organizing things often becomes a logistical nightmare. But it makes us as RECONCILE staff really surround our work in prayer and doubly thankful to God as we marvel at all of the good things RECONCILE is able to accomplish amidst the chaos.

Please pray for peace in Sudan, for the opening of the RECONCILE Peace Institute and for us as we develop new materials to minister to women and children who have been traumatized.

## Report of Words of Hope

Words of Hope was founded in 1945 by classes of the Reformed Church in America in order to “proclaim Christ as the world’s only Savior.” We are deeply grateful for the prayers and gifts of congregations, individuals, foundations, and businesses that make this ministry outreach possible. Please join in praising God for his mercies and provision in 2008, and in praying that he will likewise provide in 2009, as Words of Hope seeks to faithfully serve him as his witnesses “to the ends of the earth.”

### Broadcasting

**Albania:** During the days of government imposed atheism, Words of Hope programs reached many Albanians from international stations airing programs from outside the country. Now Christian FM stations have emerged inside Albania and air the daily Words of Hope Albanian program. “The Words of Hope ministry has been very effective,” reports pastor Albert Dosti, Words of Hope Albanian speaker. “We have heard many testimonies about how the programs touch the hearts of Albanian listeners. There are many people, believers and unbelievers, who are encouraged and blessed by the Words of Hope programs.”

**Arab World:** Arabic outreach has been a top Words of Hope priority for more than three decades. April 2008 marked an important milestone as these Arabic broadcasts to the Middle East and North Africa expanded from fifteen to thirty minutes every night. Production teams and volunteers in Cairo (Egypt), Beirut (Lebanon), Khartoum (Sudan), and Amman (Jordan) have designed a creative, fast-paced mix of program segments to attract and hold listeners’ interest. Thousands of listeners are responding via email and SMS text messages.

**India:** In 2008 Christians, who officially comprise less than 3 percent of India's 1.1 billion people, faced serious persecution in regions where Hindu nationalists are strong. Indian observers note that the persecution began and has been most intense among tribal peoples and outcaste "Dalits" who have been committing their lives to Christ in recent years. As Christians now face increased opposition and threats, the broadcasts help many believers deepen their understanding and conviction to stand firm in their faith. Words of Hope broadcasts gospel programs to the Indian subcontinent in the languages of Bhojpuri, Dogri, Dzongkha, Garhwali, Hindi, Kashmiri, and Tibetan. A highlight this past year was a September 2008 trip to India by representatives from Words of Hope and Back to God Ministries International, the international media ministry of the Christian Reformed Church, in preparation for joint ministry there. India will be the fourth Words of Hope-Back to God partnership project, along with Arabic, International English, and Spanish.

**Iran:** It is an unspeakable privilege to be involved in building the church in Iran, one of the most difficult places for Christians today. Words of Hope, together with its partners in Iranian ministry, Middle East Reformed Fellowship and Trans World Radio-Canada, does that through nightly radio broadcasts, Bible teaching/training conferences, supporting Christian workers inside the country, and through literature production and Bible distribution. Iran continues to be a place of suffering for Christians, but the number of believers and house churches is growing.

**Niger:** Words of Hope's strategic partnership with the Evangelical Church of the Republic of Niger (EERN) began in 2005. As Hausa and French broadcasts continue to expand, the network now includes twenty-five local and regional radio stations in Niger's principal population centers along its southern border with Nigeria. Listener response to the programs is growing, with reports of new radio converts who have joined EERN congregations. In 2008, Words of Hope's Media Research Institute conducted extensive audience research throughout southern Niger and held a week-long communications workshop attended by twenty EERN pastors and evangelists.

**Specialized English:** "Everybody is very happy about that [*Spotlight*] program because it is a simple English and it is not so complicated and everybody can understand," is the comment of a listener from Africa. In addition to a daily broadcast on more than sixty radio stations worldwide, *Spotlight* programs are also accessed through the Internet, especially in places such as China and Vietnam. Thanks to a major website redesign in late 2008, visitors are now better able to listen to or download programs and interact with producers. *Spotlight* programs are also being used as a resource by teachers and students who are learning English.

**Sudan:** Torn apart for fifty years by civil war, South Sudan now exists with a very fragile current peace. Nonetheless, there has been a great advance of the gospel. Approximately 2.8 million people now belong to the evangelical/reformed communities in South Sudan alone. Radio broadcasts in the Dinka and Nuer languages are a strategic means to teach God's Word to a largely illiterate and widespread population. According to extensive 2007 audience research conducted by the Words of Hope-sponsored Media Research Institute, these programs are the most listened-to broadcasts among southern Sudanese listeners.

**Turkey:** Turkey has 70 million people and an estimated three thousand evangelical Christians. In an effort to reach more Turks with the gospel, producer Haluk Bilgen now has a weekly television version of his Words of Hope radio program. Broadcast over TURK-7 satellite TV, these programs present Christian faith in a challenging and practical way. "God is blessing the program tremendously," shares Haluk. "Our prayer is that through this program the Holy Spirit will fill the hearts of those who watch with God's words of hope so that they will come to know that hope in their own lives and experiences."

**Uganda:** Throughout Uganda, church growth is most evident in areas where Words of Hope-Uganda broadcasts. A listener observed, "No matter the situation or purpose of gathering, people talk about Words of Hope-Uganda. Even in moments of bereavement, these programs become our consolation and comfort." Titus Baraka, a graduate of Western Theological Seminary, produces the Bari radio programs and leads the ministry. Fellow Western alumnus Stephen Kaziimba, who now serves as bishop of Mityana Diocese, broadcasts in the Luganda language.

### Additional Resources

**Media Research Institute:** Words of Hope’s research arm, the Media Research Institute (MRI), convened its first ever follow-up research seminar in December 2008. Representatives from twenty-five of the thirty-three dioceses in Uganda assembled for three days to hear the results of the research project and to discuss the implications for the work. The seminar involved the delegates in extensive interaction, concentrating on the role of radio in assisting the church to meet its evangelistic, discipleship, and pastoral goals, and examining the relationship between the churches and the populations they serve. MRI operates under the auspices of Words of Hope and Far East Broadcasting Company.

**Internet Outreach:** Words of Hope is currently redesigning its website to make it both more attractive and user-friendly. Ongoing features on the woh.org website include: the *Daily Reflections* devotional meditations’ *Read the Bible in a Year*, with daily installments from Genesis through Revelation; and the English-language radio program, available in three formats: web text, portable document format (PDF), and audio (mp3). Scripts from the weekly *Words of Hope* radio programs (from 1988 to the present) can also be searched by Scripture reference, topic, date, or keyword. Both the *Daily Reflections* and the weekly *Words of Hope* scripts are distributed to email subscribers, and can also be received monthly in audio CD format or downloaded via podcast. The website also includes a page where videos can be streamed or downloaded. Words of Hope encourages all RCA churches to link to woh.org.

**Materials Available:** Each quarter Words of Hope publishes 90,000 copies of the *Daily Reflections* meditations for worldwide distribution. Copies, including a large-print edition or a recorded version on CD, are available for individuals and churches. Words of Hope’s devotional meditations can be imported by any website interested in daily updated content. For more information contact: woh@woh.org. Words of Hope also produces a bimonthly *Update* newsletter. Two issues each year are sent in quantity to each RCA congregation for distribution in church bulletins or mailboxes. A collection of ministry reports, including updates on Bhutan, Sudan, Niger, Iran, and the Radio Project, is available on DVD for use by congregations and individuals.

### Grateful Thanks

Words of Hope is thankful for the involvement and support of so many friends of Jesus Christ drawn together around the great purpose of sharing the gospel with the world by radio. During 2008 RCA congregations contributed a total of \$689,262 to Words of Hope. Congregations are encouraged to support the ministry of Words of Hope by adopting one or more project shares designated for a particular ministry field and recognizing the leader of that field as one of their missionaries. In addition to faithful financial support, Words of Hope also asks that the ministry be prayed for regularly by RCA congregations. Each month prayer concerns from listeners and ministry partners are gathered and distributed to individuals and prayer groups.

“Preach the word...in season and out of season,” the apostle Paul exhorted his young charge Timothy (2 Tim. 4:2, NIV). The ongoing economic troubles definitely make this an “out of season” time for ministry. Things are not easy, and difficult decisions continue to confront us all. But none of that is a reason for quitting. God has called us to be faithful, confident, and courageous. When RCA classes and congregations launched Words of Hope in 1945, war still raged in the Pacific. Now, in our sixty-fifth year of sharing Jesus Christ with the world by radio, RCA classes and congregations continue to uphold and guide this worldwide missionary arm. To God be the glory!

## Report of the General Synod Council on the RCA's Multiracial Future Freed from Racism

*"After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands" (Revelation 7:9).*

The work of the office of Multiracial Initiatives and Social Justice is guided by three core principles.

- Scripturally Grounded
- Collaboratively Strong
- Racially and Ethnically Equitable

The above core principles support the vision statement of the RCA's office of Multiracial Initiatives, which is "everyone who wants to experience the RCA as home may experience the RCA as home." As we move into our multiracial future freed from racism, the RCA is called to affirm its commitment to unity, reconciliation, and justice.

### **Multicultural Growth at Our Savior's**

Minnesota is home to at least 3,000 Liberians—refugees from Liberia's 1990s civil war. "Liberians found a welcoming culture in Minnesota," says Lori Walber, pastor of Our Savior's Church (OSC) in Brooklyn Park, a suburb of Minneapolis where many of the refugees settled.

OSC is within walking distance of apartment buildings that housed many of the new immigrants. The number who came increased slowly, which Walber says worked well. "That was the timing our congregation needed to make the adjustment to being open to another culture," she says.

"At OSC they found a caring congregation that helped to meet some very real physical needs and welcomed them as brothers and sisters in Christ. Each new immigrant will say that OSC is their church home. Most of the Liberians have Christian backgrounds coming from Catholic, mainline, and Pentecostal churches. They have the option of attending many Liberian national churches, but they stay at OSC.

"We have received three great rewards. One is to see families reunited. One of our women was here for six years before her children were allowed to join her. What a celebration that was! Secondly, our congregation has a greater global awareness. We have studied and prayed for lands around the world. Thirdly, we have been encouraged in our Christian walk by people with great stories of persecution, faith, and prayer.

"We have seen that as we have become more welcoming, God has brought us into contact with Africans from Liberia, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Kenya, and Sudan. Not all stay, but all are welcome."

### **The Multiracial Congregation Team**

The mission of the Multiracial Congregation Team (MRCT) is to assist the RCA to engage its multiracial future. The team is involved with a variety of denominational initiatives. Members of the MRCT lead pastoral affinity networks geared for pastors who lead or are interested in leading multiracial congregations. MRCT members have taken foundational coach training; they have also completed network facilitator training. The MRCT supports training programs such as Sankofa and Joining the Journey that advance the RCA's multiracial future freed from racism. MRCT members are represented in the Multiracial Strategy Coalition. The team also cosponsors conferences that focus on the RCA's multiracial future freed from racism.

### **Multiracial Strategy Coalition**

In February 2009, participants of the new Multiracial Strategy Coalition gathered for the first time. The group is intergenerational, with strong representation from both genders and from people of color. Participants represented a number of constituent groups: racial/ethnic councils, congregations, regional synods, RCA colleges and seminaries and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency, the Multiracial Congregation Team, and

General Synod Council members and staff. The Multiracial Strategy Coalition provides strategic discussion, reflection, and recommendations on RCA multiracial goals pertaining to growth, communication, and leadership development in ways that integrate with Our Call.

### **Multiracial Training Programs**

The RCA supports several training programs that help participants understand and combat racism, and engage with people of different cultural backgrounds.

#### Sankofa Bus Trips

*Sankofa* is a West African word that means “looking backward to move forward.” It implies that as we engage the RCA’s multiracial future freed from racism, we must look backward to see the contexts and experiences of our multiracial past punctuated with racism.

Sankofa is a cross-racial/ethnic three-day bus trip that helps Christians move toward righteous responses to racism. This intensive, interactive, cultural awareness training involves exploring historic sites and viewing videos and provides times for processing the experiences of African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans. In addition to consciousness-raising, the trip invites participants to grow to understand and value each other. Participants move toward healing the wounds and racial divides caused by hundreds of years of racial injustice in the United States. Participants become more equipped to fruitfully address racial righteousness in our church, our nations, and our world. The Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC) has hosted twenty-five RCA members, including members of the staff of the General Synod Council offices, commission members, pastors, and other leaders, on three Sankofa trips. With the ECC’s assistance, the RCA is building its own capacity to sponsor Sankofa trips. The first RCA trip occurred in April 2009. We plan to provide several trips each year, customizing them for each region of the United States and Canada.

#### The Breakfast Club

The Breakfast Club is a twelve-month cross-racial relationship-building ministry. Cross-racial pairs meet monthly over a meal to discuss race, faith, and personal life journeys. Discussions are guided by sets of questions developed by this ministry’s originators, the Chicago Urban Reconciliation Enterprise (CURE). To date, the RCA has one club at Fort Washington Collegiate Church in New York City and another at Living Springs Community Church in Illinois. We are exploring the establishment of two more clubs at churches in other locations. We hope to begin five other clubs over the coming year.

#### Understanding Racism: Joining the Journey

This one-day workshop focuses on understanding racism from an institutional perspective. Participants learn how history was racialized, how racism affects socialization, how socialization racialized our personal and Christian identities, and how racialized Christians benefit from and promote (albeit unknowingly) racialized institutions and systems, including churches. Participants also learn basics about dismantling race-based institutions. Joining the Journey is offered by the training organization Congregations Organizing for Racial Reconciliation (CORR). To date, 120 RCA people have participated in three sessions. Five more sessions are being explored for 2009.

#### **Diverse Congregation Reaches Out in Manhattan**

“We like to think of ourselves as a mission center on Manhattan Island,” says Charlie Morris, senior pastor of Fort Washington Collegiate Church in Manhattan, New York. “We are shifting to become a place where people come to fill others with Christ’s blessing instead of focusing on filling themselves.”

Fort Washington emphasizes connecting with and serving the community—it was the first element of a five-year strategic plan adopted several years ago.

To start, the church embraces Manhattan’s diverse people groups. “We are probably one of the most diverse congregations in the RCA,” Morris says. “We are about 40 percent Caucasian, 30 percent Hispanic, 20 percent African and Caribbean, with the remaining 10 percent representing a variety of other ethnicities.

“We believe in the vision of Revelation 7,” Morris says. The Fort Washington staff is also multiracial.

The church offers a number of programs for discipleship and outreach. “We offer several mini-courses for adults,” says Troy Schremmer, director of education and church life. “We’ve talked about ethics, race and culture, and other issues suggested by our congregation. People have a deep hunger to learn and stay connected to God’s call.”

Additionally, the church hosts a film series called “The Face of the Other” that explores the Israeli/Palestinian rift. “We’ve hosted several community forums on issues such as the war in Iraq and relations with Iran,” Schremmer says. “We were interfacing our congregation with socially minded folks from the community and Jews from area synagogues.”

Part of the drive to serve the community is inspiring people to be servant leaders. “We want to see a real integration of faith and life so that living out the gospel is seamless,” says Schremmer.

## **GSC MULTIRACIAL FUTURE FREED FROM RACISM ENDS MONITORING REPORT**

The General Synod Council (GSC) adopted a new global ends policy in response to R-67 at General Synod 2008, which added “A Multiracial Future Freed from Racism” to Our Call and instructed GSC to develop goals, objectives, and strategies in this area. The ends policy changes also include a new sub-end.

### **Global Ends Policy**

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, grounded in Scripture, and in covenant with the general secretary and staff, the General Synod Council will carry out its responsibilities in order to ensure that the Reformed Church in America will be a faithful and fruitful denomination where: congregations are following Christ in mission, equipped and empowered to embrace unity, reconciliation, and justice, which requires all we have and all we are to the glory of God.

Sub-End 1: Congregations and assemblies of the Reformed Church in America will reflect God’s vision of the kingdom: embracing complete unity; reaching all people (every race, tribe, people, and language, every disability and special need, including those living on the margins) with the love and grace of Jesus Christ; actively engaging in love, acceptance, forgiveness and justice. (John 17:23; Revelation 7:9)

### **A Multiracial Future Freed from Racism—Ends Policy**

GSC also adopted a new ends policy to guide the denomination’s efforts around a multiracial future freed from racism:

The RCA will be a fellowship of congregations resisting the sin of racism and committing to a multiracial future engaging all of God’s people in mission and ministry.

### **2009 Monitoring Report**

Each spring the general secretary is required to report to GSC on progress on the various ends policies established by the GSC. The report for the RCA’s multiracial future follows.

### **General Secretary’s Interpretation**

To fulfill this ends policy, I have instructed GSC staff to collaborate with regional synods, classes, and congregations in ways specific to each region to make a difference in the experiences of congregations, assemblies, agencies, and RCA-related nonprofits so that:

- Capacities for equitable and just ministry in multiracial contexts are increased.
- Institutional racism is identified and eliminated.
- Multiracial congregations are developed and strengthened.
- Geographic communities around RCA congregations are transformed.

This ends policy is focused on a long-term time horizon—2013 and beyond. It is my responsibility as general secretary to ensure that measurable outcomes for 2013 are established and yearly benchmarks between the years 2009 and 2013 are developed and monitored. To that end I have established the following goals, outcomes, and strategies.

**Goal for Multiracial Training:** *To increase cultural sensitivity and anti-racism capacities for one thousand RCA leaders and members by 2013.*

**Outcomes**

- Eight hundred RCA leaders and members will recognize and own the place of racism in their own hearts, minds, and lives.
- Seven hundred RCA leaders and members will increase their ability to listen effectively and empathetically to others' stories of pain and frustration due to racism.
- Seven hundred RCA leaders and members will be better able to identify and work to eliminate instances of institutional racism.
- One thousand RCA leaders and members will understand what biblical peace is, how racism destroys it, and what to do to restore it.

**Strategies**

- To develop and implement the training programs of Sankofa, the Breakfast Club, and Understanding Racism: Joining the Journey.
- To incorporate the key principles of the Belhar Confession into training programs.
- To establish meaningful relationships with regional synod executives to customize training offerings in each region.
- To make anti-racism programs available to:
  - Pastors, elders, deacons, and RCA members
  - Church planters, seminarians, and MFCA participants
  - General Synod delegates, GSC members, and members of commissions
- To develop and promote a guide that assists congregations to explore biblical and theological bases of a multiracial future freed from racism.
- To develop multi-generational training groups to address generational differences in experiences and perspectives about racism and a multiracial future.

**Data**

- Since June 2008, twenty-one RCA members have participated in Sankofa experiences sponsored by the Evangelical Covenant Church. The first RCA Sankofa experience took place on April 22, 2009, and included approximately forty people.
- Since June 2008, the RCA has begun two Breakfast Clubs, with at least forty participants.
- Since June 2008, the RCA has trained 126 people in Understanding Racism: Joining the Journey.

**New Church Works toward Racial Reconciliation**

The River, a multisite RCA church in Kalamazoo, Michigan, names racial reconciliation as one of its six stated values.

“A church can have thousands of things to value,” says lead pastor Rob Link. “Each church has to hone in, focus on a few. We focused on racial reconciliation because we believe it’s the vision of God himself. It’s what Jesus said in Matthew 28—go into all the nations. That means all people groups, all types of groups. John recorded in Revelation about every nation, tongue, and tribe gathering before God. We see the opposite of that in many places today—Hispanic churches, black churches, white churches. We would love to see some mutuality, a place where there is a shared fellowship.”

But, Link says, “In terms of actually being multiracial, we’re not even close to being where we want to be.

“We have four sites of The River, one of which could be called racially diverse. The River Downtown is several hundred folks with a very small percentage of minorities. The River on Campus has 50 or so members with a small percentage of minorities. The River East, with about 50 attendees, might be pushing 20 percent minority. The River on Lake Street is by far our most diverse community, with about 35 percent minority attendance.”

Though attendance isn’t yet representative of the multiracial body The River hopes to become, all four sites were purposely planted in multiracial environments. The River on Campus is located on the campus of Western Michigan University, which has a diverse student body, and the other three sites are located in or near downtown Kalamazoo.

“The way we are reaches different folks,” Link says. “We’re not a church that would necessarily appeal to upper-middle class folks who like church done in the same ways as it always has been. We have an appeal to a diverse crowd—not necessarily racially diverse, but certainly economically and other ways.”

**Goal for Multiracial Leadership: To facilitate the implementation of the Five-Fold Test in one hundred congregations by 2013.**

***Outcomes***

- One hundred congregations will become accustomed to assessing progress against an evaluation tool.
- One hundred congregations will recognize and own the race-based barriers to their progress toward a multiracial future freed from racism.
- Eighty congregations will develop skillful ministry teams to address race-based barriers to a multiracial future freed from racism.
- Eighty congregations will increase their reliance on God to help them eliminate race-based barriers.

***Strategies***

- To convene the Multiracial Strategy Coalition to discuss, reflect, and make recommendations on RCA multiracial goals pertaining to growth, communication, and leadership development in ways (such as the Five-Fold Test) that integrate with Our Call and guide the development of the RCA as a multiracial denomination.
- To pilot the Five-Fold Test in ten congregations.
- To conduct a series of two-day sessions to help congregations to establish customized activities that make the Five-Fold Test useful in their settings.
- To coach congregations that use the Five-Fold Test.
- To gather progress reports three times a year from each congregation that uses the Five-Fold Test.
- To develop multi-generational teams to address generational differences in experiences and perspectives about racism and a multiracial future.

***Data***

- Wes Granberg-Michaelson and Earl James cofacilitated the first annual Multiracial Strategy Coalition from February 27 to March 1, 2009. The coalition, intended to be an annual gathering for five consecutive years, discusses and makes recommendations regarding the RCA's multiracial future freed from racism. During this first meeting, coalition members developed key activities and targets for the denomination using the Five-Fold Test. Many of the outcomes and strategies in this ends monitoring report emerged from this coalition meeting.

**Goal for Multiracial Congregations: To stimulate the development of one hundred multiracial congregations and three hundred congregations of color by 2013.**

***Outcomes***

- Forty pastors will be equipped and qualified to lead pastoral networks whose members either lead or are interested in leading multiracial congregations.
- Three hundred pastors will participate in pastoral networks whose focus includes the development of multiracial congregations.
- Two hundred pastors will be equipped to transition white congregations into ones where no less than 20 percent of members are people of color.
- Two hundred new RCA congregations of color and multiracial congregations will be planted through church multiplication efforts.
- Between 2011 and 2013, one hundred pastors, elders, and deacons of color, including those who are thirty-five years of age or younger, will exhibit excellent leadership values and skills and high levels of knowledge about using the *Book of Church Order*.

***Strategies***

- To develop partnerships and coordinate with GSC staff, especially those leading efforts in multiplication, the racial/ethnic councils, and pastoral networks (revitalization).
- To establish meaningful relationships with regional synod executives to identify opportunities in each region.
- To identify and promote the use of a tool that guides the development of multiracial congregations.
- To support the work of the racial/ethnic councils and exchange information with them.
- To support the work of the Multiracial Congregation Team.
- To promote regional and area gatherings focused on developing multiracial congregations.
- To enroll eligible pastors in the Multiracial Training Initiative.

- To develop and locate adequate funds for a training academy that equips persons for leadership in the RCA.
- To develop multi-generational teams to address generational differences in experiences and perspectives about racism and a multiracial future.

***Goal for Multiracial Community Engagements:*** *To assist one hundred congregations in their efforts to engage in transformative, missional, multiracial relationships in their geographic communities by 2013.*

***Outcomes***

- Ninety congregations will increase their knowledge of their geographic community, including the people groups and dynamics involved.
- Ninety congregations will be able to articulate reasons for church-based community development.
- Seventy congregations will develop healthy relationships with leaders, churches, organizations, and other efforts within their communities.
- Fifty congregations will be revitalized as they deepen their transformative, missional, multiracial engagements in their communities.

***Strategies***

- To develop a relationship with the Christian Community Development Association and help congregations get involved.
- To utilize resources such as Communities First and Partners in Urban Transformation.
- To help congregations develop their own nonprofit corporations and establish meaningful ministry relationships with nonprofit corporations and other community development organizations.
- To develop and promote a guide that helps congregations explore biblical and theological bases of church-based community development.
- To develop multi-generational teams to address generational differences in experiences and perspectives about racism and a multiracial future.

**Congregation Embraces Diversity to Reach Out**

“We like to call our fellowship ‘Calvary on Eighth,’ because it grounds us in our community, on the main street of Holland,” says Blaine Newhouse, pastor of Calvary Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan. “Our neighborhood is diverse in terms of ethnicity, race, and economics.

“When I came 13 years ago,” he says, “this was a great church, but it was focused primarily on the already convinced. This community was changing. I see so many churches that ignore that and get older and smaller over time, or they move to the suburbs. I see so much more potential impact for the kingdom if the church can learn to embrace and welcome its community where it is.”

The neighborhood around Calvary had undergone a distinct population shift before Newhouse came. One factor contributing to the neighborhood’s shift was the decision of the Holland city council to allow a high concentration of multifamily units to be built near Calvary.

Calvary decided it should be reaching out to the neighborhood, which had a racial and economic makeup very different from the church’s membership. “Initially we had to wrestle with what kind of church we wanted to be, and what defines success from God’s perspective,” says Newhouse. “We decided that it’s about trying to share the good news with those who don’t know it. How are we going to connect to these people?”

Calvary now runs community programs such as a supervised summer recreation program for neighborhood kids called Blacktop Recreation. The church also collaborated with two other area churches to form a nonprofit organization called Heights of Hope, which seeks to meet economic, social, and spiritual needs in the Holland Heights neighborhood.

“I firmly believe that people aren’t going to care what we believe until they know that we care,” says Newhouse. “And they’re not going to know that we care until we go and meet them where they are.”