RCA WOMEN

A LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP
RCA Women: A Legacy of Leadership offers a sampling of the strong, faith-filled, trailblazing women in leadership throughout the history of the Reformed Church in America. We honor and celebrate all women’s stories, told and yet untold, across the United States and Canada and well beyond. These inspiring stories, with all their joys and challenges, are part of our past, present, and future legacy as God’s beloved daughters who have and will continue to make significant, transformative contributions in the church and in the world. Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story (Psalm 107:2b)!

To share your story or that of a woman you know, please contact Rev. Liz Testa, coordinator for Women’s Transformation and Leadership, at etesta@rca.org. You can also connect with us on Facebook (She Is Called) or online at www.rca.org/women.
**Rev. Bernita Babb** was the first African American woman to graduate from New Brunswick Theological Seminary in 1985 and then to become an RCA minister of Word and sacrament in 1988. She served as senior minister at Mott Haven Church in the Bronx in the 1990s and as an urban strategist for the Reformed Church in America. Rev. Babb is presently retired and substitute teaching in the Prince George’s County public school system in Maryland.

**Isabella Baumfree** (Sojourner Truth, 1797-1883) was born a slave and grew up speaking Dutch in the Hudson Valley of New York State. Her daughter belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church. When she escaped on her famous journey with her infant daughter, the Van Wagenen family took her in and paid $20 for her freedom. She renamed herself Sojourner Truth, and her belief in God steeled her fierce dedication to truth and dignity. When she fought for the freedom of her son, she became the first person of color to win a suit in a court of law. Known as a preacher of courage and tenacity and for her speech “Ain’t I a Woman?”, Sojourner broke barriers on every level and continues to inspire people of every faith today.

**Ana Bautista** is the first Hispanic woman to become a commissioned pastor in the RCA. Pastora Ana and her husband, José, copastor Iglesia Cristiana Emmanuel de Sacramento, California. The Bautistas came to the United States after ministering for many years in their native El Salvador. She is a great encourager of others and has created a vibrant network of Hispanic women leaders from churches throughout the Central California region who gather annually for their “Conferencia de Mujeres.” Ana’s daughter Leah Bau is continuing her mother’s leadership legacy and serves as the minister of music at Iglesia Cristiana Emmanuel.

**Rev. Dr. Carol M. Bechtel** became the first woman to be ordained to the office of General Synod professor in 1998. Ten years later, she was elected General Synod President. Dr. Bechtel received her Ph.D. from Yale University and is a professor of Old Testament at Western Theological Seminary. Carol has authored several books, including two devotionals, and has been a contributor to *Horizons Magazine* and the *Horizons* Bible study series. Carol is also a gifted Celtic harpist.
Rev. Kathy Jo Blaske is a trailblazer for RCA women in ministry. She graduated with her M.Div. from Western Theological Seminary in 1978 and was ordained in 1979 by the Classis of Holland. She has served the RCA as the minister of Christian education at Third Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan; the Regional Synod of Albany’s minister for leadership development; as an interim minister for several churches in New Jersey and New York; and on the RCA youth team and CERCA (Christian Educators RCA). Kathy Jo has also served on the RCA’s Commission on Nominations, as the RCA representative to the board of the National Council of Churches of Christ, USA (NCCC), and two terms as a classis president. She is currently a long-term care chaplain for the Christian Health Care Center in Wyckoff, New Jersey.

Linda Kay Boogard is a long-time elder and lay leader at Peace Reformed Church in Eagan, Minnesota. She has been active there in a variety of roles, such as women’s ministries officer, choir member, and mentor of the Stephen’s Ministry Care Team, and is currently a Sunday school class facilitator. Linda has served in the local and global mission field, taking trips to places like Dulce, New Mexico, and Kenya, as well as serving from 1973–1975 at the RCA’s Southern Normal School in Brewton, Alabama, where she was a volunteer preschool and kindergarten teacher.

Ella Kikuno Campbell is an ordained elder serving at the First Church in Albany, New York. Previously, Ella served the RCA for 27 years as the coordinator of the Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries. A lay leader and spiritual director, Ella believes “the church is not an authentic church until it is inclusive.”

Rev. Kathleen Edwards Chase is the senior pastor for the First Reformed Church in Pompton Plains, New Jersey, a congregation where she has served for 12 years. Previously, she was the pastor of Woodstock Reformed Church in New York for nearly nine years. She was the first female pastor at both congregations. Originally from Oklahoma, Kathleen has her M.Div. from Princeton Theological Seminary and received a fellowship award to do postgraduate work at the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands. Kathleen has a passion for helping the church find its greatest impact through community partnerships and missional engagement, shaping the ministries in the congregations she has served.
Mildred Cleghorn (1910–1997) was a Chiricahua Apache tribal leader and teacher devoted to cultural awareness and heritage appreciation. Her parents helped start the Apache Reformed Church in Apache, Oklahoma, and Mildred was the first woman to be elected as an elder there. Mildred was treasurer of the American Indian Council of the Reformed Church of America and also served as a delegate on the General Program Council. One of her favorite cultural projects was making dolls authentically clothed to represent the 40 diverse Native American tribes. This collection was exhibited in museums across the U.S., including the Smithsonian. Mildred was awarded an Ellis Island Medal of Honor in 1986 during the 100th anniversary celebration of the Statue of Liberty.

Sara M. Couch (1867–1946) from Schoharie, New York, was a foreign missionary called to Japan as a traveling evangelist and devoted girls’ seminary teacher. With her friend Tomegawa Jun, she organized Sunday school, prayer groups, and Bible studies in Nagasaki’s lower income neighborhoods. Their Japanese-language RCA newsletter *Ochibo* was read worldwide. Because of her love for the people and country of Japan, Sara refused to leave the country when World War II broke out. As a result, at 75 years old, she was arrested and confined to an internment camp. She was finally released at age 78 and carried on her mission in Japan until her death.

Rev. Frances “Fran” De Jong (1935–2017) was one of the first women ever ordained in the Reformed Church in America. She was ordained by the Classis of Queens. Fran graduated from Central College in 1957 and McCormick Theological Seminary with her master’s degree in Christian Education in 1960. She served as a director of Christian education in various ministry settings before becoming chaplain at Central College, where she worked from 1977–1997. She was beloved by students for her encouragement and spiritual support.

Sarah DePeyster (1724–1802) was born to a wealthy family in the Netherlands. She came to America as a child and grew devoted to the Dutch Reformed Church (the RCA’s name at the time). In 1804, Sara became the first person—man or woman—to leave a legacy for the benefit of the church.
Rev. Joyce Borgman de Velder was the first woman to enter the Master of Divinity program at Western Theological Seminary in 1972 and graduated in 1976. After serving as an associate in ministry, she was ordained in 1979 by the Classis of Albany. A few years later, she became the pastor at Old Saratoga Reformed Church in Schuylerville, New York, where she has served since 1982.

Sarah Doremus (1802–1877) is one of the most beloved and revered laywomen in Protestant history. As a philanthropist and missionary in the mid-nineteenth century, she started worship services in New York City prisons, opened a home for women being discharged from prison, founded a home and school for women living in poverty, organized societies to raise money for global mission work, and helped establish women’s and children’s hospitals. In 1875, Sarah founded the RCA Women’s Board of Foreign Missions (WBFM), through which RCA women impacted millions of lives around the world.

Rev. Jill Fenske is a child of God, follower of Jesus, mother, expert listener, poet, musician, reader, deep thinker, and lifelong learner. She has been joyfully walking with God’s people as a minister of Word and sacrament at Franklin Reformed Church in Nutley, New Jersey, for 27 years. She also currently chairs the board of the RCA’s Warwick Camp and Conference Center in Warwick, New Jersey.

Rev. Marisol Ferrer-Malloy became the first Latina ordained as a minister of Word and sacrament in the RCA in 2007. Although Marisol currently pastors a congregational church in New Jersey, she plays an active role in the RCA as the chairperson of the Multicultural Ministry Committee in the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics and belongs to the Delaware-Raritan Classis.

Rev. Joyce Stedge Fowler (1926–2010) was the first woman in the RCA to become a minister of Word and sacrament. In 1973 the Classis of Rockland-Westchester, just north of New York City, ordained her on the basis that she was a “person,” as outlined in the Book of Church Order (BCO). This action led to several years of heated General Synod discussion that ultimately resulted in the judiciary body of the General Synod of 1979 voting that the definition of “persons” included both men and women. Joyce went on to pastor RCA and Presbyterian churches and work as a chaplain, clinical pastoral educator, and therapist.
Mary Geegh (1987–1999) served as an RCA missionary in India for 38 years. She authored a book called *God Guides* based on her listening prayer experiences in India, which she chronicled in a journal. Book sales help support the Geegh Nursery School, a school in southern India that Mary founded in 1957. Mary’s legacy continues through her great-niece Linn Gann, who established and runs Mission Partners India, an organization dedicated to meeting the needs of children affected by poverty in southern India.

Anna Gonzales is both an ordained elder and deacon. She has been serving Park Hills Community Church in Los Angeles, California, and the RCA for over 50 years. Her denominational involvement began through the African American/Black Council and continued in her classis, her regional synod, and the General Synod, including service on the General Synod Council and the *Church Herald*’s editorial board. She has represented the denomination ecumenically on the governing board of the National Council of Churches (NCC). Anna continues her service to God in her local church in various capacities, including clerk of the consistory.

Carol Wenneis Hageman (1924–2011) married Howard Hageman—pastor and New Brunswick Theological Seminary president—in 1945. They served Newark’s North Reformed Church for 28 years, during which time Carol became active in the Civil Rights Movement in Newark. She attended the last day of Martin Luther King Jr.’s voting rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, as well as his funeral. She served the RCA on four different councils, was on the Women’s Board of Domestic Missions, and was a member of both the Newark Board of Education and the executive committee of United Way.

Dinah Van Bergh Frelinghuysen Hardenbergh (1725–1807) found herself in a sinking ship while sailing to America from Holland. She prayed for God’s deliverance, and soon a large swordfish became wedged in the hole in the ship’s prow, saving all aboard. The unshakeable Dinah raised nine children, assisted in her husband’s pastoral ministry, helped establish New Brunswick Theological Seminary, and counted George and Martha Washington as close friends. Her life inspired Dina’s Dwellings, a reconfiguration of First Reformed Church of New Brunswick’s sanctuary to offer affordable housing for female survivors of domestic abuse and their children.
Rev. Dr. L'Anni Hill is the daughter and granddaughter of RCA missionaries and was raised in Asia. Following college graduation, she taught English and Bible in Taiwan through an RCA-sponsored program. Called to ministry, L'Anni enrolled in New Brunswick Theological Seminary in 1974 and was among the first group of women to become RCA ministers. She and husband served churches in Vischer’s Ferry, New York, and San Juan, Puerto Rico, before she became the senior pastor at Pompton Reformed Church in New Jersey and most recently in the Netherlands.

Rev. Dr. Carolyn Holloway (1942–2007) was the lead pastor at DeWitt Reformed Church in New York City from 1995–2007. She was the first female and first African American woman to pastor DeWitt Reformed in its more than 100 years of history. Dr. Holloway received her bachelor’s degree at the College of New Rochelle, her M.Div. at New York Theological Seminary, and a doctorate in urban ministry at New Brunswick Theological Seminary. Dr. Holloway is a past president of the New York Classis of the Reformed Church in America, and in 1999 became the first African American woman to preach during the RCA’s General Synod. She served as a committee member of the RCA’s Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA) and was later nominated and installed as chairperson of the RCA African American/Black Council.

Rev. Dr. Renée House became the first female minister of the historic Old Dutch Church in Kingston, New York, in 2013. Before that, she worked in a variety of roles at the New Brunswick Theological Seminary, including associate professor, director of the Sage Library, and dean of the seminary. Renée holds the distinction of being the first woman to preach at an RCA General Synod. Her writings include “Women Raising Women: The Urgent Work of The Mission Gleaner, 1885-1914,” which appears in Patterns and Portraits: Women in the History of the Reformed Church in America, an important textbook for many RCA history courses.

Marian Hughes (1920–2005) was a member of First Reformed Church in Albany, New York. Once the only African American teacher in Albany’s public school system, she wrote the book Refusing Ignorance: The Struggle to Educate Black Children in Albany, New York. Marian and her husband became missionaries in Nigeria, and she helped build the first high school for girls in Abeokuta.
Rev. Anna Melissa Jackson is a native New Yorker and child of the RCA. She copastors Second Reformed Church of Hackensack with her husband, Dwayne Jackson. She is a past moderator of the board of trustees of New Brunswick Theological Seminary and a member of the graduating Class of 2000. Rev. Jackson currently serves on the RCA’s General Synod Council. She served at the Queens Reformed Church in Queens Village, New York, for over 15 years.

Dorothy Cox James (1921–1989) was a graduate of Western Michigan University who taught reading. In 1961, she and her husband, Rev. B. Moses James, joined the RCA family when he became pastor of North Community Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan. They were both committed to social justice and racial reconciliation, and Rev. James was elected the first chairperson of the African American/Black Council, established in 1969. Dorothy served as a Midwest regional convener for the African American/Black Council, as a member of the Board of Theological Education, on the Commission on Christian Unity, and on the RCA delegation to the North American and Caribbean Region of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

Rev. Stephanie Kaper-Dale is co-senior pastor of the Reformed Church of Highland Park in New Jersey. She is a graduate of Hope College, Princeton Theological Seminary, and Rutgers University Graduate School of Social Work. She and her husband, Seth, have served the Reformed Church of Highland Park—a community committed to justice and inclusivity—since 2001. They have nurtured the congregation’s gifts and passions to create nearly a dozen community-based nonprofits and related ministries.

Rev. Dr. Denise Kingdom Grier has blazed the trail for African American women called to ministry. She became the first African American woman to graduate from Western Theological Seminary with an M.Div. in 2005. In 2009, she became the first African American woman to lead an RCA church in West Michigan. She made history again in 2017, becoming the first African American woman to earn a doctorate in ministry from Western Theological Seminary. Currently, Rev. Dr. Grier serves as lead pastor of Maple Avenue Ministries in Holland, Michigan: a vibrant, multicultural, multiracial congregation and the first union church of the RCA and CRCNA.
Mary Lou Hemmes Koop (1924–2018) was a charter member of Haven Reformed Church in Hamilton, Michigan. She served faithfully for multiple terms as one of the first female elders and served Reformed Church Women’s Ministries (RCWM) at local and denominational levels. She was a great encourager of people and was fondly called “Grandma Koop” by hundreds of young people. Mary Lou was a graduate of Hope College. She and her husband, Harvey, received the Hope College Distinguished Alumni Award in 1979.

Joyce Kuyper (1917–2018) was an active member of the Second Reformed Church in Pella, Iowa, where she was elected both an elder and a deacon and served on many church committees. She was a beloved piano teacher and served as an organist and pianist for several churches. Joyce also played piano in a jazz band established by her husband, Hospers. She majored in music at Central College and graduated cum laude in 1939. A composer of some significance, Joyce’s composition “A Hymn to Central Youth” was chosen to be and remains the official hymn of Central College. In 1973, Joyce and Hospers Kuyper were named Alumni of the Year by Central College and honored for their many musical and other contributions to the college. In 2012, the Joyce and Hospers Kuyper Music Scholarship was established in their honor.

Rev. Abby Norton-Levering is the Regional Synod of Albany’s ministries coordinator, the first woman to serve in this position. She is a graduate of Vassar College and New Brunswick Theological Seminary. She has served as a chaplain in the Philadelphia area and in the Classis of Albany. Abby is passionate about congregational renewal, heartfelt worship, conflict mediation, and the creation of authentic community.

Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis is senior minister at Middle Collegiate Church in New York City, the first woman to serve in this position in the nearly 400-year history of the collegiate churches. She is a nationally recognized speaker, author, activist, and preacher. She earned her M.Div. from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1992 and received an M.Phil. and a Ph.D. in psychology and religion from Drew University. Jacqui is also the executive director of The Middle Project, an institute that prepares future ethical leaders for a more just society.
**Rev. Toni Macon** was a pastor in RCA churches in Michigan and New York for many years. She has served on the General Synod Council, was the director of the Seminarian Seminar from 1993 to 2006, and continues to lead workshops for classes and congregations in the areas of sexual abuse, harassment, boundaries, and power issues. She currently resides in Miami, Florida.

**Beth E. Marcus** (1920–2006) was director of Reformed Church Women’s Ministries from 1973 to 1986. She was an ordained elder in the RCA and served in a variety of denominational staff positions. Beth has the distinction of being our first female General Synod president. The Beth Marcus Scholarship Fund, which supports women pursuing theological education, reflects her dedication to women’s ministry to this day.

**Mary E. Kidder Miller** (1834–1910) served the RCA from 1869 to 1910 as the first single woman sent as a missionary to Japan. She had been a member of the Owasco Outlet Church in New York and taught Sunday school there. In 1870 Mary founded one of the first schools for women in Japan. Now called Ferris Women’s University, the school continues to educate women in Japan today. In 1873, Mary married E. Rothsray Miller, a Presbyterian missionary in Japan. After their wedding, he joined the RCA mission. She partnered with him in evangelism work across Japan while writing articles for children and families to elevate the role of women in Japan.

**Rev. Sayuri Kist-Okazaki** is an RCA missionary in Japan. She and her husband, Abraham, provide training so that Japanese churches can more effectively reach out to non-Christians, who make up 99 percent of Japan’s population. Sayuri also serves as an associate pastor of Kugahara Church in Tokyo. She is an executive member of the National Church Women’s Guild, empowering women who serve Japanese churches faithfully. Sayuri, who is from Japan, is a graduate of both Western Theological Seminary and New Brunswick Theological Seminary.
Carol L. Mutch was the 2000–2001 president of General Synod—the second woman and fifth elder elected to that position. She has also served as president of the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantic, president of the Classis of Passaic Valley, and moderator of the RCA Commission on Nominations. She was the first female vice president of consistory at Wyckoff Reformed Church in New Jersey. She is a retired commissioned pastor and currently serves on the RCA’s Commissioned Pastor Advisory Team and the RCA Commission on Nominations.

Rev. Dr. Young Na is the first Korean ordained minister in the Reformed Church in America. She has served both Korean- and English-speaking communities. Young is the senior pastor at Forest Park Reformed Church in Woodhaven, New York, and teaches seminary courses on biblical languages. She has served the RCA as a member of the Commission on Theology and the general secretary search team.

Barb Neevel used her organizing gifts to serve the RCA as the coordinator of Reformed Church Women’s Ministries and the chairperson of the RCA Women’s Conference Planning Committee. Her husband, Jim, was an RCA pastor for many years. While Jim was pastor of Pitcher Hill Community Church in North Syracuse, New York, Barb cofounded the area’s Meals on Wheels program. Now living in West Michigan, Barb continues to follow God’s call to hospitality and administration in retirement.

Rev. Amy Nyland is the first woman to be named executive minister for the Regional Synod of New York and is the first female to serve in an executive role for any regional synod. A trailblazer in the Midwest prior to coming to New York, Amy was also the first woman called to serve as an associate pastor in the Classis of Wisconsin, among other milestones.
Rev. Phyllis Palsma is a chaplain at the Christian Health Care Center in Wyckoff, New Jersey. She graduated from Western Theological Seminary in 1978 and in 1979 was ordained by the Classis Pella—the first woman to be ordained by a classis west of the Mississippi River. She served congregations in Michigan, New York, and New Jersey and was on the leadership staff of the Regional Synod of Albany. Phyllis served on the General Program Council, the General Synod Council, and numerous RCA task forces and boards. She authored educational resources for Reformed Church Women’s Ministries and other RCA groups, and, for ten years, was a regular columnist for the *Church Herald*.

Rev. Dr. Pamela Pater-Ennis is a pastoral therapist and the executive director of the Hudson River Care and Counseling Center in New Jersey. As an ordained RCA minister and licensed clinical social worker, she has been walking alongside women healing from sexual trauma and abuse for more than 30 years. Pamela holds an MSW from Rutgers University, an M.Div. from New Brunswick Theological Seminary, and a Ph.D. in social work from the University at Albany, the State University of New York.

Rev. Dr. Florence Pert (1930–2008) was the first woman to preach at Marble Collegiate Church’s Sunday service in 1978 and the first woman ordained in the collegiate church in 1987. Florence was a trailblazer for the role of lay ministries, hospitality, and the gifts of others in the church. She championed the power of prayer and encouraged spiritual renewal throughout the RCA.

Ruth Stafford Peale (1906–2008) had unfailing energy for God’s work in the world. When her husband, Norman, threw out his only draft of *The Power of Positive Thinking*, she rescued it and brought it to a publisher. The rest is history. Together, the Peales brought the RCA to the nation’s attention. In 1955, Ruth became the first female president of the RCA Board of Domestic Missions.

Margaret Hardenbroeck Philipse (1637–1690) supplied the capital that helped her husband, Frederick, buy the land for and construct The Old Dutch Church of Sleepy Hollow, the second oldest standing church in New York. The church was made famous by Washington Irving in “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.”
Ellen Ratmeyer has served the RCA since 1988 in many different roles. In 2004, she became coordinator of consistory training and ministry services for the RCA, providing leadership training and support. Now retired and a spiritual director, Ellen recently created a labyrinth with her husband, Harlan Ratmeyer, at the First Reformed Church of Bethlehem in Selkirk, New York. She continues to help church leaders develop new skills and develop innovative ministry ideas.

Claudette Reid has been an elder at Brookdale Reformed Church in Bloomfield, New Jersey, for 20 years. As a trailblazing Caribbean American, she has helped her church and regional synod embrace racial and ethnic diversity. At Brookdale, she has served as liturgy coordinator and facilitator of training and development, and she started an annual community Caribbean Night. As chair for the Crossroads Conference for Women since 2010, she has brought to life the committee's vision to welcome racially and ethnically diverse—as well as younger—women through innovative workshops and conversation space. At the denominational level, Claudette was the first Caribbean American woman to serve in an executive RCA position, serving as coordinator for women's ministries from 2010 to 2013 and facilitator for Global Mission from 2014 to 2016.

Gladys Martinez Rivera taught children in the South Bronx for 24 years and cowrote a book on embracing diversity. She was the first Hispanic woman to be a trustee on the Hempstead Board of Education, worked with the Hispanic Council's Reformed Church Women's Ministries group, and was declared a Nassau County Trailblazer in 2010. For many years, Gladys was active in ministry alongside her husband, Carlos, an RCA pastor. Now retired, they are part of a legacy of Puerto Rican pastors in the RCA.

Arvella De Haan Schuller (1929–2014) was known as the “first lady” of the Crystal Cathedral in California. Alongside her husband, who founded and pastored the church, she played a key role at the Crystal Cathedral for many years. Arvella helped to create and run the church’s “Hour of Power” television ministry, which reached millions of viewers across the globe at its peak. Arvella is credited with making the “Hour of Power” the first syndicated television show to have closed captioning, an accomplishment for which she was honored by the Carter Administration.
Lorena Serrano met the Lord at 19 years old and has been dedicated to ministry ever since. She and her husband started Happy Day, a children’s ministry through which 10,000 Caribbean and Latin American under-resourced children and families have been blessed. She is dedicated to missions, to building churches, and to the ministry of women. She currently pastors with her husband, Andrés, in Corona, California, at Iglesia La Senda. Lorena is also the executive director of Radio Impacto radio chains in California, Texas, and the Dominican Republic.

Louise Shumacher (1948–2016) was the director of disability services at Hope College and a past president of the Michigan Commission on Handicapper Higher Education. She received the 2012 Ability Award for her work mentoring over 500 students with disabilities. Born legally blind, Louise advocated statewide, promoting personal development, education, and accessibility. Louise served as an elder at Trinity Reformed Church in Holland and was a longtime member of Calvary Reformed Church in Holland. She also chaired the RCA’s Task Force on Disabilities from 2004–2008.

Rev. Dr. Patricia Singletary is the senior pastor of Elmendorf Reformed Church in Harlem, New York, and the first female pastor in its 350-year history. She was born in Harlem and earned her M.Div. and doctorate from New Brunswick Theological Seminary. Her dissertation inspired the formation of the Harlem African Burial Ground Task Force, which successfully advocated for the church’s burial ground for Harlem’s earliest African residents to be preserved and honored with a memorial and cultural museum. Under Dr. Singletary’s leadership, Elmendorf Reformed has experienced revitalization and become a more relevant part of its community. The church now draws worshipers from around the world.

Rev. Marijke Strong is the first female executive secretary for the Regional Synod of Canada. She has served as a camp director, intentional community planter, preacher, teacher, workshop leader, coach, writer, spiritual director, and pastoral care minister. She is passionate about spiritual formation, building community, creation care, expressing faith through art, and cultivating church renewal. Marijke has an M.Div from McMaster Divinity College in Toronto. She recently served at Fellowship Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan, and has been part of many denominational task forces and teams.
Morrell “Morrie” Swart (1921–2013) and her husband served as RCA missionaries in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Sudan for 40 years. Morrie continued her ministry when she returned to the United States by holding Bible studies in her home for 23 years. Morrie also authored *The Call of Africa*, a book about the RCA’s mission in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Harriet Scudder (1794-1849) was the RCA’s first female foreign missionary. She left New York City for India with her husband, John, in 1819. John was the first American medical missionary in India. Together Harriet and John began a legacy of mission in India that would carry on through their descendants for generations. Renowned medical missionary Ida Scudder was Harriet’s great-granddaughter.

Ida Scudder (1870–1960) was a third-generation medical missionary to India. She did not plan to follow in her parents’ footsteps as a medical missionary in India. But when she heard about three Indian woman who died in childbirth because male doctors weren’t allowed to touch them, she changed her mind. Ida graduated from Cornell’s medical school in the first graduating class open to women and returned to India as a medical missionary. In 1918, she established a college to train Indian women as doctors so that they could treat each other. She later worked with other missionaries to build a hospital that, during her lifetime, became one of the largest in Asia.

Rev. Cora Taitt currently serves as the senior pastor of Highbridge Community Church in the Bronx, New York. She was born and raised in Selma, Alabama, where as a young teen she participated in the Civil Rights Movement and the final march from Selma to Montgomery in 1965. She continues to serve as a community activist and advocate for social justice today, committed to improving the quality of life for Bronx residents. Rev. Taitt is a member of the General Synod Council, the Western Theological Seminary board of trustees, and the Kingdom Enterprise Zone team, which supports church planting in the New York area.
Rev. Lisa Ann Hansen-Tice was the first RCA woman to enter Air Force chaplaincy and obtain the rank of colonel. Lisa has held a variety of positions in the Air Force and has served as senior pastor of a large ecumenical organization, as a hospital chaplain, and as an instructor at Air University. She has provided religious support to military members on missions to the South Pole, Rwanda, Mozambique, Oman, and Kuwait. She currently influences and sustains the ethical and spiritual resilience of airmen worldwide by providing financial and human resources oversight to over 2,000 chaplains and chaplain assistants.

Rev. Dr. Terry Troia has served at Project Hospitality, a community-based nonprofit agency, since 1985, first as executive director and currently as president and CEO. She is also the pastor of the Reformed Church of Huguenot Park in Staten Island, New York. Terry serves on countless city and county boards. Since Hurricane Sandy hit the shores of Staten Island in October of 2012, Terry has been at the forefront of the relief efforts and is currently the president of the Staten Island Community and Interfaith Long Term Recovery Organization.

Rev. Dr. Lisa Vander Wal pastors Lisha’s Kill Reformed Church, New York. In 2011, she served as the fourth female General Synod President. She was the planning committee chair for the 26th General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in 2017 in Leipzig, Germany, and also serves on the Evangelical Lutheran (ELCA) Church Council and on the WCRC executive committee. Lisa has an M.Div. from Calvin Theological Seminary and a D.Min. from New Brunswick Theological Seminary.

Rev. Suzanne Vogel became a commissioned pastor at Meredith Drive Reformed Church in Des Moines, Iowa, in 2014 and later received her M.Div. from University of Dubuque Theological Seminary. She was ordained in 2015 and subsequently called as the first female to serve as lead pastor of Meredith Drive’s multi-campus congregation. She became the clerk of Classis of Central Iowa in 2010 and co-led a two-year restructuring process.
Arlene Walters Waldorf was ordained as an elder in the PC(USA) when the RCA was just beginning to open the office to women. She was the executive director of The Warwick Center—the first female to hold that position at an RCA camp or conference center—and she later became executive director of Reformed Church Women’s Ministries. In that role, she advocated for women, planned conferences, and wrote and edited resources. In 2004, she received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Association of Presbyterian Church Educators (APCE).

Rev. Arlene Wilhelm is a retired RCA minister of Word and sacrament. Ordained in 1985, she has served Reformed churches in Massapequa, Port Ewen, and New Paltz, New York, and at the United Methodist Church of Hyde Park in New York. Arlene is a certified spiritual director, teaches spiritual practices, and has served as president of the Classis of Mid-Hudson twice.

Rev. Clara Moore Woodson received the 2011 Christian Educators RCA Lifetime Achievement Award. She was the second African American woman to be ordained in the RCA in 1992. “Mother Clara” became the minister for education of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church of Flatbush, New York, and taught in the New York City public school system and in church school. She was a tireless minister for the Classes of Brooklyn, New York, and Rockland-Westchester until her retirement at age 84. She continues to be a great source of encouragement and inspiration to generations of RCA members.

Gerri Yoshida has been attending the Japanese American United Church in New York City for 31 years. She serves as the chairperson of the board of directors for the church. Gerri is the administrative assistant for the pastoral formation and transitions committee of the Classis of New York. She is also the Japanese representative to the executive committee of the Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries and recently finished five years of service on the Commission on Race and Ethnicity.
Thank you to the generous sources whose input helped create this booklet, among them Patrice Donnell, Russ Gasero, Joyce Goodfriend, Renée House, Mary Kansfield, Dirk Mouw, Tom Smith, and Claudette Reid.

For further reading: By Grace Alone by Donald Bruggink and Kim N. Baker, Hands, Hearts and Voices by Una Ratmeyer, Letters to Hazel by Mary Kansfield, and Patterns and Portraits by Renée House and John W. Coakley.