

Report of the Commission on Christian Unity

The General Synod is responsible for the ecumenical relations of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) (*Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Sec. 5 [2019 edition, pp. 67–68]). In response to the full sweep of Scripture toward the unity of believers, and to fulfill its constitutional responsibility, General Synod has constituted the Commission on Christian Unity to oversee ecumenical commitments, to present an ecumenical agenda to the church, and to carry out ecumenical directives given by the General Synod. Since its creation in 1974 (*MGS 1974*, R-6, pp. 201–202) and its adoption by General Synod in 1975 (*MGS 1975*, R-4, pp. 101–102), this commission has served General Synod by coordinating a range of ecumenical involvements reaching all levels of mission in the RCA as defined by the *Book of Church Order* in this way (Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Sec. 3b [2019 edition, p. 112]):

1. The commission shall initiate and supervise action with respect to the Reformed Church in America's membership in or affiliation with ecumenical bodies.
2. It shall engage in interchurch conversations and appoint ecumenical delegates to other church bodies.
3. It shall inform the church of current ecumenical developments and advise the church concerning its ecumenical participation and relationships.

The commission also seeks to educate the RCA on ecumenical matters and advocates for actions and positions consistent with RCA confessions and ecumenical practices as outlined in "An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America," adopted by General Synod in 1996 (*MGS 1996*, R-1, p. 197). General Synod may also refer ecumenical matters to the commission for study and implementation.

RCA Ecumenical Involvement: An Overview

The RCA holds a historical commitment to active involvement in ecumenical conversation and cooperation with churches throughout North America and around the world. It is both a charter member and active supporter of historic ecumenical bodies like the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches and a driving force behind bold and needed newer ecumenical initiatives like the Global Christian Forum and Christian Churches Together. In this work, the RCA is variously represented by staff and by ministers, elders, and members; elected or appointed, paid or volunteer; who have committed both their gifts and time to promote a greater witness to the unity Christians have in Christ as they share in the witness and grace of the gospel of Jesus Christ with believers from around the corner or around the world. Periodically through the year, and especially following participation in ecumenical events or meetings, these appointees provide brief reports to the Office of the General Secretary and to the Commission on Christian Unity.

This ecumenical work the commission does on behalf of the RCA is anchored in and shaped by the direction of the whole of the RCA. In this complex and changing time for the church, in which so many, locally and globally, are trying to figure out how best to witness to the gospel of Christ, and in which we in the RCA are seeking to invest our whole selves into the work of Transformed & Transforming, we believe deeply in our clearly stated commitment of "working with all the partners that God provides," as the RCA has spoken to the world in its framing of Transformed & Transforming. The commission is committed to advancing the work and ministry of the RCA through this commitment of partnership; moreover, the commission believes the witness and influence of the RCA can be similarly transforming globally at this point in history.

This commission assumes the task of synthesizing this material into its own comprehensive report, which it presents each year to General Synod. The first portion of the report of the commission provides an overview and summary of the RCA's formal ecumenical work worldwide through conciliar groups and its impact on the ministry and witness not only of these groups but on the work and witness of the RCA. In the second part of this report, the commission presents reasons for celebration, lament, and profession at this moment in the church's history, as the church continues to struggle with its response to Jesus's prayer "that they may all be one" (John 17:21).

World Council of Churches

The largest and oldest organized expression of the modern worldwide ecumenical movement, the World Council of Churches (WCC) "is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior according to the scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is a community of churches on the way to visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and in common life in Christ."

The WCC gathers its community from 345 churches in 110 countries representing over 500 million Christians worldwide. Member churches (or denominations) consist primarily of those from the historic Protestant churches and the Orthodox Church, including most of the world's Orthodox churches, scores of Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, and Reformed churches, as well as many United and Independent churches. While the bulk of the WCC's founding churches were European and North American, today most member churches are in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, the Middle East, and the Pacific. Major parts of world Christianity, including churches from Evangelical and Pentecostal traditions, however, have little or no relationship to the WCC. The Roman Catholic Church is not a member of the WCC, but participates in various theological dialogues and cooperates in some other ways.

The WCC's highest legislative body, its assembly, meets approximately every seven years, with its 11th assembly scheduled to take place in September 2021 in Karlsruhe, Germany, under the theme "Christ's Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity." The Central Committee is the continuing body that implements WCC policies enacted at the assemblies, reviews and approves programs, establishes the budget, and secures financial support, and generally oversees the work of the WCC between assemblies. Rev. Eddy Alemán serves on the Central Committee, continuing the unbroken line of general secretaries of the RCA serving the WCC in this capacity.

The work of the WCC, at times, is to provide a Christian witness in ways that perhaps no other group in the world can do. One way in which the WCC does this is through "Thursdays in Black." Thursdays in Black is a council-wide campaign that takes a stand against gender-based violence, to ensure that women and men, boys and girls, are safe from rape and violence in homes, schools, work, streets—in all places in our societies. The Thursdays in Black movement grew out of the WCC's Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988–1998), in which stories of rape as a weapon of war, gender injustice, abuse, violence, and many tragedies that grew outward from such violence became all the more visible. But what also became visible was women's resilience, agency, and personal efforts to resist such violations. The campaign is simple but profound: Wear black on Thursdays. Declare on social media (#ThursdaysinBlack) that you are part of the global movement resisting attitudes and practices that permit rape and violence. Show your respect for women who are resilient in the face of injustice and violence. Encourage others to join you.

For more information on the work and mission of the WCC, go to www.oikoumene.org.

World Communion of Reformed Churches

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) merged to form the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in June 2010. The RCA was a charter member of the former WARC and enthusiastically worked to support the coming together of these two ecumenical bodies into one. This renewed fellowship of Reformed, Presbyterian, Congregational, Waldensian, United, and Uniting churches is a network of 230 Protestant churches in 108 countries with a combined estimated membership of 100 million people.

The 26th General Council of the WCRC took place in June 2017 in Leipzig, Germany, with the theme, "Living God, Renew and Transform Us." The council dealt with issues of justice, church unity, and world renewal. More than a thousand delegates, observers, staff, and invited guests gathered in Leipzig, making it the largest international ecclesial event in Germany during the Reformation Jubilee (commemorating 500 years since Martin Luther ignited the Reformation). During the General Council, the WCRC associated with the "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification," a document forged between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Lutheran Federation, which has since also been affirmed by the World Methodist Council. Additionally, the council celebrated the signing of the "Wittenberg Witness," a document crafted between the WCRC and the Lutheran World Federation that expresses a commitment to Christian unity as Reformed and Lutheran Christians live and work together to further a common Christian witness to a broken and troubled world.

The WCRC is "called to communion and committed to justice." Through robust engagement with the Word of God and the call of the Holy Spirit, the WCRC is always being transformed as it strives for the full and just participation of all. In its diversity, the WCRC seeks to be a living expression of "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). As a global *koinonia*, the communion is marked by discerning, confessing, witnessing, and being reformed together. With all the partners God provides, the WCRC works for the transformation of the whole world, so that all humanity and the whole of creation might live life in its fullness (Deuteronomy 30:19; John 10:10).

The WCRC may be best known worldwide for the Accra Confession, a groundbreaking statement issued at the General Council held in Accra, Ghana, in 2004, declaring that Christians are called by biblical teachings to be advocates of social, economic, and ecological justice. The text of the Accra Confession can be found at <http://wcrch.ch/accra>.

The RCA's Lisa Vander Wal serves as a vice president of the WCRC. The commission wishes to publicly commend her for the important leadership she is providing to the worldwide church through her multifaceted work with the WCRC.

For more information on the WCRC and its work, go to www.wcrch.ch.

Global Christian Forum

The Global Christian Forum (GCF) is a prominent example of a new form of worldwide ecumenical dialogue and influence, drawing for the first time world leaders from Evangelical, historic Protestant, Orthodox, Pentecostal, Catholic, and African Instituted churches into a new

place of relational, rather than structural, fellowship. Begun quietly in the 1990s, with RCA involvement from the very beginning, it is responding to the rapid shift in global Christianity marked by new vitality and growth in the churches in the global south, often in Pentecostal and Evangelical expressions that have no links to broader ecumenical bodies. From the start, the WCC, the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the World Evangelical Alliance, the Pentecostal World Fellowship, and others have been supportive of the GCF's work.

In 2018, Dr. Casely Essamuah was installed as the newest secretary of the Global Christian Forum. An ordained minister in the Methodist Church, Ghana, Dr. Essamuah describes himself as "evangelical and ecumenical." Coming originally from Africa and now ministering in North America, he views himself as a "bridge-builder" between the churches in the global north and global south.

The facilitation group met, with the addition of young adult consultants, in Denmark in the fall of 2019, at the invitation of the Moravian Church, with a focus on the directives that came out of the GCF's Third Global Gathering (held in Bogota, Colombia, in April 2018). The facilitation group's chief purpose is to plan activities for the next three to five years, based on the ideas that emerged from the Third Global Gathering. Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary emeritus of the RCA, serves on the GCF committee and facilitation group, and Rev. Stacey Duensing serves as young adult consultant for the GCF.

For more information on the Global Christian Forum, visit www.globalchristianforum.org.

National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA

Since its founding in 1950, the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC) has been a visible presence for ecumenical cooperation among Christians in the United States. The 38 NCC member communions—from a wide spectrum of Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox, Evangelical, historic African American, and Living Peace churches—include over 40 million persons in more than 100,000 local congregations in communities across the nation. The RCA was a charter member of the NCC.

By necessity, the work of the NCC has evolved in dramatic ways over the last decade, in response to a precipitous decline in revenue. NCC general secretary and president James E. Winkler presides over a very differently structured organization than the one that existed a generation ago. Still, the NCC continues to offer an important witness to the power of a shared voice among Christians. The newest multi-year initiative of the NCC focuses on ending racism. The NCC continues to respond to other urgent issues that Christians face, most recently mass incarceration and interreligious relations with a focus on peace. General secretary Eddy Alemán serves on the governing board of the NCC. The RCA is also represented on the NCC's Convening Tables on Interreligious Relations, Christian Education, Faith Formation and Leadership, and Faith and Order. The commission thanks Rev. Laura Osborne, Norma Coleman-James, and Dr. Monica Schaap Pierce for their ongoing service on these Convening Tables.

The website of the NCC is www.nationalcouncilofchurches.us.

Christian Churches Together

Formed in 2001, Christian Churches Together (CCT) is the broadest Christian fellowship in the United States. It represents members from the Catholic, Orthodox, historic Protestant, historic

Black, Evangelical, and Pentecostal families of Christian churches. In addition, its membership includes national organizations such as Bread for the World, Evangelicals for Social Action, Habitat for Humanity, and Sojourners. It is this mix of churches and religious organizations that makes the CCT unique among North American ecumenical organizations. One of the distinctive characteristics of CCT is its intentional focus on relationship-building and mutual understanding, instead of theological consensus-building. This characteristic has invited these diverse Christians to come together in a unique and holy manner that continues to gain momentum.

In 2019, Christian Churches Together held its convocation in Montgomery, Alabama. With the theme “Beloved Community,” speakers and participants engaged in dialogue on the nature and purpose of the church in a culture still plagued by racism. The group prayed over historic sites in the United States’s history of enslavement and toured the deeply moving Legacy Museum and lynching memorial. The RCA delegation consisted of Dr. Monica Schaap Pierce, who also serves on the steering committee of CCT, Rev. Carlos Corro, Rev. Stacey Duensing, and Rev. Eddy Alemán.

Among the many benefits of participating in CCT, RCA delegates laud the annual convocations as opportunities to build personal relationships with people across the church in the U.S., to come to a more nuanced understanding of the differences and commonalities between communions, to grow together in Christ, to deepen spiritual wisdom, to identify new possibilities for a shared witness, and to act as a unified voice in speaking to contemporary culture on issues of spirituality, life, justice, and peace.

CCT’s website (www.christianchurchestogether.org) provides additional information about its mission and activity. There you will also find common statements on poverty, immigration reform, racism, and evangelism.

RCA–Formula of Agreement Relationships

In 1997, the Reformed Church in America, in conjunction with its Reformed ecumenical partners the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the United Church of Christ, approved a historic agreement with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America known as the Formula of Agreement. This landmark agreement brought the four churches—already partners in a number of ministries, both in North America and around the world—into full communion with each other.

Since that agreement, the working relationships between the churches have remained close and vibrant, if not always very public. For example, Rev. Daniel Meeter recently completed his service as a member of the church council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Rev. Paul Janssen serves on the Presbyterian Church (USA)’s ecumenical committee, and representatives from the Formula of Agreement churches serve as corresponding delegates to this body each year. While the commission regularly looks for means of cooperation between the partner denominations, it also acknowledges that, in fact, much ecumenical work between these denominations happens at the local level, where Reformed and Lutheran congregations join in ministries of worship, education, and service. Behind the scenes, denominational staff from the respective churches, including general secretary Eddy Alemán, meet both to support each other in their respective work and to plan for possible joint historic streams of Protestant Christianity at a time when their common witness makes the gospel of Jesus Christ more available to more people in more places.

To help churches grow in mutual understanding and, in particular, to implement the Formula’s provisions for the exchange of ministers at the local level, denominational staff of each of the

Formula churches have produced a newly revised guide in “The Orderly Exchange of Ministers of Word and Sacrament” document:

<http://images.rca.org/docs/ministry/FormulaOfAgreement.pdf>. We commend this resource to those classes, ministers, and consistories that are considering an exchange of ministers with other Formula churches. The commission would like to thank RCA staff members Andy Bossardet and Molly Towne and the Commission on Church Order for their work on this updated guide.

Roman Catholic–Reformed Dialogue

For over 50 years, the Reformed Church in America has participated in an ongoing theological dialogue with other Reformed and Roman Catholic representatives. Recently, the Reformed-Roman Catholic consultation concluded its eighth round of dialogue. Included in the dialogue were representatives from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Presbyterian Church, (USA), the United Church of Christ, the Christian Reformed Church in North America, and the Reformed Church in America. The RCA was represented by Rev. Dr. Allan Janssen, Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, and Dr. Monica Schaap Pierce. The dialogue focused on ecclesiology, and, in particular, on the roles of the Trinity, covenant, Word and sacrament, mission, and unity and diversity in the life of the church. The dialogue also examined ecclesial ministry and oversight and uncovered a unifying affirmation that ecclesial ministry and oversight are undertaken personally and collegially in service to the church, not just for the church’s own sake, but for the sake of the world God so loves.

The commission commends the report of the eighth round, titled *The One Body of Christ: Ministry in Service to the Church and the World*, to churches for study. The text can be found at <http://images.rca.org/docs/synod/TheOneBody.pdf>. The ninth round of dialogue will commence upon approval by partner denominations and will focus on the relationship between justification and justice. The prospectus for the ninth round can be found at <http://images.rca.org/docs/synod/ProspectusNinthRound.pdf>.

Unity Begins at Home

Reflecting on its mandate for Christian unity, the commission is concerned about fissures of disunity within and among local churches and in the RCA as a whole. Diversity of thought is realistic and healthy. Diversity is realistic because the church is comprised of a multiplicity of people with sundry gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit. Diversity is healthy because, through these diverse gifts, creativity emerges and with it, fresh approaches to upholding sacred traditions as well as addressing new issues in changing times. Diversity is not inimical to unity. Rather, the unity that has already been established in Christ comes to its fullest expression through the various gifts of the faithful, which are unified in their service to the gospel.

The RCA has a long history of collaborating with other Christians of diverse cultures, histories, gifts, and beliefs. Whether in hospitals founded by missionaries, in a local vacation Bible school hosted with neighboring churches, or in dialogue with other communions, we partner with other believers in order to advance Christ’s mission on earth. Our common, unifying work is a response to Jesus’s prayer that we “may all be one” (John 17:21). In the Bible, Christian unity is described as a gift and a call. It is a gift that has already been realized by Jesus Christ, who has broken down the dividing walls of hostility (Ephesians 2:14). It is a call to bear one another’s burdens so as to make visible to all a unity that God already sees (Galatians 6:2).

Yet, within our denomination, we have turned away from the gift of oneness. Stymied by fear and pride, we have fallen short of our call to manifest the unity that we have in Christ. Rather than modeling wholeness within the RCA, we have allowed walls to be built up and allowed hostilities to fester. The ecumenical pursuit of Christian unity is deficient without internal concord. It is inconsistent for us to reach out in ecumenical relationships while failing to reach across our own denomination to extend hospitality and strive for compromise.

The urgent work of reconciliation and cooperation within our denomination requires renewed strength and courage, which we can only find in God. It necessitates trust in, and openness to, the Spirit. It demands an unqualified, intentional, and prayerful commitment to heal the brokenness of the Body of Christ. As a commission, we prayerfully urge our denomination to seek a deeper and more authentic expression of oneness that we have in Christ. For Christian unity—while universal in God’s promise—must begin at home.

Marking Ten Years Since the Adoption of the Belhar

This year, we commemorate ten years since the Reformed Church in America adopted the Belhar Confession as its fourth standard of unity, thereby affirming it as a statement of its fundamental beliefs. Notably, the RCA was the first denomination within the United States to grant the Belhar such a place within its confessional identity. In 2016, the Presbyterian Church (USA) added the Belhar to their Book of Confessions. In 2017, the Christian Reformed Church in North America adopted the Belhar Confession as a contemporary testimony.

The History of the Belhar

The Belhar Confession has its roots in the struggle against apartheid in southern Africa. First drafted by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) in 1982, the DRMC formally adopted the confession in 1986. It is now one of the “standards of unity” of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA), the church that was formed out of the uniting of the DRMC and Dutch Reformed Church in Africa. The Belhar’s theological confrontation of the sin of racism has made possible reconciliation among Reformed churches in southern Africa and has aided the process of reconciliation within the nation of South Africa. But the Belhar’s relevance is not confined to southern Africa. It addresses three key issues of concern to all churches: unity of the church and unity among all people, reconciliation within church and society, and God’s justice. As one member of the URCSA has said, “We carry this confession on behalf of all the Reformed churches. We do not think of it as ours alone.”

The Belhar Confession was adopted by the RCA’s 2009 General Synod. It was then ratified by two-thirds of the RCA’s classes and incorporated into the *Book of Church Order* as a doctrinal standard at the 2010 General Synod. The RCA has published *Unity, Reconciliation, and Justice* (<http://images.rca.org/docs/aboutus/BelharGuideComplete.pdf>) as a study guide designed to help people reflect on the Belhar Confession as a living confession of faith that speaks directly to ministry and mission in North America.

What Purpose Does a Confession Serve?

A confession affirms that God is active in history. The nature and action of God are imbedded in creation—the world. God calls the church into existence to be a community that arises out of the world and lives in the world, for the world. A confession declares that the church is gathered not on its own behalf or for its own purposes, but to be the manifestation of God’s healing, redeeming, repairing, and renewing of the *oikoumene*, or whole inhabited world. Or, as we say

in the language of our day, the Belhar empowers a thousand churches in a million ways doing one thing—following Christ in mission, in a lost and broken world so loved by God. A confession gives expression of faith, by and through the church, giving rise to action/mission that becomes a historical witness to the truth that God is a living, active, expressive, moving God in events and time. A confession also speaks internally to the church as a statement about its fundamental beliefs, vision, and mission. As such, it inwardly forms the church and reminds it of its vision and mission.

Ten Years of the Belhar

Over the past ten years, the Belhar Confession has become a part of the RCA's witness in many, diverse congregations and contexts. It is recited in worship, celebrated through song, confessed in prayer, celebrated in litany. It has inspired churches to pursue racial justice, welcome the stranger, seek unity where there is division. There is much to celebrate about the ways in which it has shaped the life of the RCA over the last decade.

As the RCA finds itself in yet another season of disagreement, polarization, and potential schism, we acknowledge that there is so much of this confession that we have failed to uphold. We have failed to reconcile with neighbors and church members who may disagree with us on a variety of issues. In a denomination that is predominantly white, we have failed to establish racial justice and to make all people feel welcome. We have failed to stand in solidarity with refugees who seek asylum in our country. We have failed to remember that unity is "gift and an obligation." There is much to lament about the ways in which the RCA has failed to live up to the principles of the Belhar over the last decade.

On this momentous occasion of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Belhar, the Commission on Christian Unity wishes to remind the delegates of our confessional commitments to unity, justice, and reconciliation as revealed in the Belhar Confession. We commend to you the many excellent resources offered by the RCA for utilizing the Belhar in worship (www.faithward.org/belhar-confession-worship-resources) and invite you to study with your congregation the study guide *Unity, Reconciliation, and Justice* (<http://images.rca.org/docs/aboutus/BelharGuideComplete.pdf>) as you pursue unity, justice, and reconciliation in your own context.

Acknowledgments

The commission wishes to offer deep gratitude to Jodie Wu and Michael Hardeman, who are both completing their second term. Michael served as moderator, and both Michael and Jodie have led ecumenical engagement in their local contexts and have participated in national ecumenical gatherings. The commission also extends deepest gratitude to Jim Payton from the Christian Reformed Church in North America, who has contributed greatly to the work of the commission during his several years of service.

Finally, the commission expresses its profound appreciation for the excellent work of our ecumenical associate, Dr. Monica Schaap Pierce.

REPORT OF THE INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE

The missional mandate for the work of the Interreligious Relations Subcommittee of the Commission on Christian Unity is found in the 2018 Report of the Interreligious Task Force:

The primary purpose of the church of Jesus Christ is to bear witness to God's saving grace and love in a world imbued with cultural and religious diversity. We are, in this sense, a missionary people, called by God to use our gifts in God's renewing and reconciling work in all its dimensions. This entails working with our neighbors to bring healing and hope to the many victims of poverty, injustice, and oppression while also embracing Jesus' call to "make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19)" (*MGS 2018*, p. 92).

The position of coordinator for interreligious relations was filled in June of 2019. The Interreligious Relations Subcommittee was formed in August of 2019. The subcommittee has met via Zoom five times and met for a two-day in-person meeting in February 2020. During the February meeting, we were joined by the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) interreligious committee.

One of the subcommittee's joint projects with the CRCNA is Journeying into Friendships. The Journeying into Friendships network is a place for connection; for mutual encouragement, prayer, and learning; and for working together to develop a library of resources, invite more people to join us, walk alongside congregations stepping into ministry with refugees, immigrants, or international students, support church planting movements among our new neighbors, and promote a Reformed approach to interfaith dialogue that balances openness with authentic witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. In addition to discussing how we have worked together and how we might do so in the future, the CRCNA and RCA teams made a joint commitment to share resources. Right now, our joint work is focused on:

1. A shared database of interreligious "champions" to help connect churches and individuals with practitioners of interreligious work. With that information, we can help resource churches that have these champions in their area and help find resources in the areas that don't.
2. A joint website to help resource churches. These resources would include, but are not limited to, webinars, books, curriculum/study guides, and videos.

The RCA team is currently working on:

1. An interreligious mandate with the biblical and theological rationale for engaging across religious difference.
2. Resourcing churches that are trying to connect with their neighbors of another faith and elevating the stories of churches that already are connecting.
3. Collaborating with RCA Local Missional Engagement, refugee coordination, and other departments that intersect with other faiths.
4. Exploring how RCA colleges and seminaries are training the next generation of leaders in world religions. If this isn't being done or can't be done, then we can find a way to

work more closely with the churches nearby to help equip students. The subcommittee is working now to add a seminary and undergrad student to the committee.

5. The subcommittee is working with RCA Short-Term Mission to ready volunteers to help love their neighbor of another faith as they serve at home and abroad.
6. The team will be working closely with the Al Amana Center in Oman to help bring more groups to be trained in interfaith work, scriptural reasoning, and interfaith dialogue.

The subcommittee is committed to working with our ecumenical partners as we conduct and lead interreligious engagement on behalf of the RCA. One of the ways in which we do this is through the World Council of Churches (WCC). The WCC convened a gathering in Cardiff, Wales, from October 31 through November 3, 2019, titled "Towards Fostering Interreligious Dialogue Ecumenically." The Rev. Harold Lay represented the RCA at the gathering. He is a member of the Interreligious Relations Subcommittee.

The WCC called for representatives from member churches to attend this first gathering of interfaith leaders. Thirty people attended, representing 23 countries, including Christian-minority countries such as Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, and Malaysia.

Interreligious dialogue and cooperation are central to who the WCC is. It has been part of the WCC since its founding in 1948. In all parts of the world, there is ongoing interreligious dialogue. But many factors undermine the good work that is occurring. There is a strong desire in many countries to form strong social cohesion with diversity, but fear mongering and bigotry often undermine those efforts.

A clear challenge is to articulate the Christian vision in such a way to overcome fear (fear felt by Christians and non-Christians alike) and work for the common good of all living in God's world. Dialogue and cooperation can serve both evangelism and witness by holding up God's vision in Christ for the good future of the world. The challenge is to create win-win situations rather than win-lose situations.

The church focuses on Christ. We have a distinctive witness. But then, who is Christ in our world, the world of religious pluralism? The gathering in Wales was a forum to share what is happening in our diverse settings and share together the ways we are expressing God's vision and salvation. The RCA has been and will continue to be a participant in this mutual work through the WCC and other ecumenical bodies.

Along with our work with the WCC, the RCA is involved with the National Council of Churches, where Rev. Laura Osborne sits on the Interreligious Convening Table. This table helps facilitate interreligious dialogues across the country. Best practices, connections, and planning are all shared at the meetings.

Along with our other ecumenical partners, the RCA is involved with and Rev. Laura Osborne is on the steering committee for Shoulder to Shoulder, a strategic partner in countering discrimination and violence against Muslims.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Laura Osborne on behalf of the Interreligious Relations Subcommittee