

## **Report of the General Synod Council Serving as the Executive Committee of the General Synod**

The Son of God gathers, protects, and preserves the church by his Spirit and his Word (Heidelberg Catechism, answer 54). The church exists to announce, teach, and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. The church speaks, and it acts. For those of us in the Reformed tradition, the church governs its life, and it determines how best to carry out its mission through its assemblies.

God seeks certain characteristics, and the world also watches to see if those characteristics are evident in our life and work together. Our ability to go forth and preach the gospel is supported by the work of our congregations, classes, and synods. Together we are a body of committed believers in covenant with one another. Christ's mission is enhanced when the Word of God and our love for each other are the foundation for order, discipline, and effectiveness. This Reformed understanding of the church and the manner through which we govern our life together are foundational.

Our prayer throughout the year and as we meet as a General Synod body is that our unity and attention to governance will glorify God.

The General Synod Council is established by and responsible to the General Synod. It shall act as the executive committee of the General Synod and it shall administer the affairs of the Reformed Church in America between the sessions of the General Synod. It shall implement decisions, policies, and programs of the General Synod through proper channels and agencies. It shall support, strengthen, and coordinate the work of the several commissions, boards, institutions, and agencies of the Reformed Church in America, thus seeking to increase the effectiveness of the mission and witness of the church (*BCO* Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 7, Section 1 [2019 edition, p. 71]).

The General Synod Council serves "as the Executive Committee of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, as the Committee of Reference at meetings of the General Synod, and as the Board of Trustees of the General Synod as may be required by law" (*BCO* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6a [2019 edition, p. 108]).

For a full listing of the responsibilities of the General Synod Council, refer to the Bylaws of the General Synod (*BCO* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6 [2019 edition, pp. 108–109]).

The work of the General Synod Council, as directed by previous General Synods, is reported to the General Synod in two areas:

1. Matters of governance—the work the General Synod Council (GSC) has done with respect to a) the meeting of the General Synod; b) matters of its own organization, including its oversight and stewardship of the financial resources given to it; c) its support and supervision of denominational staff and the general secretary; d) the work of its committees, teams, and racial and ethnic councils; and e) a general overview of the work of the church as reported by the GSC in its role as the General Synod Executive Committee.
2. The work the GSC has done with regard to the oversight of the mission and ministry assigned to it by the General Synod under the rubric of Transformed & Transforming, the

General Synod's 15-year ministry goal, and which is reported by the GSC in its role as the General Synod's program agency.

## Review of Regional Synod Minutes

The General Synod Office has received and read the 2019 minutes of the regional synods of Albany, Canada, the Far West, the Great Lakes, the Heartland, Mid-America, the Mid-Atlantics, and New York.

## GENERAL SYNOD MEETING

### Amendments to the *Book of Church Order*

The General Synod of 2019 adopted and referred to the classes for approval 11 amendments to the *Book of Church Order*. The amendments are recorded in the *2019 Minutes of the General Synod* as noted. As of July 23, three classes had not reported votes to the Office of the General Synod on the questions of whether to approve the amendments. The votes of the other 43 classes, as reported in writing by the classes' stated clerks, were as follows:

<i>Book of Church Order</i> Amendments	Disapproved	Approved
<p><b>1. Procedure for Amending the Government, the Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures, the Formularies, and the Liturgy and Directory for Worship</b>            (MGS 2019, EC 19-15, pp. 115–116)  <i>BCO</i>, Rules and Amendments of the Government of the Reformed Church in America and Disciplinary Procedures, Sec. 2 (2019 edition, p. 75)</p>	20	23
<p><b>2. Affiliation of a Local Church with More Than One Denomination</b>            (MGS 2019, CO 19-1, pp. 226–237)  <i>BCO</i> Chapter 1, Part I (new article)</p>	11	32
<p><b>3. “Transferring” Ministers to Other Denominations</b>            (MGS 2019, CO 19-3, pp. 247–248)  <i>BCO</i> Chapter 1, Part II, Article 15, Section 13 (2019 edition, p. 56)</p>	7	36
<p><b>4. General Synod Responsibilities Regarding Regional Synods</b>            (MGS 2019, CO 19-4, p. 248)  <i>BCO</i> Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 3 (2019 edition, p. 67)</p>	17	26
<p><b>5. Formulary No. 3, Declaration for Ministers of Word and Sacrament</b>            (MGS 2019, CO 19-5, p. 249)  <i>BCO</i>, Formulary 3 (2019 edition, pp. 132–133)</p>	1	42
<p><b>6. Permanent Record for Declarations</b>            (MGS 2019, CO 19-6, pp. 249–250)  <i>BCO</i> Chapter 1, Part II, Article 15, Section 12 (2019 edition, p. 56)  <i>BCO</i>, Formulary 1 (2019 edition, p. 131)</p>	1	42

BCO, Formulary 7 (2019 edition, pp. 136–137)  
 BCO, Formulary 16 (2019 edition, p. 143)

<b>7. Formulary No. 9, Certificate for Transfer of a Minister of Word and Sacrament</b>	2	41
<i>(MGS 2019, CO 19-7, pp. 250–251)</i>		
<i>BCO, Formulary 9 (2019 edition, p. 138)</i>		
<b>8. Textual Reference to Formulary No. 9</b>	1	42
<i>(MGS 2019, CO 19-8, p. 251)</i>		
<i>BCO Chapter 1, Part II, Article 15, Section 9 (2019 edition, p. 55)</i>		
<b>9. Formulary No. 15, Provision for Articles of Incorporation for Congregations</b>	2	41
<i>(MGS 2019, CO 19-9, pp. 251–252)</i>		
<i>BCO Chapter 1, Part I, Article 1, Section 1 (2019 edition, p.11)</i>		
<b>10. Transfers of Licensed Candidates from One Classis to Another</b>	1	42
<i>(MGS 2019, CO 19-10, pp. 252–253)</i>		
<i>BCO Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 6 (2019 edition, p. 50)</i>		
<b>11. Formulary No. 17 (New), Certificate of Transfer for a Licensed Candidate</b>	2	41
<i>(MGS 2019, CO 19-11, pp. 253–254)</i>		

*\*\*Note: final declarative votes on those amendments that received approval from the requisite two thirds of classes (Amendments 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11) will be taken at the next stated session of the General Synod. Amendments 1 and 4 did not receive the requisite two-thirds approval. In addition, the two changes to the General Synod bylaws adopted by the 2019 General Synod (EC 19-11, MGS 2019, p. 53 and W 19-1, MGS 2019, p. 294) will be submitted to the next stated session of the General Synod for final approval.\*\**

### **General Synod Meeting Location**

The location for the next annual meeting of the General Synod in 2021 is Central College in Pella, Iowa. The 2021 meeting of the General Synod is planned to take place on June 10–15. The General Synod is able to respond to invitations from the assemblies of the church to meet in other locations. Planning for the meeting requires invitations to be submitted at least two years in advance of the proposed meeting.

### **OVERVIEW OF THE GSC’S WORK ON MATTERS OF ITS INTERNAL GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION**

The General Synod Council (GSC) operates internally according to a not-for-profit governance practice known as “policy governance” developed by Dr. John and Miriam Carver. Policy governance allowed the GSC to enhance its ability to monitor the various “ends” and objectives that were established to fulfill the General Synod’s directives regarding Our Call, the General Synod’s ten-year goal for mission and ministry that ended in 2013. In October 2014, the GSC adopted new ends and objectives to fulfill the directives of the new ministry goal adopted at General Synod 2013, Transformed & Transforming. Policy governance has also enhanced the

GSC's ability to both support and monitor the work of its general secretary and staff through a series of "limitations" policies. The GSC has established and holds itself accountable for its own work through policies concerning its own internal governance and its relationships with the general secretary and staff.

The Ministerial Formation Certification Agency and the Board of Benefits Services also operate in accordance with the principles of policy governance. This work required extensive discussion over a period of two years to clarify the governing relationship of these agencies with the GSC in its capacity as the executive committee of the General Synod.

### **RCA Salary Structure for Fiscal Year 2020 (October 2019–September 2020)**

The GSC policy (EL-8) pertaining to staff compensation states: "With respect to employment, compensation, and benefits and recognition of employees, consultants, contract workers, and volunteers, the General Secretary will not cause or allow jeopardy to fiscal integrity or to public image or decisions that are unrelated to the relevant market."

The GSC compensation program allows for the evaluation of positions based on the essential requirements and responsibilities of the job as defined in the job description. Job descriptions are created together by the manager, employee, and Human Resources. As responsibilities change or when there is an open position, the job description is reviewed, updated as needed, and reevaluated to ensure that it is still classified in the correct range. The program incorporates geographic differentials to recognize variances in distinct regions. Positions are benchmarked against comparable external positions through the use of compensation surveys in the nonprofit and church sectors.

There are 13 salary ranges that span between grades 11 and 23. Grade 11 represents the most entry-level positions, and Grade 23 represents the highest level, held by the general secretary.

Staff are evaluated annually by their managers. Any increases or adjustments in wages are approved by the general secretary. The general secretary is evaluated by the General Synod Council. Executive staff who are accountable to the Board of Benefits Services (BOBS), the Church Growth Fund (CGF), and Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA) are evaluated by their respective boards.

The following table represents the ranges that were used for fiscal year 2020. The ranges are utilized to establish beginning wages and annual salaries and do not represent the actual compensation of any individual employee. Most employees' salaries fall in the mid-range of the table. The following table represents Grand Rapids-based staff; this table is adjusted for cost-of-living differences for staff who live and work in other areas.

**GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN**

<b>2019–2020 ANNUALIZED SALARY RATE</b>					
<b>GRADE</b>	<b>LOW</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>MID</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>HIGH</b>
11	\$24,960	\$27,620	\$30,280	\$32,940	\$35,600
12	\$32,240	\$35,880	\$39,520	\$43,160	\$46,800
13	\$35,200	\$38,975	\$42,750	\$46,525	\$50,300
14	\$41,800	\$46,950	\$52,100	\$57,250	\$62,400
15	\$47,000	\$52,800	\$58,600	\$64,400	\$70,200
16	\$56,000	\$62,900	\$69,800	\$76,700	\$83,600
17	\$61,000	\$68,510	\$76,020	\$83,530	\$91,040
18	\$66,500	\$74,688	\$82,875	\$91,063	\$99,250
19	\$79,000	\$89,625	\$100,250	\$110,875	\$121,500
20	\$89,500	\$101,550	\$113,600	\$125,650	\$137,700
21	\$101,376	\$118,257	\$135,138	\$152,019	\$168,900
22	\$115,983	\$135,237	\$154,492	\$173,746	\$193,000
23	\$144,662	\$168,697	\$192,731	\$216,766	\$240,800

**Commission Review Process**

The GSC moderator and General Synod president met with two commission moderators in February 2017 to begin drafting a specific process the GSC will use in fulfilling its BCO-assigned responsibilities of both providing support for the work of the General Synod commissions and reviewing them once every five years. As BCO Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6g (2019 edition, p. 109) says, one of the GSC's responsibilities is

To review all General Synod commissions at least once during each five-year period and to recommend to General Synod a continuation of, a reconstitution of, or a discontinuation of such commissions, with the understanding that the necessity of continuation shall not be assumed.

The proposed commission review process was presented to the GSC at its March 2017 meeting. After discussion and some adjustments to improve clarity, the GSC voted to adopt the process. GSC appointed a small group of GSC members to work on the surveys mentioned in points two and three below and bring a proposal back to GSC. In October 2017, GSC received and adopted proposed survey questions for both surveys. The first year cycle of the process began in spring 2018.

The GSC's review and recommendations regarding the Commission on Nominations and the Commission on Theology follow.

Given that General Synod will not meet in 2020 to consider the following two reviews, and that it is uncertain what meetings will look like over the next year, GSC will wait to begin the next set of commission reviews until 2021.

*The Process*

The following is the process adopted by GSC in March 2017.

1. In order to encourage open channels of communication between the commissions and the GSC and to help the GSC support the commissions in their work, the GSC will send a representative to each commission's winter meeting when there is a GSC member available and in close geographical proximity to the meeting place.
2. Each commission will be asked to fill out a two- or three-question survey each year for report to the GSC. Commission members will be asked to fill out the survey individually, not together as a group. The survey will be sent out around the time of the winter meetings, and commissions will be asked to complete it by General Synod. Responses will be reviewed by the GSC at its fall meeting.
3. Every five years (on a rotating basis, two commissions per year), each member of a commission will be asked to complete a longer survey. Commission members will be asked to fill out the survey individually, not together as a group. This survey will also be sent out around the time of the winter meetings, and the two commissions will be asked to complete it by General Synod.

The rotating schedule for commission review will begin as follows:

- Year one: Christian Discipleship and Education, Church Order
  - Year two: Theology, Nominations
  - Year three: Christian Worship, Race and Ethnicity
  - Year four: Christian Action, Christian Unity
  - Year five: History, Women
4. At one of its meetings at General Synod, the GSC will assign three GSC members to each of the two commissions, and they will be given the compiled survey responses from that commission. Whenever possible, one of those assigned to the review team should be the GSC member who attended the commission's last winter meeting. GSC members will also be asked to comment on that particular commission based on the work that the GSC knows the commission has done (based on General Synod reports, etc.) and reports from GSC members who have attended meetings of that commission. The three GSC members assigned to the commission will fill out the same survey that the commission members fill out.
  5. The three GSC members will then meet with the commission being reviewed during the fall joint meeting of the GSC and the commissions.
  6. The GSC members who meet with the commission will report back to the GSC either later in the fall meeting or at the spring meeting.
  7. The GSC will decide whether to recommend to the General Synod a continuation of, a reconstitution of, or a discontinuation of the commission (*BCO* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6g [2019 edition, p. 109]).

#### *2019–2020 Review Cycle*

The members of the Commission on Nominations (CoN) and the Commission on Theology (CoT) received a link to the longer survey mentioned in point three of the process via SurveyMonkey and were asked to complete the survey by June 1, 2019.

In June 2019, the GSC appointed three of its members to serve as a review committee for CoN, and three for CoT. These GSC members received commission members' responses to the five-year review survey in late summer and early fall 2019. The review teams met with the commissions at the joint GSC and commissions meeting in October 2019.

Each review team reported back to GSC at its March 2020 meeting with a recommendation regarding its assigned commission.

### *Commission on Nominations*

Two of the review committee members joined the commission for part of its winter meeting in January 2020. The committee reported back to GSC:

We observed a commission that is tasked with the enormous job of coordinating and placement of multiple profiles into slots that require very specific requirements. We observed the members discussing profiles in depth. It was obvious they had done their homework and even though they didn't know many of the people behind the profiles, they had worked to get to know them through their profiles and really cared about getting them plugged into the right fit.

It was like a huge jigsaw puzzle with some pieces fitting into two positions and the group deciding which would work best. The process was bathed in prayer.

We also felt the commission is supporting the Transformed & Transforming initiative by choosing wisely who would be asked to serve.

A way that we, as GSC, can show our support for the Commission on Nominations team is by doing our best to encourage leaders in our areas to submit profiles.

We enjoyed our time with the commission and submit this report with the highest regard for their work.

GSC voted to recommend the following to the 2020 General Synod, upon the recommendation of its review committee:

#### **Recommendation**

To approve the continuation of the Commission on Nominations.

### *Commission on Theology*

In October 2019, two members of the General Synod Council reviewed the work of the Commission on Theology and visited with them. The committee reported back to GSC:

This commission is absolutely essential for the denomination in pressing forward toward God's will for the Reformed Church in America. While they do not establish the denomination's theological stances, they have the time and expertise to take a good look at theological issues facing our denomination so we can be better informed in our decision-making. The GSC appreciates the good spirit of working together found on this commission. Because this commission is comprised of a good cross-section of the diversity in our denomination, there is not always full agreement amongst themselves about some matters. But rather than issuing reports with attached minority reports, they

prefer to work toward documents that all could sign off on. They believe the whole church could benefit from watching their commission at work in dealing with diversity.

GSC voted to recommend the following to the 2020 General Synod, upon the recommendation of its review committee:

**Recommendation**

To approve the continuation of the Commission on Theology (CoT); and further,

To commend the CoT for its very important work in giving theological guidance to the Reformed Church in America.