

REPORT OF THE GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL ON COMMUNICATION

Since its origins in 1628, the RCA has given testimony to the goodness and faithfulness of God. Now, in the midst of Transformed & Transforming, we continue to share stories of how God is at work among us. We also share ideas, goals, concerns, prayer needs, and other information and resources. This happens in a wide variety of ways, utilizing longstanding communication channels alongside new ones.

Supporting Transformed & Transforming

Over the last year, GSC staff have worked to raise awareness of Transformed & Transforming, the denomination's vision to engage with discipleship, leadership, mission, and the next generation. Stories of transformation have taken the form of magazine and website features. They've also been tweets, Facebook posts, and video testimonies.

Transformed & Transforming initiatives were designed in response to needs expressed by churches and leaders. As those initiatives took shape, congregations and leaders were invited to take their next step in order to better fulfill God's call for them. A plethora of learning and equipping opportunities are available. The RCA communication team has supported each initiative in sharing these opportunities and in developing related resources where needed.

Supporting Global Mission

RCA Global Mission is growing the global church and sharing the love of Jesus around the world. Over the past year, communication staff have assisted in this work by sharing many stories from the mission field. They also rolled out new branding for RCA Global Mission that better captures the excitement and credibility of RCA mission work, including an updated website, new prayer cards, and countless missionary letters with stories and prayer requests from the field.

Digital Communication

The RCA communication team manages an array of websites and social media interactions online. Thousands of people have interacted with the RCA on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Vimeo in the last year.

This year, www.rca.org was rebuilt from the ground up to better represent the RCA online and to better support churches, leaders, and ministries. This site overhaul addressed longstanding difficulties with site organization and searchability. The new rca.org is streamlined for a better user experience. It's more visual, has updated and accurate content, and is easier to navigate. This site, along with RCA emails and social media accounts, is optimized for use on smartphones. To provide feedback on the new site, email webservant@rca.org.

Video is growing in frequency as a communication tool, and, beginning in 2018, all RCA-produced videos have been closed captioned for greater accessibility.

RCA Today

While technology allows communication to take place in a number of ways, many people still desire print communication. Within the RCA, this medium includes *RCA Today* magazine, which is produced three times a year for each RCA household. (For a free subscription, email

updates@rca.org.) *RCA Today* continues to support Transformed & Transforming by communicating stories of church and individual discipleship, leadership development, mission, and next generation engagement.

In 2019, the RCA unfolded a new digital strategy for *RCA Today* with the launch of Faithward.org. The site, focused on moving faith forward, includes ideas for living out your faith, reflections on Scripture, and resources for your church. Faithward.org includes many stories and resources from *RCA Today*, and added content from a regular rotation of contributors from throughout the church. In its first year, Faithward helped church leaders connect with resources and spend time in thoughtful reflection about faith. It also engaged people asking big questions like “Who is God?” and “How do I know God’s listening when I pray?” and “How do I know what God wants for me?” As Faithward’s reach grew, it began to shift from a blog site to a resourcing hub for the wider church.

A bulletin insert, also called *RCA Today*, shares RCA ministry stories and increases connection with RCA mission work around the world.

Translation Efforts Continue

As the RCA grows in diversity, the need for translated materials also grows. In addition to offering the 2019 *Book of Church Order* in Spanish, Korean, and Mandarin, a number of Transformed & Transforming resources have been translated.

The monthly Spanish and Korean translations of the *RCA Today* bulletin were redesigned in 2019; they are now in full color with photos to provide an equitable reading experience for Spanish and Korean speakers.

Over the past year, the RCA and the Christian Reformed Church in North America completed updated Spanish translations of the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort. (The Belhar Confession is also available in Spanish, but its translation was more recent and did not require a refresh.)

Report on the Faith Alive Christian Resources Partnership

The RCA continues to work with Faith Alive Christian Resources as a partner in distributing resources. The RCA receives revenue from the Reformed Church Press materials sold through Faith Alive, and that revenue is then used to produce additional resources to support the RCA and other Reformed congregations throughout the United States and Canada.

Office of Historical Services

The archives of the RCA serves as the memory of the Reformed church through its collection of documents, videos, photographs, and electronic records. Stories of life and ministry from the past provide a strong foundation for faithful witness in the future. While the archivist gathers the records of our past and present ministry, the outlook is always looking forward to tomorrow—the stories of a past generation provide inspiration and encouragement for today as we grow into tomorrow. The office assists congregations, classes, regional synods, and staff with their historical and records needs.

RCA Museum

The high point of this year was the establishment of the online RCA Museum (rcamuseum.omeka.net), organized and created by digital archivist Matthew Gasero, which begun with the transfer of the Tanis Curio Collection of Western Theological Seminary. This initial collection of artifacts donated by the children of Rev. Edward H. Tanis included more than 70 items from around the world. Since that initial collection, the museum continues to grow with such items as the lectures of Hendrikus Berkhoff at the 350th anniversary celebration of the RCA, a video of a sermon titled “Sermons in Shoes” by the Rev. Wilbur Washington, the first African American president of the General Synod, photos from previous synods and from around the church. It is a rich treasure trove of artifacts and information that adds to the RCA’s self-understanding.

Records Storage

Archival collections are housed in space leased from New Brunswick Theological Seminary and in an underground storage facility in Grand Rapids—about one mile of paper and other materials. The archives receives records from disbanded and active congregations on a regular basis. The archives continues to digitize records in an active manner to increase their accessibility for research. The Amsterdam Correspondence, which includes the earliest holdings of the archives from the 1650s to 1800, will provide an easily accessible format for a future translation and transcription project undertaken by a collaboration of historical organizations.

Historical Series

The archivist also serves as the production editor for the Historical Series and assists with the design, typesetting, and production of the books in that series as well as the Congregational History Series. A full list of the 100 volumes can be found at www.rca.org/series. The archives assists with the promotion and marketing of the publication and is exploring ways to publish the series as ebooks as well as make individual chapters available. A full report is in the report of the Commission on History.

Growth and Development of the Archives

The archives has continued to benefit from the grant provided by New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS) and matched by the RCA Historical Series for four years. The RCA and NBTS negotiated a new five-year lease which included a reduction in cost. NBTS, through the Reformed Church Center, and the archives are exploring partnerships in collection, preserving, and disseminating the rich heritage of the RCA.

The digital archivist has a digitization center which includes flatbed, overhead, microfilm, large format, and high speed scanners. The archives has been approached to consider internship opportunities with Rutgers University, continuing a relationship that we have had since 1766.

The Facebook presence for both the archives and the Historical Series continues to reach a good audience of interested “fans.” A sampling of some materials is at rcaarchives.omeka.net. More useful information about our history and retention of records by congregations and assemblies is on the archives’ web page (www.rca.org/archives). Archives staff have also enjoyed providing videos about the RCA and the archives on an internet channel: www.vimeo.com/channels/RLGasero.