Report of the Commission on Church Order

The Commission on Church Order (CCO) is responsible for “making recommendations concerning the content, structure, and style of the Book of Church Order” (BCO) and for providing “advisory responses to requests for interpretation of the Book of Church Order” (BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 4b [2019 edition, pp. 112-113]).

To fulfill these responsibilities, the CCO met in person October 17–19, 2019, in Grand Rapids, Michigan; January 22–24, 2020, in Chicago, Illinois; and in a series of 12 Zoom video conferences in 2020 and 2021. While the CCO did not receive any referrals from the 2019 General Synod or from the 2020 General Synod (which did not meet), this report reflects our work arising out of consultations with General Synod officers, General Synod Council (GSC) staff, the Vision 2020 Team, and others, as well as clarification of other items encountered by the commission in the ordinary course of our work.

Consultations and Collaboration with the Vision 2020 Team

The CCO spent a portion of its in-person January 2020 meeting conferring with the Vision 2020 Team, which was meeting separately at the same time and location. The commission assisted the Vision 2020 Team by providing answers to polity-related questions and provided guidance on implementation of various possible scenarios.

When the Vision 2020 Team issued its report on June 30, 2020, as part of its Recommendation 3 for mutually generous separation, it noted that “we will seek the assistance of the Commission on Church Order both to determine what portions of the following provisions will require BCO changes and to write these proposed changes in order to develop specific language of the recommendation that will be submitted to the 2021 General Synod.” Further consultation and collaboration between the commission and a subcommittee of the Vision 2020 Team resulted in the regulations that are proposed in the Vision 2020 Team’s final report to the 2021 General Synod.

Why Adopt Regulations?

The General Synod is specifically authorized “to make all rules and regulations necessary to put into effect any and all articles of the Government, the Disciplinary Procedures, the Formularies, and the Liturgy of the Reformed Church in America” (BCO, “Rules and Amendments of The Government of the Reformed Church in America and Disciplinary Procedures,” Section 1 [2019 edition, p. 75]). While formal regulations have not been used recently, an infrequent use of a provision in the Constitution does not invalidate the provision; rather, it demonstrates the wisdom of infrequently using such a provision except for “such a time as this.”

In Constitutional Theology, Allan Janssen reflects on historical precedents for the use of regulations, as well as relatively recent discussion by the General Synod to reconsider our method of regulating the work of the church, concluding, “A Reformed church should be capable of establishing its constitutional basis, which can be amended only after considered and patient reflection by the entire church, and at the same time constructing a set of rules that can be amended more easily to meet expected changes in circumstance” (second edition, p. 248 [Reformed Church Press, 2019]).
If adopted, the regulations will provide an orderly, consistent, and fair implementation of the recommendation to accommodate mutually generous separation following the current process by which a consistory may petition its classis for leave to withdraw from the denomination as outlined in the *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10 (2019 edition, pp. 40-44). The sunset provision included in the regulations ensures that they particularly address this specific, unique situation in the life of the RCA without an untethered reach beyond this specific situation.

The adoption of regulations also keeps our Constitution smaller and more responsive to the needs of our congregations in mission. The advantage is that the proposed regulations can be adopted and implemented immediately by this General Synod, without the need for a lengthy process to amend the *BCO* that would also permanently add to its length, and they can more easily be revised or rescinded when necessary.

The CCO remains available for advisory responses to requests for interpretation of the provisions of these regulations as well as the *BCO*.

**Transfer of Ministers of Word and Sacrament to Other Denominations**

The commission was asked to clarify whether an RCA minister of Word and sacrament can be transferred to another denomination, and if so, what effect such a transfer has on that minister's membership in the classis. Yes, a classis may transfer a minister of Word and sacrament to any denomination that will receive an RCA minister by transfer. When the minister is received into another denomination, the transfer results in a demission (an action of the classis declaring that a minister has voluntarily relinquished the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament in the RCA).

If such a minister later requests transfer back into the RCA, the receiving classis must follow the process for “Reception of Ministers and Licensed Candidates from Other Denominations” found in *BCO* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 14 (2019 edition, pp. 50-52). While this process may be easier for any ministers who have previously held ordination in the RCA, no other process exists to transfer into the RCA. Note that such a transfer is distinctly different from a “request for reordination” as described in *BCO* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 15, Section 14 (2019 edition, p. 56-57).

An expanded paper explaining the reasoning, discussing additional questions, and providing an example certificate for the transfer of ministers to another denomination was made available on the stated clerks’ private page hosted on the RCA website. Given the likelihood that classis clerks may be receiving a number of requests for the transfer of ministers to another denomination parallel to churches requesting transfer to other denominations, the commission presents the following two recommendations to add the example certificate of transfer as a new formulary:

**CO 21-1**

To adopt the following amendment to the *Book of Church Order* for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined):

18. **Certificate for the Transfer of a Minister of Word and Sacrament to Another Denomination**
To transfer a minister to another classis within the RCA, use Formulary No. 9.

Demission of a Minister

To the [NAME OF RECEIVING BODY AND DENOMINATION]
From the [CLASSIS NAME] of the Reformed Church in America:

This is to attest that the Rev. [FULL NAME] is a member in good and regular standing of the [CLASSIS NAME] of the Reformed Church in America, and is now requesting transfer to the [NAME OF RECEIVING BODY AND DENOMINATION], to whose Christian fellowship and care [HE/SHE] is hereby affectionately commended. When received by the [NAME OF RECEIVING BODY] the Rev. [LAST NAME]’s relation to this classis and the Reformed Church in America shall cease.

[CLERK’S NAME], Stated Clerk
[DATE]

Please complete the form below and return it to:
[NAME OF THE RCA CLASSIS]
[ADDRESS OF THE CLASSIS]

Receipt of a Minister

To the [CLASSIS NAME] of the Reformed Church in America
From the [NAME OF RECEIVING BODY AND DENOMINATION]:

This is to certify that the Rev. [FULL NAME] was received to unite with the [NAME OF RECEIVING BODY] on [DATE OF RECEPTION].

[SIGNATURE OF THE OFFICER OF THE RECEIVING BODY OF THE DENOMINATION]
(NAME AND ADDRESS OF THE RECEIVING BODY)

The second of the two recommendations adds a corresponding parenthetical note of clarification to the existing Formulary No. 9 for the transfer of a minister to another classis within the RCA:

CO 21-2
To adopt the following amendment to the Book of Church Order, Formulary No. 9 (2019 edition, p. 138) for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined):

(To transfer a minister to another classis within the RCA, use Formulary No. 9.)
9. Certificate for the Transfer of a Minister of Word and Sacrament

(To transfer a minister to another denomination, use Formulary No. 18.)

Conversation with CORE Representative and the General Secretary

Commission moderator Joshua Scheid had a series of initial conversations with Nate Pyle (representing the Commission on Race and Ethnicity [CORE]) and general secretary Eddy Alemán about the relationships between the General Synod and CORE and the General Synod Council and the racial/ethnic councils, specifically exploring whether the commission and councils are strategically aligned to help the RCA make continued progress in its commitment to a multicultural future freed from racism. While the CCO does not have any action items resulting from the initial conversations, the commission affirms the desire for greater collaboration between the general secretary, CORE, and the racial/ethnic councils.

Pandemic-Initiated Inquiries from General Synod Officers and GSC Staff

The commission received many inquiries related to application or interpretation of the BCO in the peculiar circumstances resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the decision not to convene the 2020 General Synod. What follows is a summary of some of the more significant advisory responses provided by the commission.

Adoption of General Synod Assessment Amount for 2021

While the General Synod bylaws give the General Synod Council (GSC) the responsibility of proposing an assessment amount to the General Synod (BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6c [2019 edition, p. 108]), it is the General Synod’s authority to approve the assessment amount. GSC staff asked whether it was appropriate, if the General Synod could not meet in 2020, for the GSC, acting in its capacity as the executive committee of the General Synod, to adopt an assessment amount for 2021.

The commission advised that while the proposed course of action was less than ideal, it may be appropriate under the unique circumstances described. The commission also encouraged the GSC to limit its action to a continuation of assessments for the General Synod Council, Board of Benefits Services, and Theological Education, to not exceed the amounts for those categories established for 2020 by the 2019 General Synod, and to seek ratification of the amount at the next session of General Synod.

Approval of Church Growth Fund Bylaws Amendment

GSC staff asked whether it was appropriate for the GSC, acting in its capacity as the executive committee of the General Synod, to approve amendments presented by the Church Growth Fund Board to its bylaws, with the following General Synod ratifying such actions.

Because the Church Growth Fund bylaws state that they “may be amended by a majority vote of the voting directors after such proposed amendments have been approved by a majority vote of the General Synod” (emphasis added), the commission concluded that it seemed
inappropriate for the GSC to act on behalf of the General Synod to approve a proposed amendment to the Church Growth Fund bylaws.

**Process for Calling a Special Session of General Synod**

GSC staff informed the commission that after the 2020 session of the General Synod was canceled, questions arose regarding when and how a special session of the General Synod may be called. Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 4, Section 2 of the *BCO* (2019 edition, p. 70) reads:

> The president of the General Synod shall call a special session of the synod at a place determined by the president, vice president and the general secretary of the synod upon the joint application of three ministers and three elders from each of the regional synods, all of them serving currently as accredited delegates to the General Synod. Three weeks' notice of the session shall be given to the members of the synod, such notice to state the purpose of the session.

The commission discussed whether this section describes the only circumstance under which a special session may be called, or instead describes a set of circumstances under which a special session *must* be called but not to the exclusion of other situations under which a special session *may* be called. Two key points in our review persuaded the commission to advise that the process described is the *only* circumstance under which a special session may (and consequently must) be called. One, the fourth Principle of Interpretation in Robert’s Rules of Order, which suggests, “If the bylaws authorize certain things specifically, other things of the same class are thereby prohibited” (*Robert’s Rules of Order*, 12th edition, pp. 624ff). Since no other method of calling a special session is authorized, it follows that all other methods are prohibited, which is further supported by the other: Al Janssen’s argument in *Constitutional Theology* that the “imposing conditions” of calling a special session are appropriate given the “daunting and expensive task” of gathering a special session (second edition, p. 229).

**Publication and Printing of a 2020 Edition of the BCO**

Since the 2020 General Synod was not in session to take final declarative action on classis-approved amendments to the Constitution or to second favorable action on amendments to the bylaws and Special Rules of Order of the General Synod, there were no substantive changes to the *BCO*. Therefore, the commission advised GSC staff that publication and printing of a 2020 edition did not seem necessary.

The next edition of the *BCO* will include a glossary that has already been available for many years on the RCA website. Howard Moths, a current member of the commission, originally authored the glossary in 2003. The commission updated the glossary and will continue to do so, including it in future printed editions. In so doing, the glossary is not intended to have any constitutional authority; rather, like the explanatory notes to the disciplinary procedures and the sections entitled “An Introduction to the *Book of Church Order*” and “How to Use the *Book of Church Order*” (also updated), the commission believes the glossary serves as a helpful tool for readers of the *BCO*. The glossary and the sections “An Introduction to the *Book of Church Order*” and “How to Use the *Book of Church Order*” are not included in the digital version of the *BCO*, but are available as separate downloadable items at [www.rca.org/bco](http://www.rca.org/bco).
Scenario Planning for General Synod 2021

Over the past year, it became ever so clear that our polity, far from perfect (just as we all are), was certainly not written with a global pandemic in mind. The commission is profoundly grateful to the General Synod officers, the General Synod Council, and GSC staff for their tireless effort to effectively convene the stated session of General Synod in 2021 and for their creative and careful consideration of a wide range of details and decisions pertaining to the possible scenarios.

The commission advised that an electronic meeting of General Synod would not be permissible, because the bylaws of the General Synod specify that the rules of order shall be those set forth in *Robert’s Rules of Order* (cf. *BCO*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 10 [2019 edition, p. 124]), and the most recent edition of *Robert’s Rules of Order* (12th edition, September 2020) continues to require that an organization’s bylaws expressly permit electronic meetings (which the General Synod’s do not). The commission further advised that a hybrid meeting of General Synod—with some delegates attending in person and others attending electronically from satellite locations—might be permissible under a specific set of circumstances, without offering comment on the advisability of such an option.

Given the significance of the decision regarding the 2021 General Synod meeting, the commission encouraged a broad conversation to listen and to build trust and agreement in the process, similar to how a consistory might “endeavor to learn the mind of the congregation” (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 3 [2019 edition, p. 14], regarding calling a minister) or a classis committee might “endeavor to ascertain the will of the congregation” (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Section 4c [2019 edition, p. 41], regarding a petition to transfer denominations). That suggestion played a part in General Synod president EJ de Waard and vice president Phil Assink convening an advisory Zoom meeting with classis presidents (or other officer representing the classis) in February 2021, and that meeting served as the real-time experiment that resulted in the commission’s proposal for a Committee on Emergencies.

Committee on Emergencies

We’ve all learned so much on so many fronts in light of the challenges we’ve faced because of the disruptions caused by the pandemic. Understanding the obstacles we encountered as a denomination in the last year because of our inability to gather, the commission worked on a recommendation that would establish some emergency provisions going forward—but Lord, hear our prayer: be merciful to us such that we won’t need to use them! In proposing a Committee on Emergencies, the commission focused on three guiding considerations: appropriate circumstances, composition of the committee, and specified but limited authority.

*Appropriate Circumstances.* What kind of emergencies qualify, and who may decide such an emergency exists to convene a meeting of the committee? The language proposed in the amendment is sufficiently broad to avoid detailing every possible type of emergency. Whenever a disaster or crisis would prevent the General Synod from meeting or substantially disrupt plans to hold a session at a particular place, it seems appropriate for such a committee to be convened. No specific advance notice is stated in the proposed amendment in order to allow the meeting to be called as soon as possible. For example, if a fire destroys the venue hosting the General Synod one week before the meeting, the Committee on Emergencies will need to meet right away to postpone the session. The broadness of the type of emergency and the lack of stated notice are balanced by the requirement of sufficient reason and notice to gain a quorum.
Composition of the Committee. Who should have the authority to act when the General Synod cannot meet because of an emergency? No group in the RCA presently has authority to postpone an annual meeting of the General Synod without relying on a pro-forma gathering and a particular set of procedural motions. It seems wise that the Committee on Emergencies would include General Synod officers, as they are elected by the assembly and are expected to provide leadership to the assembly. While the BCO names three officers of the General Synod: the president, the vice president, and the general secretary (cf. BCO, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 5 [2019 edition, pp. 70-71]), this group is too small to make major decisions.

How about the General Synod Council? The GSC acts “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” (BCO, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 7, Section 1 [2019 edition, p. 71]). In many organizations, the executive committee would be the logical group to make decisions regarding the postponement of a meeting. While the GSC includes a representative from each of the regional synods, it does not include a representative from every classis.

Given that (1) the General Synod is primarily populated by delegates sent from the classes, (2) the process to adopt amendments to the RCA Constitution requires votes from several classes, but not from other assemblies, and (3) listening to historical precedence and contemporary feedback desiring classis input, the commission believes that a gathering of one officer from each of the classes is the best way to approximate a smaller gathering of the assembly. Although it would be possible to expand the membership to include an officer of each regional synod, the regional synods are likewise composed of delegates from the classes, which are already represented. This limitation also helps keep the size of the group manageable, especially for an electronic meeting.

Specified but Limited Authority. What authority should be granted to the Committee on Emergencies? While the group of classis presidents convened in February 2021 was advisory, to have purpose, the Committee on Emergencies should have some authority to take specified, but limited, actions. Postponing the stated session and setting the date and place for the postponed session (so that a pro forma meeting is not required) provides the essential starting point. Based on last year’s experience, the commission also believes the authority to take actions such as setting the General Synod assessment and approving the Commission on Nominations report would be helpful, subject to a higher voting threshold and ratification by the next session of the General Synod.

The commission prepared two recommendations to form and enable a Committee on Emergencies. The first is to form the Committee on Emergencies in the General Synod bylaws. The commission makes the following recommendation:

**CO 21-3**

To approve the following amendment to the *The Bylaws of the General Synod* by adding a new Article 10 to Chapter 3, Part I (2019 edition, at p. 124) and re-numbering the subsequent articles, for submission to the next General Synod for final approval (additions are underlined):

*Article 10. Committee on Emergencies*
Sec. 1. Purpose

A Committee on Emergencies shall be convened whenever necessary in response to a disaster or crisis that would prevent the General Synod from meeting in its stated session or disrupt plans to hold a session at a particular venue, such as a fire, natural disaster, or another sudden calamity.

Sec. 2. Membership

The membership of the committee shall consist of the following:

a. The president, vice president, and the immediate past president of General Synod, *ex officio* and without vote.

b. The president of each classis, or if unable to attend, the classis may designate its vice president or stated clerk.

c. The general secretary of the General Synod, *ex officio* and without vote.

Sec. 3. Meetings

a. The committee shall be convened by the president of General Synod, in the event of an emergency as described in Section 1. In the event of a disaster that makes his or her participation impossible, the basis of succession for convening shall be: (a) president, (b) vice president, (c) immediate past president of General Synod.

b. Meetings may be held using electronic means as long as the meeting allows for simultaneous aural communication among all participating members.

c. The presence of a majority of the classis representatives is required to constitute a quorum.

d. This committee is empowered to postpone a session of the General Synod and schedule the time and place for the next session by a two-thirds majority vote of the classis representatives present and voting.

e. By the vote of three quarters of the entire committee membership, this committee may also take any of the following actions: set the amount of the General Synod assessment, act on recommendations offered by the Commission on Nominations, or other actions that may be required for the General Synod to function.
f. The convener shall make a report to the next session of the General Synod of all meetings held and actions taken under this emergency provision. At the next session of the General Synod, all decisions of this committee must be reviewed and ratified to continue to have effect.

The second recommendation enables the Committee on Emergencies in the Constitution. The commission had separately noted that the decision not to convene General Synod in June 2020 at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa, unintentionally created a peculiar conundrum given the precarious language of the current *BCO* requirement that the “previous session” of the General Synod shall determine the time and place of the next session. At least in recent years, the practice has been that the GSC includes the time and place of the next session of the General Synod in its report, and no official action is taken by the assembly—in some reports, the details for the next two General Synods are reported (e.g., *MGS 2017*, p. 44); in others, the details are reported for only the following year (e.g., *MGS 2018*, p. 42). The commission believes this is reasonable but encourages the practice of reporting at least two years at a time.

Since the commission’s proposal to clarify the requirements for determining stated sessions of the General Synod amends the same section of the *BCO* in which the Committee on Emergencies should be enabled, the commission combined the proposed amendments and presents the following recommendation:

**CO 21-4**

To adopt the following amendment to the *Book of Church Order*

Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 4, Section 1 (2019 edition, p. 69) for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

**Article 4. Sessions and Meetings of General Synod**

Sec. 1. The General Synod shall meet no less frequently than annually at such time and place as shall have been determined was either reported by the Executive Committee at its previous stated session or determined by the Committee on Emergencies. All meetings of the General Synod shall begin and end with prayer.

**Process for Amending the RCA Constitution and General Synod Bylaws**

During consideration of various scenarios for General Synod 2020 and 2021, the commission was asked to advise whether or not amendments to the Constitution and General Synod bylaws could be made at a special session of the General Synod. While the current language of the *BCO* is clear that amendments can only be adopted at a stated session, it is perhaps less clear whether the final declarative resolution on an amendment can only occur at a stated session or if it can occur at a special session. The commission advised that both adoption and final declarative resolution can only occur at stated sessions of the General Synod. The slight ambiguity was unintentionally introduced when this section was amended in 2018–2019, dividing what was previously one paragraph into three separate subsections and resulting in the lack of specificity in subsection c to the extent that it was read independent of subsection a. Therefore, the commission presents the following recommendation:
To adopt the following amendments to the Book of Church Order “Rules and Amendments of The Government of the Reformed Church in America and Disciplinary Procedures” (2019 edition, p. 75) for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

Sec. 2.

a. Amendments to the Government, the Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures, the Formularies, and the Liturgy and the Directory for Worship shall be made only upon adoption by the General Synod at a stated session, with recommendation to the classes for approval.

b. At least two-thirds of the classes shall approve a proposed amendment in order to secure its adoption. Only classes whose delegates were eligible to be seated at the General Synod at which the amendment was adopted are eligible to vote on the recommendation for approval.

c. If an amendment is approved by the classes, the General Synod, at its next stated session, may pass a final declarative resolution on the amendment at its discretion. When the declarative action has taken place, the amendment shall become effective.

During its review, the commission also noted that consideration of classis-approved amendments for final declarative resolution is not currently included as part of the required agenda of General Synod. Therefore, the commission presents the following recommendation:

To approve the following amendment to the Special Rules of Order of the General Synod by adding a new subsection to Chapter 3, Part II, Article 1, Section 2 (2019 edition, pp. 125-126) and re-lettering the subsequent subsections, for submission to the next General Synod for final approval (additions are underlined):

Sec. 2. Agenda of General Synod

a. Disposition of Communications

b. Final Declarative Resolutions on Classis-Approved Constitutional Amendments

Declaration for Ministers of Word and Sacrament (Formulary No. 3)

The commission proposed an amendment to the 2019 General Synod that amended the parenthetical instruction at the beginning of Formulary No. 3 to clarify that ordination and installation are not the only circumstances under which a minister may read the declaration. The amendment was adopted, and it has been approved by at least two-thirds of the classes. It was
brought to the commission’s attention that the phrase as amended (“at the time of reception into the classis”) continues to omit some circumstances under which a minister of Word and sacrament reads the declaration (e.g., when a minister is installed at another church within the same classis). The commission discussed the matter but concluded that no further amendments to the Formulary would be proposed at this time.

**Discipline of a Member of a Local Church**

This recommendation originally appeared in the commission’s report to the 2020 General Synod. Discipline of a member of a local church is discussed in *BCO* Chapter 2, Part I, Article 3, Section 1 (2019 edition, pp. 79-80). The section does not state that a charge must be filed to commence the disciplinary process beyond admonishment and rebuke. The commission concluded that the section should require a charge be filed in accordance with *BCO* Chapter 2, Part I, Article 1, Section 2 (2019 edition, p. 79), and, therefore, presents the following recommendation:

**CO 21-7**

*To adopt the following amendments to the *Book of Church Order* Chapter 2, Part I, Article 3, Section 1 (2019 edition, pp. 79-80) for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined):*

**Sec. 1. Discipline of a Member**

All members of a local church are under its care and are subject to its government and discipline, as administered by its board of elders. The board of elders may, upon formal presentation and trying of a charge, suspend from the privileges of membership in the church a member who persistently rejects its admonitions or rebukes. If a member fails to show marks of repentance after suspension, the board of elders may, with permission of the classis, proceed to excommunication. The board of elders shall publicly notify the congregation of its intention to excommunicate, and later, after a hearing, of its final action. The board may omit such public notification, if such omission will not impair the purposes of discipline and will best serve the spiritual welfare of the congregation. Such omission shall require a two-thirds vote of the board of elders.

**Commission on Theology Review of Doctrinally Substantive Matters**

During the joint commission meetings in the fall of 2019, the CCO moderator had a discussion with the moderator of the Commission on Theology and agreed that the Commission on Theology should send a resource person to the advisory committees of the General Synod. Liz Brand (director of General Synod operations) has agreed to help facilitate this arrangement. If this arrangement does not appear to be effective, the commission may consider alternatives, such as recommending to the General Synod the creation of a separate advisory committee on theology.
Revisions to *The Orderly Exchange of Ordained Ministers of Word and Sacrament*

At its January 2020 meeting, the commission adopted revisions to the RCA section of the document *The Orderly Exchange of Ordained Ministers of Word and Sacrament* as established by *A Formula of Agreement*. Following adoption, the commission forwarded the revised document to the RCA’s ecumenical associate for transmission to the other parties to *A Formula of Agreement*. Additionally, the revised document was uploaded to the stated clerks’ private page hosted on the RCA website for use by the classes.

**Consultations on Other Matters**

In June 2021, the commission provided initial advisory responses to the following consultations received: (1) from the African American Black Council and the General Synod Council, regarding potential avenues to implement an anti-racism policy within our order; (2) from the Pastoral Formation Oversight Board, regarding a proposal to revise the role and responsibilities of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency; and (3) from Western Theological Seminary, regarding the process required to approve amendments to its articles of incorporation and bylaws, and ancillary questions raised. In each case, the commission identified additional matters for clarification, respectfully requesting that the councils and boards further work to resolve the questions and seek conceptual approval from the General Synod before beginning detailed work on proposing specific amendments to the *BCO* where necessary.

**Editorial Changes to the *Book of Church Order***

The commission agreed that the following editorial, non-substantive changes will be reflected in the next edition of the *BCO*:

1. Traditionally the formularies have used blanks to indicate places where information must be inserted, but the adopted new Formulary 17 instead uses brackets around a word or phrase to describe information that must be inserted. The commission agreed that all formularies should contain bracketed descriptions wherever language must be inserted and provided the updated versions to GSC Communication and Production Services staff.

2. The text of the *BCO* uses the term “Formulary” while the “References to the Minutes of General Synod” (which discusses formularies beginning at page 169 of the 2019 edition) uses the term “Formula.” The commission discussed whether one of these two terms should be used consistently throughout the *BCO* (including such things as its related tables, indexes, and references), and agreed that the term “Formulary” should be used in the “References to the Minutes of General Synod.”

3. The commission voted to delete an incorrect citation in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 9, Section 5 regarding supersession of a consistory because of its close proximity to the section cited.

4. The commission agreed to eliminate from the guide captioned “How to Use the *Book of Church Order*** the reference to Faith Alive Christian Resources (and its related contact information) from the section describing how to acquire a copy of the book *Constitutional Theology* and the reference to the New York office from the section describing how to contact the commission.
5. The commission agreed to eliminate the word “the” from the phrase “candidate for the ministry” wherever it appears in the BCO. This will make the phrases consistent with the heading of BCO Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11. Locations in the BCO affected by this editorial change are the Preamble; Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11, Section 1 (2019 edition, p. 44); Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11, Section 2 (2019 edition, pp. 44-45); Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11, Section 3 (2019 edition, p. 45); twice in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 1 (2019 edition, p. 46); Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 2a (2019 edition, pp. 46-47); Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 3 (2019 edition, pp. 47-48); Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 4 (2019 edition, pp. 48-49); Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 2 (2019 edition, p. 49); Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 3 (2019 edition, p. 49); Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 8 (2019 edition, p. 68); and Formulary No. 1 (2019 edition, p. 131).

6. In Chapter 1, Part I, Article 1, Section 1b, the commission agreed to delete “(hereafter “governing body”).”

7. In Chapter 1, Part I, Article 1, Section 1c, the commission replaced “and it” with “which.”

8. The commission agreed to capitalize “master of divinity” in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 2b (2019 edition, p. 47) and Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 4b (2019 edition, p. 49), so that it is consistent as “Master of Divinity” everywhere it appears in the BCO.

9. The commission agreed to capitalize “certificate of fitness for ministry” in Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 8, Section 7 (2019 edition, p. 73) and Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 8, Section 8 (2019 edition, p. 73), so that it is consistent as “Certificate of Fitness for Ministry” each of the 20 times it appears in the BCO.

10. If the amended Formulary No. 9 receives a favorable final declarative resolution from the 2021 General Synod, the two headings “Dismission of a Minister” and “Receipt of a Minister” should be italicized before publication.

Elections and Appointments

The commission elected Joshua Scheid to serve as both its moderator and secretary for the annual term beginning July 1, 2021. Additionally, the commission appointed Howard Moths to serve as its corresponding delegate to the 2021 General Synod.

Giving Thanks

The commission sincerely appreciates Philip De Koster, an attorney from Hull, Iowa, and Linda Gold, a minister from Fonda, New York, for their six years of faithful contribution to the work of the CCO and the ministry of the RCA. The commission is deeply grateful for Paul Karssen, staff to the commission, for his invaluable guidance and support.

Respectfully submitted,
Joshua Scheid, moderator