

REPORT OF THE COUNCIL FOR HISPANIC MINISTRIES

To the General Synod Council (GSC) of the Reformed Church in America (RCA), peace and greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The Council for Hispanic Ministries submits the following as our report to GSC for the year of 2020.

The Council for Hispanic Ministries (CHM) has continued to work toward the collective vision and voice expression of our constituents as well as to advocate for the rights of our people. Amid the divisive social and political climate, we continue to work to ensure that we speak up and work together on positive strategies to resolve issues that separate us all as God's people. The pandemic that we all have lived through in 2020 has interrupted and changed so many aspects of life and ministry. Like every group in our society, the pandemic affected people in Hispanic communities and congregations, from church members to ministers. The loss and pain has touched many lives. Facing these realities and the continued growth of the Hispanic population in America, we adapted and focused on the care and growth of our current churches, our church planting work, and the connection of all our Hispanic pastors as part of our efforts and work this past year.

Fifth Annual Hispanic Summit

In collaboration with Church Multiplication, the RCA Hispanic Church Planting Summit took place in Orlando, Florida, on March 5–6, 2020. The meeting was a great success. This year, the summit helped to gather more than 90 leaders, which included church planters, parent church leaders, next generation Hispanic leaders, and classis and regional synod leaders. The focus was providing helpful tools for church planters in the process of building up their ministries. We also focused on future planters and their supporting churches and/or entities, ensuring they have the best foundations for their future plants. Immediate feedback shared with us included new callings for some current seminary students to plant and for some existing churches to reach out to the Hispanic communities around them. This summit would be the last in-person event in 2020 for the Hispanic Council.

Support and Training

CHM continued support to help pastors and church plants in Florida with training and preparation for classis examination as well as support in translation during the exams. There were also training programs for commissioned pastors in Texas. Examinations in both Florida and Texas resulted in receiving commissioned pastors and the transfer of ordained ministers that continue the growth of the RCA. In June, 16 new congregations and their planters were approved and supported by three classes: Central Plains Classis, Clasis de las Naciones (Classis of the Nations), and Central California Classis, all being spearheaded by the training and work of Andres Serrano, coordinator for Hispanic Ministries, and Fabio Sosa, who prepared and continues to prepare Hispanic pastors and leaders for ministry. The kingdom of God continues expanding, and the gospel is being shared with many as we respond to the need for Hispanic leaders and churches in the RCA.

Latin America

The cooperative work between the Council for Hispanic Ministries, the RCA, and Iglesia Reformada Dominicana (Dominican Reformed Church, IRD) continued to work toward achieving objectives that include the provision of assessments for pastors and leaders within the IRD. The

travel restrictions due to the pandemic affected some of the work, but, when the opportunity in December to travel opened up, Andres Serrano and Bruce Bugbee provided training to pastors of the IRD. The examinations that took place allowed for the ordinations of three ministers of Word and sacrament and four commissioned pastors. The general secretary, Eddy Alemán, and the current president of the Hispanic Council were present for this. Their presence was of great support and motivation for the IRD and the leaders within it who are being trained for ministry work and for the preparation of more leaders that can teach Reformed theology to the future congregations that will be part of the IRD. There is a great need for the gospel in Latin America, as well as many other parts of the world, and we will continue to look for the doors the Holy Spirit may open for the opportunity to share the gospel!

Zoom Prayers, Training, and Connections

The reality of a global pandemic that we all had to face as of March 2020 changed things as we knew them. Congregations could not gather to worship, weekly meetings were canceled, and technology took the forefront of how we all connected to each other more than ever. Within the Hispanic community, the lack of communal gatherings was not something that was easy for our churches to adapt to, as gatherings are a foundation for Hispanic church communities and families. Many Hispanic congregations struggled with the access and/or use of technology to continue weekly services as well as being able to receive offerings and tithes electronically for continued support of their ministries. The Hispanic Council, along with support of the general secretary, began weekly prayer Zoom meetings with the RCA Hispanic pastors and leaders, which allowed the communal sharing of ideas and best practices around church electronic services for both financial and social media connections to their congregation and communities. In the process, training for the use of Zoom and other streaming platforms were set in order to help our congregations continue doing ministry during the pandemic lockdown in their respective cities. The weekly gatherings have continued to share up-to-date information and training with all our Hispanic churches as we continue to live through the current pandemic.

Partnership with Western and New Brunswick Theological Seminaries

The Hispanic Council has supported the work of both Western (WTS) and New Brunswick (NBTS) Theological Seminaries and their efforts to be more accessible to Hispanic students with new courses and programs in Spanish. Summer 2020 saw the completion of the first WTS Hispanic cohort in the certificate program; the program prepares its participants in the BCO's ten competencies for commissioned pastors (Chapter 1, Part II, Article 17, Section 2b [2019 ed., p. 59]) and also serves as credits for those who continue in their scholastic path toward their MDiv and ordination.

This past year, NBTS partnered with the Hispanic Council to create the WELL Program with a heart for urban ministry, spiritual outreach, and community transformation, that will assist Hispanic pastors in launching new churches and leading congregations in urban areas. The WELL Program specifics were developed through the partnership with the Hispanic Council and other affiliates and are based on feedback from listening sessions, which, in the end, prompted the name. The primary aim for the project is to help participating pastors to thrive toward WELL-ness in self-care, leadership, authentic relationships, and vitality. The council will continue to work and endorse the continued education of our Hispanic leaders and pastors through our seminaries and their programs.

Joint Councils and 46th Annual Hispanic Assembly (Postponed)

The Council for Hispanic Ministries had its 46th annual meeting scheduled for October 2020. A big part of the planning was a joint meeting with all the other RCA councils to look toward the future of the RCA and the ministries of our minority congregations. Both were postponed because of the pandemic lockdown, but the CHM still met through Zoom to follow the directives of its bylaws in appointing a new executive committee. The Zoom gathering was a success, and we were able to appoint the team that currently serves the CHM. We look forward to when we can once again meet in person and finally connect, not just as the CHM but with the other councils as well.

In Conclusion

We are thankful for the work and support of the general secretary, the office of Global Mission, the office of Church Multiplication, the coordinator for Hispanic Ministries, and the General Synod Council for the work done for the Hispanic people of the Reformed Church in America and beyond through this difficult and unprecedented year. We pray for the RCA and work toward its future in the expanding of the gospel. As the Hispanic community continues to grow in America, the CHM will work to reflect that same growth within the RCA. Though the pandemic slowed things down, we look forward toward a blessed future and seeing the fruits that will come from the education, work, and training that continues to take place, as well as what new things our Hispanic Assembly will bring with the coming together of the other councils of the RCA. With much love, many prayers, and our faith in God for the future, we submit this report to you and pray for the Lord's blessings and for the anointing of the Holy Spirit to be with all of us as we continue this journey of transformation to live and love like Jesus.

Respectfully submitted,
The Executive Committee of the Council for Hispanic Ministries