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. It also received and read the 2020 minutes of the regional synods of Albany, Canada, the Far West, the Great Lakes, the Heartland, and Mid-America. The regional synods of the Mid-Atlantics and New York reported that they did not meet, and thus there are no 2020 minutes from those assemblies.

GENERAL SYNOD MEETING

Referral of Business

The business of General Synod was assigned to the appropriate committees as presented in the General Synod Workbook.

EC 21-1
To approve the agenda and schedule of the General Synod as presented in the General Synod Workbook.

The Seating of Delegates

The bylaws of the General Synod require that a classis be current in the payment of its General Synod assessments before its delegates may be seated as members of the General Synod (BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 1, Section 1a [2019 edition, p. 105]). The general secretary will report on classes’ payments of General Synod assessments and will report whether there are any delegates who cannot be seated because of irregularities.

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 (BCO). The amendments are recorded in the 2019 Minutes of General Synod as noted. Forty-six classes were eligible to vote on these amendments (per BCO, Rules and Amendments of the Government of the Reformed Church in America and Disciplinary Procedures, Section 2b [2019 edition, p. 75]). As of August 15, 2021, two 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 44 classes, as reported in writing by the classes’ stated clerks, were as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book of Church Order Amendments</th>
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<th>Approved</th>
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<td>Affiliation of a Local Church with More Than One Denomination</td>
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<td>“Transferring” Ministers to Other Denominations</td>
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<td>General Synod Responsibilities Regarding Regional Synods</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Formulary No. 3, Declaration for Ministers of Word and Sacrament</td>
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<td>Permanent Record for Declarations</td>
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<td>Formulary No. 9, Certificate for Transfer of a Minister of Word and Sacrament</td>
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<td>Textual Reference to Formulary No. 9</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formulary No. 15, Provision for Articles of Incorporation for Congregations</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transfers of Licensed Candidates from One Classis to Another</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formulary No. 17 (New), Certificate of Transfer for a Licensed Candidate</td>
<td>2</td>
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EC 21-2
To declare Amendment 2 to be approved for incorporation into the 2021 Book of Church Order.

EC 21-3
To declare Amendment 3 to be approved for incorporation into the 2021 Book of Church Order.

EC 21-4
To declare Amendment 5 to be approved for incorporation into the 2021 Book of Church Order.

EC 21-5
To declare Amendment 6 to be approved for incorporation into the 2021 Book of Church Order.

EC 21-6
To declare Amendment 7 to be approved for incorporation into the 2021 Book of Church Order.

EC 21-7
To declare Amendment 8 to be approved for incorporation into the 2021 Book of Church Order.

EC 21-8
To declare Amendment 9 to be approved for incorporation into the 2021 Book of Church Order.

EC 21-9
To declare Amendment 10 to be approved for incorporation into the 2021 Book of Church Order.

EC 21-10
To declare Amendment 11 to be approved for incorporation into the 2021 Book of Church Order.

Amendments 1 and 4 did not receive the requisite approval of two-thirds of the classes and thus are not presented here for a final vote by the General Synod.

The 2019 General Synod also approved in first reading for recommendation to the next stated session of the General Synod the following amendment to the bylaws of the General Synod:


EC 21-11
To declare the Amendment to the Bylaws of the General Synod specified in W 19-1 adopted in first reading by the 2019 General
Synod to be approved for incorporation into the 2021 Bylaws of the General Synod.

Proposed Delay in Final Implementation of Covenant Shares

General Synod 2019 approved changes to the General Synod bylaws that would allow a change in the manner in which assessments are calculated to a percentage of income method from the per member method (EC 19-11, MGS 2019, p. 53). Changes to the General Synod bylaws require approval by two General Synods in order to become effective. The amendment process for the Bylaws and Special Rules of Order (BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 11 [2019 edition, p. 124]) says that both votes by the General Synod must occur at stated sessions. Because General Synod 2020 was postponed, the final vote of General Synod to make this bylaws change effective has not yet happened.

Because it is likely that a larger than normal number of congregations will be leaving the Reformed Church in America (RCA) in this next year, it seems wise to delay the implementation of covenant shares for at least another year in order to avoid increasing the complexity of an already complex situation. Staff has discussed this with the Commission on Church Order as well as with the General Synod officers.

A large number of congregations have indicated that they plan to leave the RCA or are considering leaving the RCA in the near future, and that it seems likely that many of these congregations will initiate their departure shortly after General Synod, meaning that if the covenant shares bylaws amendment were to receive its second vote at General Synod in October, it would be implemented in January 2022, in the same general time frame that many of the expected requests to withdraw from the RCA are likely to be processed by classes. In addition, the Vision 2020 Team plans to include in its proposal to General Synod an adjustment to the assessment payment timeline for departing churches both to account for the pandemic delay in consideration of the team’s recommendations as well as to make the payments more even regardless of when in the calendar year a congregation departs. The assessment billing for departing churches may be more complicated than the current process, and there are many unknowns regarding how many congregations will choose to withdraw from the denomination and when that will take place. Therefore, both staff and the officers believe it would be better to not add an additional complication by changing the methodology of calculating assessments from a per-member basis to a percentage of income–basis in this upcoming year, and we are proposing that the final approval of covenant shares be delayed. This would allow for a reassessment before the next session of General Synod as we see how things unfold to determine whether it would be advisable to continue to wait to implement the covenant shares model or whether it makes sense to proceed with that second vote.

While traditionally amendments to the General Synod bylaws are presented to two immediately successive General Synods, the wording in the BCO does not require that the two votes happen at immediately successive General Synods. Chapter 3, Part I, Article 11 says that “the Bylaws and Special Rules of Order of the General Synod may be amended at any stated meeting of the synod by vote of the majority of all the members present, provided that due notice of the proposed amendment has been submitted in writing at a previous session and has received the approval of a majority at that session” (2019 edition, p. 124, italics added). Because the wording is “a” previous session and not “the” previous session, the Commission on Church Order has agreed that it is permissible to delay the second vote.
Because it is a departure from how votes on bylaws changes typically proceed, the commission recommended that the full General Synod assembly should agree to delay the second vote rather than having GSC or anyone else make the decision to do so. In addition, at the suggestion of the Commission on Church Order, this motion to delay will be placed toward the end of the General Synod’s agenda, so that, though the General Synod may decide it does not wish to delay the second vote on the bylaws change, the per-member assessment amount for 2022 would already be set, so the first year of covenant shares would begin in 2023.

The GSC recommends the following to the 2021 General Synod:

EC 21-12
To delay until the next stated session of General Synod the second vote on the change to the General Synod bylaws in Book of Church Order Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6c (2019 edition, p. 108) to make covenant shares effective.

Ratification of 2021 Assessment Amount

Because General Synod was unable to meet in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was unable to approve the 2021 assessment amount proposed by the GSC. The General Synod Council and staff sought the opinion of the Commission on Church Order on whether the GSC could approve the assessment amount in the absence of another option. While the General Synod bylaws give the 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]), they do not provide the authority for the GSC to approve the assessment amount. The BCO makes no provision for how to approve assessments in the event that the General Synod is unable to meet. The Commission on Church Order agreed that having GSC approve the assessment amount in the event the General Synod was unable to meet was “less than ideal, but likely the only option.” The commission encouraged GSC to limit its action to a continuation of the assessment amounts approved in previous years, with no increases over the amounts approved by the 2019 General Synod, and also indicated that the GSC should seek ratification of this action by the next meeting of the General Synod.

In the absence of a 2020 General Synod meeting, the GSC approved the following motion at its June 2020 Zoom meeting:

GSC 20-33
To adopt a General Synod assessment amount for 2021 of $52.01 per confessing member (including $46.10 for the General Synod Council assessment, $2.00 for the BOBS assistance fund, and $3.91 for theological education), which reflects no increase over the 2020 numbers, given that there is no alternative for approving an assessment for 2021 since the General Synod will not meet again before its stated session in June 2021; and further;

To seek ratification of this action by General Synod 2021.

Consequently, the GSC now seeks ratification by the General Synod of this action.
EC 21-13
To ratify the action of the General Synod Council in approving the General Synod assessment amount of $52.01 per confessing member, given that there was no alternative for approving an assessment for 2021 in the absence of a meeting of the General Synod in 2020.

Ratification of Ad-Interim Appointments of Hope College Trustees

While the BCO gives the GSC the responsibility to fill vacancies on General Synod agencies and commissions in an ad-interim capacity, subject to the approval of the General Synod at its next regular session (BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 4, Section 3 [2019 edition, p. 110]), it does not give the GSC the responsibility or authority to make ad-interim appointments to the boards of trustees of the RCA colleges. Thus, in the absence of a General Synod meeting in 2020, open General Synod positions on the RCA colleges’ boards of trustees were unable to be filled.

The president of Hope College sent a communication to the GSC in September 2020, asking for GSC to provide and affirm three ad-interim General Synod candidates for their board of trustees whose terms were to begin in July 2020, since, in the absence of a 2020 General Synod meeting, there was no way for the General Synod to do so.

GSC took the following action at its October 2020 meeting:

GSC 20-38
To appoint ad interim Mike Pitsenberger, Eddy Alemán, and Eugene Sutton to the Hope College Board of Trustees, Class of 2023, given that the postponement of General Synod 2020 meant that the General Synod was unable to approve these appointments, and further;

To seek ratification of this action by the next regular session of General Synod.

Consequently, the GSC now seeks ratification by the General Synod of this action.

EC 21-14
To ratify the action of the GSC in approving ad-interim appointments to the Hope College Board of Trustees for 2020, given that General Synod 2020 was unable to meet to elect new trustees.

Appointment of the General Synod Treasurer

In accordance with its corporate bylaws, the General Synod must annually appoint a treasurer of the General Synod corporation (Corporate Bylaws of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, Article V).

EC 21-15
To appoint Jillisa Teitsma as treasurer of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America.
General Synod Meeting Location

The location for the next annual meeting of the General Synod in 2022 is Central College in Pella, Iowa. The 2022 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 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 2020–September 2021)

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 supervisor, 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. This has become more important as we have more and more employees working remotely. 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 11 and 23. Grade 11 represents the most entry-level positions, and Grade 23 represents the highest level, held by the general secretary. The majority of positions fall within the middle ranges (14 to 17).
Staff are evaluated annually by their supervisors. 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 the 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.

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<th>GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN</th>
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<td>2020–2021</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANNUALIZED SALARY RATE</td>
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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 and to 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 was begun in spring 2018.

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

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

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 2021 General Synod, upon the recommendation of its review committee:
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 that the whole church could benefit from watching their commission at work in dealing with diversity.

GSC voted to recommend the following to the 2021 General Synod, upon the recommendation of its review committee:

**EC 21-17**

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.

**Addisville Reformed Church Transfer Request**

The consistory of Addisville Reformed Church is requesting a transfer from the Classis of Delaware-Raritan to the Classis of Central California. Because this transfer is across regional synod lines, according to the *Book of Church Order*, it must be effected by the General Synod.

The consistory sent a request to the General Synod Council to bring a recommendation to the General Synod on its behalf. The consistory’s communication to the GSC indicated that it is seeking this transfer because it feels that there are several areas in which Addisville Reformed Church (ARC) and the Classis of Delaware-Raritan are “not aligned and gradually have grown apart as we have evolved over many years. ARC remains fully committed to the Reformed Church in America, and we pray God’s blessings of peace and grace to be with our brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ and to the ministries of other churches in the D-R Classis.”

GSC received communication from the Classis of Delaware-Raritan, the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantic, and the Regional Synod of the Far West that they consent to this transfer. Specific confirmation of consent was not received from the Classis of Central California, but the Far West communication indicated that the Classis of Central California is also in favor of the transfer.
In response to this request, the General Synod Council voted to bring the following motion to the 2021 General Synod:

EC 21-18
To transfer Addisville Reformed Church in Richboro, Pennsylvania, with all of its assets and liabilities, from the Classis of Delaware-Raritan in the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics to the Classis of Central California in the Regional Synod of the Far West.

Recommendations on Behalf of the African American Black Council

At its March 2021 meeting, at the request of the African American Black Council (AABC), the General Synod Council voted to bring the following recommendations from the African American Black Council to the General Synod (more information can be found in the report of the AABC):

EC 21-19
To urge RCA assemblies to provide an annual one-day event dedicated to antiracism.

EC 21-20
To urge RCA assemblies and institutions to provide regular antiracism training for students, faculty, and staff, to integrate racially and culturally diverse voices in the curriculum, and to revisit hiring policies to ensure that faculty and staff are racially diverse.

EC 21-21
To urge General Synod delegates to consider African Americans and people of color for General Synod officer positions.

EC 21-22
To commend the African American Black Council for its historical and ongoing commitment to holding up antiracism to the church and holding the RCA accountable for deficiencies.

Review of Investment Restrictions

At the GSC meeting in March 2021, the GSC passed this motion:

To appoint a small group of GSC members to study the GSC’s investment policies to determine whether armaments (and potentially other ESG [environmental, social, and governance] items) should be added to the investment policy statements and bring a report and recommendation to GSC in June. (GSC 21-14)

The moderator of the GSC asked Jillisa Teitsma, the RCA’s chief financial officer, to work with GSC members Margaret Ritchie and Kent McHeard to bring a recommendation to the GSC. This group met and discussed additional restrictions to add to the GSC investment policy statements.
Currently Restricted Investments

The investment alternatives chosen in the Endowment Fund must seek to avoid investments in the securities of companies whose principal business involves the production or distribution of tobacco or alcohol, the business of gambling, or the business of for-profit prisons. The socially responsible investment guidelines are not intended to be a “zero tolerance” policy and the determination, implementation, and ongoing monitoring of these guidelines shall be the sole responsibility of the Investment Manager hired to oversee these investments.

The preceding excerpt is from the GSC Endowment Fund Investment Policy Statement (IPS). Each GSC, CGF, and BOBS IPS for reserves and endowments contains the same or similar language. The BOBS retirement plan is managed differently. Because the institution is not the beneficiary of the funds, we do not screen all funds offered by Fidelity. Instead there are ESG funds offered in the fund lineup.

Proposed Additions to Restricted Investments

The small group recommended to GSC that these items to be added to the list of restricted investments:

Adult entertainment and pornography

Reasons for restriction:
1. Psalm 101:3a: “I will not set before my eyes anything that is base…” Pornography and adult entertainment places base or wicked (another way this word is translated; in Hebrew, it is the word Bel-e-yah-al) images and words that demean and pervert the natural use of human sexual relations.
2. Profits from adult entertainment and pornography come from the selling and display of offensive images.
3. Pornography and adult entertainment defy the ways in which Scripture portrays godly living.
4. Both small crime and organized crime organizations are often behind procuring, producing, and distributing these materials.
5. Vulnerable persons are victimized.

Firearms and military weapons

Reasons for restriction:
1. In 1977, the General Synod spoke out in favor of gun control. It adopted three resolutions, including:
   - To request the Congress of the U.S. to ban the manufacture and sale of handguns for civilian ownership.
   - To urge the members of the Reformed Church in America to render the handguns in their homes inoperable and/or enact stringent safety precautions for all weapons.
• To urge the constituency of the Reformed Church in America to seek refinement and strict enforcement of present laws regulating gun ownership and use (MGS 1977, pp. 200-201).

2. When Jesus was being arrested in Gethsemane and Peter struck the slave of the high priest with his sword (military weapon), Jesus said to him “Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Matthew 26:52).

3. We have seen in recent current events the destructive results of assault weapons in the many mass shootings in the U.S.

4. With the recent war between Azerbaijan and Armenia, Canadian citizens became painfully aware that Canada had supplied drone technology to Turkey, which was then used so devastatingly on Artsakh. Israel supplied a great deal of military hardware directly to Azerbaijan. The U.S. supplies military technology to Saudi Arabia, which is being used against Yemen. At least the Christian church should not profit from war.

5. Second Corinthians 10:3. For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. Paul was most likely using this example metaphorically to make a point about how he was dealing with the Corinthians; this doesn’t mean it cannot be used literally.

6. The prophet also warns Jerusalem and Judah in Isaiah 31:1 (NIV): “Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots and in the great strength of their horsemen, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the Lord.”

7. Arms deals, even when “legal,” are probably the most corrupt activities our governments involve themselves in. Bribery is endemic.

*Other Items Discussed*

The small group discussed other areas, including fossil fuels and nuclear energy, which could be restricted but chose not to add them to the list of restricted investments at this time. These two categories in broad terms are not entirely bad. If it was determined that a more specific category related to these areas was harmful to the environment, could cause climate change, or went against our biblical beliefs, those could be added to the list of restricted investments at a later time.

The small group also discussed how an ESG rating system could be utilized to avoid worst-in-class investments using quantitative ESG measurements. It decided to seek advice from the Investment Advisory Committee regarding this type of system, as that committee may have more specific expertise in this arena.

The small group also clarified that these restrictions are not meant to be “zero-tolerance.” It is nearly impossible to invest in only what is purely good. The current policy is written in such a way that seeks to avoid direct investment in the restricted categories. The small group clarified how it is interpreted that the restrictions apply to direct holdings, index funds, and mutual funds.

**Direct holdings:** Seek to avoid any investments in which the principal investment involves the types of restricted investment types. If the type of restricted investments is not the primary purpose of the organization, it may often be unknown to the investor. Direct holdings in corporations whose business may include these restricted areas but is not the primary purpose may be allowable. Example: A restaurant or hotel's primary
purpose is to provide food services and lodging; however, as part of its business, it may sell alcohol. A company such as this would not be screened out due to this activity.

**Index and mutual funds:** We recognize that, practically speaking, it would be very difficult to divest ourselves entirely of a small percentage of our monies remaining in restricted areas as part of an index or mutual fund. Annually, staff will review the percentage of assets within each index and/or mutual fund holdings that include companies in which the primary business is in one of the restricted categories. The current investment managers can provide this information to us.

In response to the small group’s report, the GSC voted:

**GSC 21-21**
To direct the Investment Advisory Committee to add screening language to the RCA’s investment policies which would restrict investment in companies whose primary business relates to adult entertainment and pornography and firearms and military weapons; and further, to divest of any investments in such companies.

**Next Steps**

The Investment Advisory Committee will evaluate applicability of screenings and how this might affect the effectiveness of GSC investments and the returns. The Investment Advisory Committee will also update the investment policy statements and make a recommendation to GSC for related changes to the IPS.

**Commission on History Communications with GSC Regarding the Archives**

The Commission on History (CoH) sent a communication to the GSC in late October 2020 expressing concerns that documents were not being submitted to the RCA archives that the commission feels should be submitted to the archives. The commission is especially concerned with specific types of documents generated by staff. This letter was received after GSC’s fall meeting had taken place, and so the GSC did not respond immediately.

In March 2021, the commission sent a request for a meeting of the CoH and the GSC, with no staff, including the general secretary, present in order to present their concerns. In this request, the commission alleged that staff were out of compliance with records management policies that the commission said had been mandated by the General Synod. The GSC moderator responded, asking that the CoH dialogue with staff to try to work through some of these concerns, but that a meeting between the entire GSC and CoH with no staff present did not seem appropriate. At the GSC moderator’s behest, a request was made to set up a smaller meeting with the CoH and GSC moderators and a few staff members from the Office of the General Synod to begin to discuss some of the concerns, but this meeting request was not accepted by the CoH moderator, citing that he could not speak for the entire commission, and instead reiterated the request for a meeting of the entire GSC and CoH, with no staff present.

Past General Synod and GSC actions regarding the archives as well as BCO language around the role and responsibilities of the CoH and the GSC were researched to seek clarification regarding various statements about responsibilities and mandates that the commission had made in its communications to GSC. Past minutes of both the General Synod and the General Synod Council showed no indication that the records management policies in question were
ever voted on (and thus mandated) by the General Synod, though a portion of the archives policy manual cited by the commission was approved by the predecessor body to the GSC in 1980, and that approval was reported to the 1980 General Synod. The GSC shared this research with the CoH.

The GSC continues to believe that a meeting between the entire CoH and the GSC, especially such a meeting that specifically excludes any GSC staff, is not a helpful or fruitful way to move forward for two reasons. First, the entire CoH and GSC is a relatively large group of people; it seems much more efficient to attempt to work through issues and disagreements in a smaller, more focused group. Second, the request to meet without any staff present does not seem right or healthy, given that a) the general secretary is a member of the GSC and, as such, is included in a GSC meeting, and b) the commission is alleging that the staff has acted improperly; it seems only fair that staff would be allowed to be present to speak to these allegations.

In June 2021, the GSC voted to ask the General Synod to form a working group composed of members of each group involved in the disagreement to better work through these concerns and seek a resolution that is acceptable to all parties. The GSC moderator also communicated this decision, and the rationale for it, to the CoH.

EC 21-23
To instruct the General Synod Council (GSC) to form a working group of 12 members, plus a facilitator, to seek clarity and resolution around the concerns that have been expressed to the GSC by the Commission on History, particularly with relation to oversight of the archives as well as what constitutes archival records, and related costs. This group would include three members of the Commission on History, three members of the General Synod Council, three members of the Commission on Church Order, and three GSC staff members, and would plan to meet via electronic means. The first meeting of this working group should take place before December 31, 2021.

Note: The reason for including Commission on Church Order members is that questions of supervision of and authority over the archives are closely tied to current BCO mandates, and it would be helpful to have experienced polity voices in the discussion, especially if changes to responsibilities around supervision of the archives, which the CoH seemed to suggest in some of its communications, are to be considered and/or proposed.