REPORT OF THE GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL ON COMMUNICATION

Since its origin in 1628, the Reformed Church in America (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 long-standing communication channels alongside new ones.

Supporting Transformed & Transforming

Over the last year, General Synod Council (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 two years, communication staff have assisted in this work by rolling 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 amid a global pandemic. When many churches were still worshiping virtually, communication staff also helped to produce a denomination-wide recorded worship service for Epiphany, including voices from mission partners around the world.

Supporting Church Planting

RCA Church Multiplication is starting 1,000 churches over 20 years, not just to start churches, but to introduce 100,000 people to Jesus and raise them up as disciples. Over the past two years, communication staff have assisted in this work by introducing new branding, sharing stories, updating resources, and spreading the word about training opportunities.

Responding to Racism

In response to worldwide conversations about racial justice over the past two years, communication staff have collaborated with Transformed & Transforming staff, racial/ethnic councils, and commissions to craft resources especially for ministry leaders for dismantling racism. These resources reflect the RCA’s commitment to a future freed from racism and are in keeping with many General Synod statements over the last 70 years that have spoken out against racism and the harm that it causes. Dismantling racism resources are collected at www.rca.org/about/dismantling-racism.
Increasing Focus on Digital Communication

In 2019, the RCA unfolded a new digital strategy 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. Last year, an online learning platform was added, Faithward Learn (www.faithward.org/learn), to facilitate skill-building for ministry leaders amid the shifts of a digital world and pandemic shut-downs. Though the world is opening back up after the pandemic, digital and hybrid equipping opportunities will continue to be provided; they make learning accessible to more people in the RCA and beyond, and they make it more affordable with lower travel costs.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, church leaders were faced with urgently rethinking everything about ministry. To support these leaders, communication and ministry staff quickly provided resourcing to help with livestreaming, digital worship, pandemic decisions, and adaptive change. The world changed overnight, then continued to change rapidly over the next year as the pandemic ebbed and flowed. In response, the monthly News & Resources email newsletter to church leaders increased frequency from monthly to weekly, then settling into a biweekly schedule, to provide dynamic, responsive resourcing.

In 2020, 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 long-standing 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.

During the pandemic, video was used more to share stories and connect with each other across the RCA. The first-ever denomination-wide recorded worship service was released in September, when many churches were worshiping virtually due to the pandemic and many pastors were in need of a week off. A second recorded worship service, focusing on mission, was released for Epiphany. All RCA-produced videos have been closed captioned for greater accessibility.

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

After 14 years, denominational magazine *RCA Today* ceased print publication with the spring 2021 issue. The magazine had been produced three times a year for each RCA household, communicating stories of church and individual discipleship, leadership development, mission, and next generation engagement. Discontinuing print publication was primarily a financial decision, as part of wider budget cuts to keep the RCA in a financially stable position during a time of uncertainty, though it also reflects a shift to digital communication, which offers new opportunities and allows the RCA to reach even more people. Discontinuing the print magazine
allows for a significant reduction in cost, while also shifting additional resources to
Faithward.org, the RCA’s resource website that has hosted RCA Today stories since the
website’s launch two years ago, along with practical tools for growing in faith and leading in
ministry.

A printed bulletin insert, also called RCA Today, was discontinued during the early months of
the pandemic, when many churches were gathering virtually. Instead, a quarterly print
newsletter has been introduced to highlight RCA Global Mission efforts to share God’s love
around the world; subscribe at www.rca.org/subscribe.

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 and Church Multiplication resources have been
translated.

Over the past two years, 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.)

Other recent translation projects include an oversight handbook for churches sponsoring a
church plant, curriculum for the Renovations program, and the She Is Called Women of the
Bible study series, volume 1. A She Is Called edition of the Purposeful Living curriculum is the
first project to be initiated in Spanish and translated into English.

Report on the Faith Alive Christian Resources Partnership and the RCA Store

Beginning in 2021, resources specific to the RCA are available in an online RCA Store rather
than being housed and distributed through Faith Alive Christian Resources. This move
significantly reduced both production and fulfillment costs for the denomination.

The RCA Store (store.rca.org) was launched in summer 2020, offering synodical resources as a
pilot project. Select additional resources have been added, with more expected over time. The
store is a print-on-demand platform, which requires no inventory. When an order comes in, each
item is printed at that time and shipped to the purchaser.

Revenue from the RCA Store supports the ministry of the Reformed Church in America.