

## Report of the General Secretary

The Lord be with you!

I must begin my report this morning by naming the two most challenging situations we are going through as a denomination:

- We are dealing with a global pandemic that has killed millions around the world and has disrupted our lives in every way;
- And we are going through one of the most difficult conversations we have had in our history as a denomination.

Friends, this is a hard time. It is difficult to do ministry. It is difficult for all of us.

Because of COVID-19, we have lost wonderful colleagues and friends, and beloved family members. In the summer of 2020, I lost my brother-in-law, and many family members back in Nicaragua were infected with this deadly virus. My sister just got home after spending about two weeks dealing with COVID-19 in the hospital. I am glad that she is well and is home now.

Many of you who are here today that are here in this place have also been directly affected in different ways. And many of the people who are not here but are watching this video stream have also dealt with a lot of losses and difficult situations as a result of the pandemic.

Many of our churches continue to struggle to adapt to the new reality and continue to do ministry. And, in the midst of it all, what an opportunity to be the church. This is the time when the church needs to stand up and be the very presence of Jesus in the midst of the devastating conditions we are all facing in North America and around the world.

The divisions in the RCA for the last few years have been very difficult. I was installed three years ago as general secretary of this denomination. And let me tell you, it has been difficult for me to serve. Our relationships are broken. I have been in meetings that are really painful. Our covenantal vows when we were ordained as ministers of Word and sacrament in the Reformed Church in America are also broken. I believe that we are far away from God's desire for his disciples to live in unity.

I read the Gospel of John in chapter 17. It is so hard to see the reality that we are going through as a denomination. We are living far away from what Jesus prayed for us to have as Christian unity. Friends, we cannot continue to live and do ministry in this way. We're brothers and sisters in Christ, but sometimes we forget that. This must change!

I beg you to pray for the conversations that we're going to have, and the decisions that we will make as General Synod in the next couple days.

You, delegates of the 2021 General Synod, are sent by a classis or regional synod, or by a college or seminary or commission or agency of the RCA. You are sent by them, but in your role as a delegate, you do not represent them; you represent Jesus Christ. The work of our assemblies, including this assembly of General Synod, is to discern the mind of Christ together. You are representing Jesus Christ. We are gathered in this place to make some hard and difficult decisions in the next few days, and my prayer is that every decision will be guided by the Holy Spirit, that the Holy Spirit will reach beyond human emotions and personal agendas. In

the coming days, you will have the opportunity to make decisions on the Vision 2020 Team's recommendations and other recommendations presented during this meeting. I ask you to have honest, graceful, and respectful conversations with one another, full of the love of Jesus. Please don't forget that we are brothers and sisters in Christ. We are here to make decisions for the church and about the church.

Yes, this is a difficult time for us as leaders, as churches, and as a denomination, but in the midst of this challenging time, there is so much to celebrate and to give thanks to God for.

### **First, I celebrate the RCA staff!**

I want to give thanks to God for the staff. Even during this stressful and uncertain time, my colleagues have shown resilience and commitment to God's call in their lives to serve the Reformed Church in America with faithfulness and love during this time. We are blessed to have such an amazing group of people who have been focused on their calling of God to serve the churches and pastors of the Reformed Church in America. Even in the midst of this challenging situation, they have been faithful in their service to God in the Reformed Church in America. I'm proud of all of them, and you should also be proud. It is a blessing to work with them. It is a blessing to pray with them. It is a blessing to serve God with them. Please join me in thanking them for all their hard work during this uncertain time. Thank you, staff. You are amazing! Some of them are here; please bless them when you see them around.

### **Second, I celebrate the progress we have been able to make with the vision of Transformed & Transforming.**

Transformed & Transforming is the vision that General Synod adopted in 2013. It focuses the RCA on discipleship, leadership, mission, and the next generation. We have been able to make great progress in spite of the challenging times we are in. God has been doing so many things through the work of Transformed & Transforming that I don't have time to share them all, but I will give you some highlights.

- **Women's Transformation and Leadership:** in March of 2020, amid the intense challenges of the early days of the pandemic, Women's Transformation and Leadership provided virtual opportunities for people to gather, find encouragement, and get support—three things people desperately needed as our world was turned upside down. Some of the gatherings filled that immediate need and helped leaders manage change. Two groups of women formed such strong connections that they continue to meet to this day. It is a blessing to see them gathering together, supporting each other, and following the Lord together in this challenging time.
- **She Is Called Women of the Bible study:** God's Word has much to teach us as we seek to follow Jesus faithfully. A new Bible study, the She Is Called Women of the Bible study, was released last summer. It provides high-quality Bible study material on biblical women from a Reformed perspective, and it is guiding many people in the study of Scripture. Some of you who are present here at this synod wrote chapters of the Bible study. Thank you! More than 140,000 people have accessed the Women of the Bible study since its launch on Faithward, and it's now also available in print on the RCA online store. This resource is in use both within the RCA and far beyond it, helping people dig into God's Word and grow as disciples. The response to this Bible study has been so positive, volume two is coming soon.

- **Disability Concerns:** The launch of *Everybody Belongs, Serving Together* is an exciting ministry achievement. It's a practical digital resource that any church can use to become more fully inclusive of people who have disabilities, and we can celebrate that it's already reached 2,000 people within its first few months. This was a labor of love for RCA and CRCNA Disability Concerns, Christian Horizons, and Elim Christian Services.
- **From Outreach to Embracing:** Last summer brought a worldwide reckoning with racial injustice, and many pastors and church leaders asked for resources to help. More than 80 people signed up for a powerful 10-week course this winter called "From Outreach to Embracing." Together, they looked at the biblical call for equity-based hospitality for four frequently marginalized groups: people of color, women, young people, and people with disabilities. Pastor and missionary Denise Kingdom Grier led master classes on the Gospel of John, alternating with discussions led by Transformed & Transforming staff that created safe space for hard questions and helped people apply the concepts to their real-life situations. By the end of the course, each person had committed to living out equity-based hospitality in one specific way in their life or ministry.
- **A Cultivate volunteer becomes a church planter:** A few years ago, Savannah Clapper served as a year-long volunteer through Cultivate, our young adult mission program. Coming out of that year, Savannah sensed God calling her to start an intentional Christian community in the place where she'd served during Cultivate: Lincoln, Nebraska. Savannah is now working with RCA Church Multiplication to start a fresh expression of church called Oikos, a church that looks and feels like home.
- **In the area of Church Multiplication:** Despite the difficulties in the Reformed Church in America and the pandemic, Since our last General Synod, we have planted 34 new church plants in North America, with another 34 church plants in Nepal, a country that is less than 2 percent Christian. More than 85 percent of these plants since 2019 are led by planters of color. More than 85 percent of our recent planters are bivocational or covocational; they hold other jobs to subsidize the work of ministry. We are particularly excited by the thriving church planting landscape in the southern U.S., especially in Texas and Florida, where we have struggled in the past. It is amazing to see God at work there. God is providing great opportunities for ministry in those areas. On Sunday evening, you will hear more from Randy Weener, our director of Church Multiplication.

### **Third, I celebrate the progress we have been able to make in our Global Mission efforts.**

You will also hear more about Global Mission on Sunday evening from JP Sundararajan, our director of Global Mission. I just want to highlight three areas this morning: generosity, growth, and going.

**Generosity:** During a season of much turmoil brought on by COVID-19, national and international disasters, political unrest, denominational disagreements, and more, RCA congregations have stepped up in big ways to support the work of their missionaries and the work RCA Global Mission does around the world. Every appeal Global Mission sent out in the last two years has overwhelmingly showed the generosity of RCA churches and individuals. Every one of these appeals has also had tangible impact around the world and encouraged our missionaries and partners greatly. Whether for COVID relief with over \$250,000 raised, or hurricane relief in Haiti, which raised \$40,000, or even the recent appeal to work with partners in Afghanistan, which is up to \$120,000 and counting—more gifts and support for mission means

channeling more resources into sharing God's love with the world. We are so grateful for this generosity. We have been able to do this work because of the generosity of our churches and leaders. I have had the opportunity to visit some of our Global Mission sites and missionaries. I was in Bahrain, in India, and many different places. And I am amazed. I've been blown away to see the footprints of our Global Mission work. It's amazing to see how God has shown his grace and how our missionaries have done such incredible work.

**Growth:** RCA Global Mission and its partners are sharing God's love around the world in wonderful ways.

In Europe, where the church has largely been left for dead, RCA Global Mission has planted 11 churches, congregations where faith is taking root and growing.

In East Africa, more than 1,000 people have come to Christ through a discipleship program that is connected to asset-based community development efforts.

In Iraq, RCA Global Mission is helping communities rebuild after devastation by the Islamic State. Global Mission worked with a national partner to help rebuild a school that had been destroyed. The school was expected to serve 400 to 500 students, but more than 600 students have now returned to the school! Some of them had not received formal education in more than six years. And because of Global Mission work, they can come back to school.

In South Africa, more than 300 children have been placed with loving adoptive families or quality foster care in the last three years, through the work of our mission partner Setshabelo Family and Child Services.

In Kenya, the Maasai Outreach Mission has grown by leaps and bounds since 2018, adding nearly 5,000 new believers and starting more than 45 churches.

This is good news, brothers and sisters, and a taste of the growth that we are part of through the work of RCA Global Mission.

**Going:** We are excited for the missionaries who are currently fundraising to serve around the world. We are also excited to relaunch Cultivate, a summer or year-long opportunity for young people to serve in mission around the world; Cultivate will relaunch in the summer of 2022.

I invite you to join us in supporting our missionaries with your prayers, with your finances, and in giving thanks to God for incredible generosity, growth, and going in Global Mission.

#### **Fourth, I celebrate two of our classes' faithful commitment to the gospel.**

All of our classes in the RCA are serving God with faithfulness. There is no question about it. And they are doing that in different ways. Every classis in the Reformed Church in America is different, approaches ministry in their context differently. I am glad to see the work all of our classes are doing in different ways. Today, I want to highlight two of them.

**Clásis de Las Naciones** launched in January 2020. This classis is in Florida and Georgia, with strong ties to Latin America and Europe. It includes 15 organized churches, 2 Fresh Expression churches, 3 churches ready to organize yet this year. It includes four other church plants, and 50 more sites in process in Latin America and other places in Europe. This classis has recently

partnered with Iglesia Reformada Dominicana (IRD), providing support and training for church planting in the Dominican Republic. The stories in this classis are amazing. For instance, pastor Sebastian Gimenez (who is here at synod) from Montreal Church in Hialeah, Florida, spends his Saturday mornings teaching the Heidelberg Catechism to hundreds of people on Zoom in Spanish. When I heard that story, I thought, wow, this is crazy! It is amazing to see hundreds of people devote their Saturday mornings to studying the Heidelberg Catechism together. So many people in Latin America and other parts of the world have fallen in love with Reformed theology. They have seen the hope, they have seen a different understanding of God. When you see Sebastian around, just ask him about this story. It is amazing. There is a deep hunger for God and Reformed theology.

**Central Plains Classis** has seen remarkable growth. In January of 2018, Central Plains Classis had 13 churches. Today they are a classis of 37 ministries. Can you believe that? Only God could do that. And soon, that number could double. Before the end of the year, the classis expects to receive another eight new congregational plans for new church plants. Next month, the classis is meeting with 30 to 35 churches that are interested in joining the RCA and Central Plains Classis. And you might be asking, who in the world would want to join the Reformed Church in America during this time? But God does amazing things. The classis is also building relationships with some 50 churches in Argentina.

I celebrate that work, and I believe that has to be the focus of our future. I'm so sad when I walk into classis meetings and some regional synod meetings when the conversation is only about human sexuality. There are other topics of conversation. God is glad when we hear his Word, when we talk about mission. And I believe that it changes the vision when we talk about the things that are really important.

#### **Fifth, I celebrate our faithful commitment to prayer.**

I strongly believe in prayer. I really believe in prayer.

You know, I receive a lot of emails from people who are not happy with different things. What do I do with that? I just bow my head in my office, and I give thanks. I say, Lord, thank you. This is part of leadership. This is part of the painful process of leadership.

I am so sorry if you have sent me an email that I have not responded to. I archived your email, and I offered a prayer to the Lord. Sometimes when you say something, you can get in more trouble, and I'm trying to avoid that. Anything you say can get used against you. So when I receive an email, I just pray. I say, Lord, thank you. You called me. I'm doing my best. I'm not perfect. I want to keep going. God bless this person. Give them your grace.

Anxiety makes people say things that maybe they don't want to say. But I believe in prayer. The example of Jesus is amazing when we see the work of the Lord calling us and inviting us to pray. And also Jesus giving us the example of prayer. We need to be more and more like Jesus.

Reading the gospels, it's amazing to see the life of Jesus. Jesus disappeared many times, and his disciples didn't know where he was. He was with the Father. He prayed a lot. Jesus constantly prayed to the Father for long, very long periods of time. Sometimes he would pray all night. Can you believe that?

We need to be serious about our commitment to seek the face of God at all times.

Since the beginning of the pandemic back in March of 2020, I have been praying with a group of RCA pastors every Friday at 2:00 p.m. Eastern. If you are a pastor of the RCA, you have received one of my emails inviting you to pray with me. And it's just amazing to see a group of pastors join in prayer.

We are praying for one another, we are praying for the RCA, and we are praying for the world. This pastors' prayer meeting is not about politics or about divisive conversations in the RCA. I don't care about the political stances that people have. We pray to seek the face of God. We pray to support one another. This prayer meeting has been a huge support for me as a leader in a difficult time. There have been between 20 and 30 pastors praying every single Friday since March 2020, and we will continue to pray together, because prayer is the only way to move forward as the Reformed Church in America.

I also pray with another group of Spanish speaking pastors every Monday night at 7:00 p.m. Eastern. I have the blessing to speak Spanish, and I have the blessing to encourage them and support them. If you speak Spanish, you are always welcome to join us. These times of prayer have been meaningful to me and have really helped me to carry the heavy load I have been carrying these days.

People ask me, "Eddy, how are you doing, brother?" And that's a good question. My heart is at peace. It is difficult and complicated, especially when you serve as general secretary of the Reformed Church in America. The way we are structured, I don't have authority over a lot of things. I can lead the staff, and I do that with faithfulness. But when people ask me, "How are you doing?" I say, "You know, it's hard. It's difficult. I am blessed that GSC sends me encouraging emails to bless me." And that's really important. But these prayer times, for me, are the highlight of the week.

In the month leading up to General Synod, hundreds of leaders from across the denomination have been praying for you and for this gathering. I have heard from many of you who are praying faithfully; thank you. It has been my privilege to pray with some of these leaders on weekly Zoom calls over the last month, and in fact, some of them will meet again this afternoon to pray while we are meeting here—they are praying right now! Those prayer gatherings will continue once a month until the next meeting of General Synod in June. And actually today, a group of leaders are praying for us right this moment. Right now, they are praying for you. They are praying for us because prayer makes all the difference. And monthly prayer meetings will continue until the next meeting of the General Synod.

I'm grateful for the prayer team that organized the month-long prayer campaign for this meeting of General Synod. I give thanks for:

- President Micah McCreary
- Liz Testa
- Christina Tazelaar
- Phil Assink
- Nancy Boote
- Don Poest
- Judy Nelson
- Patricia Singletary
- Eliza Cortés Bast

And many other faithful leaders have been instrumental in organizing these prayer efforts in the RCA. Thank you! Thank you for your commitment to prayer and for your commitment to serve in this capacity.

Chaplain Judy Nelson and a prayer team are here on site to pray for you and with you. A prayer room has been set up in the “South Rim” room. You can step into the prayer room for a time of prayer, or pray in solitude in your room or outdoors.

I invite you to seek the face of the Lord. If you came here with a decision already made, I ask you to put that aside. And just look to the mountains here and raise a prayer to the Lord. Read one of the psalms. Say “Lord, I will cast my vote. Please guide me.”

### **The Vision for the Four M’s**

This is one of the most difficult times we have had as a denomination but this is also one of the most amazing times in our history. We have a great opportunity to create something new and recast a new and compelling vision for the future.

People have said to me, “This is bad, Eddy; It’s time for you to move on.” I don’t think so. I think this is an amazing opportunity for us to create something great.

I know that many people have lost hope. I get it. I have conversations with a lot of our leaders, and they don’t see any hope for the future of the Reformed Church in America. But I don’t just see a problem. I see a great opportunity. I could not be in any other place serving in this capacity than in the Reformed Church in America.

We have a great opportunity to create something new, something amazing, to re-cast a compelling vision for the Reformed Church in America, for the future. God is not done with this denomination!

We started almost 400 years ago, and we have done amazing work. We are not a huge denomination. We’re a tiny, small denomination. But this is a great time to create something amazing for the future.

People ask me, “Are you done, Eddy? The ship is sinking.” But I don’t see that. Maybe I need some different lenses, some different glasses. But what I see is a great opportunity for mission and ministry. This is a great time, church. This is an amazing time to create something great.

We are at a “Red Sea moment.” Can you imagine Moses with the people approaching the Red Sea, a group of Egyptians coming up behind them? That’s a big problem. So we are at a Red Sea moment. And I believe that God will make a way for the Reformed Church in America in this critical moment.

The good thing is that God specializes in these kinds of moments. When people don’t know where to go or how to find their way, that’s where God shines! God is a specialist in complicated situations. That’s the God that I serve. That’s the God that I preach about. As a pastor, I encourage my congregation to continue to believe in God, the God who is going to show up. And I believe that God is going to show up in an amazing way for the RCA.

I believe that in the years to come, we will continue to be a great testimony of faithfulness to Scripture and to mission and ministry in North America and the world.

At the request of the General Synod Council in 2020, I gathered a group of people to come together to dream about the future focus of the GSC staff's work. We were asking, what will be the focus of our staff moving forward? These people included GSC staff members, racial/ethnic leaders, and classis leaders. We met several times to pray and to hear the voice of the Spirit. The team came up with what we called the four M's:

- Making Disciples
- Multiplying Leaders
- Multiplying Ministry
- Missional engagement, locally and globally

Those will be the four main areas that we will be putting our energy into as a GSC staff. The four M's are not replacing the vision of Transformed & Transforming that General Synod approved back in 2013; rather, the four M's build upon the foundation of Transformed & Transforming and will continue to shape that work and how GSC staff serve the church, knowing the difficult reality that in the next two to three years, we are going to be a smaller denomination.

After 2025, I think we will be a larger denomination than we are right now. The first half of the next decade, we will decline in number. This is the painful reality we are facing. And I need to name that. But I believe that in the second half of the decade, we will see growth in the Reformed Church in America. So we are preparing for that as a staff.

## **Embrace Change**

Friends, the RCA is changing. The greatest shift we are beginning to experience is a huge increase in racial/ethnic diversity. The future of the RCA is multi-ethnic; we are no longer a "white Dutch denomination." And I have to say, that is a beautiful thing.

Our historic roots have given us a strong foundation, and I give thanks to God for those leaders who came from the Netherlands to preach the gospel. Just read the history of the Reformed Church in America to see how committed the Classis of Amsterdam was. It's amazing. Those people were visionary, and I give thanks to God because they really believed in the gospel. They sent pastors until we established our own seminaries in North America. That's beautiful, and I celebrate that. I give thanks to God for those leaders who came from the Netherlands to preach the gospel and establish the Reformed Church in America centuries ago.

Now, in the twenty-first century, the Reformed Church in America is becoming more and more like the people that make up the North American landscape—a context that is multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-racial. This is a beautiful thing. The future we are creating must reflect this reality. So the shift in the work that we are doing must reflect the reality of becoming a multi-ethnic denomination where Black people, Latinos, Asians, and Caucasians can gather and worship the Lord together.

The Bible makes it clear that God's desire for his church is to welcome, embrace, and empower people from every nation under heaven.

In Mathew 28:19-20, Jesus called his disciples to: "Go and make disciples of *all nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and

teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Jesus’s instruction to his disciples after his resurrection was to reach people of all nations and all ethnicities with the saving message of the gospel.

In Acts 2:4, we read that when the Holy Spirit came, “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”

In Jerusalem, there were people from every nation under heaven and everyone heard the gospel’s message in their own language. That’s beautiful.

In Acts 13, we read about the leadership of the church in Antioch and how Paul and Barnabas were sent out to share the good news of the gospel to the Gentiles:

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

Just look at the leadership of that church! People from different places and different ethnicities empowered by the Holy Spirit to go out to the gentile world to proclaim the good news of Jesus.

And, finally, look at how the story ends. Isn’t that beautiful, that we have read the last chapter of the story? We don’t have to wait. We already know what will happen. Revelation 7:9-10 is a beautiful description to the end of the story:

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”

The shift the RCA will experience in the next few years is the influence of the global south, where the center of Christianity is now located. The center of Christianity is not in North America. It is in the global south. I guess God called me to serve in this capacity three years ago as a sign of this shift.

When I went through the process to become general secretary, I said, “I don’t think so. I’m not white. I’m not Dutch. I don’t think so.” But God had other plans.

It’s been a huge challenge for me.

I did work in California among Mexican immigrants, and I was glad that I was able to plant several churches in the Central Valley. Then I joined Emmanuel Reformed Church in Paramount, a larger, multi-ethnic church. God was preparing me, but I didn’t know it yet.

I was asked to lead Hispanic ministries in the RCA, and I thought, “Okay, I can do that. No problem.” And then former general secretary Tom De Vries invited me to be the director for leadership development. And I said, “Well, let me try. That’s going to be a challenge for me, but I am up to the challenge.” God did amazing things.

And then when this position came, to be the general secretary of the Reformed Church in America, going through one of the most challenging times, I said, “No, Lord, I’m done. I’m moving to Florida to plant a church and to do ministry. I’m not going to do that.” I also started a PhD in New Testament studies, not knowing that I was going to be ending serving in this capacity. If I had known, I wouldn’t have done that. This is crazy. But in the midst of all of this, God has shown me grace and mercy. I love how God is willing and ready to help us do that work that he has called us to do.

One of the most important trends within the Christian movement is the explosive expansion of Christianity southward in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Philip Jenkins argues that by the year 2050, only one Christian in five will be a non-Latino white person, and the center of gravity of the Christian world will have shifted firmly to the Southern Hemisphere.

As we make decisions about the future of the RCA, we need to choose what kind of future we want to have. General Synod is responsible for that. My job is to do what you ask me to do. So I’m inviting to think deeply about these things.

Take Ghana in West Africa, for example. According to the most recent census (2010), more than 71 percent of Ghana’s 31.7 million people are Christian.

As a *Religion News Service* article observed, “The statistics understand the fervency of everyday faith. Many attend church on weeknights. All-night prayer vigils are common and billboards advertising Christian meetings line the streets. That’s just what they do, because they love Jesus, and they want to grow in faith.

“It’s common to see people studying the Bible on the bus, and many office workers keep open Bibles on their desks.”

According to the International Bulletin of Mission Research, some 41 percent of the world’s 560 million Protestants live in Africa. This could increase to 53 percent by 2050.

The opportunities this shift brings are enormous, and we should celebrate the growing strength of Christianity in that part of the world as opposed to the “rise of the nones” in our own context. Where are the numbers of the “nones” growing? It’s in our context. So this is the focus we must have when we are thinking about the future of the Reformed Church in America.

Let me conclude my report with this pastoral invitation.

Reformed Church in America, let our focus be on the gospel. When people ask me, “What is the gospel?” I’m not talking about gospels, as in plural. There is only one gospel: the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel is the story of Jesus. We must embrace that story with faithfulness.

The gospel begins with the story of the incarnation: the birth of Christ. In Jesus Christ, God became one of us and moved into the neighborhood to live among us! There are not many gospels. There is only one gospel. This is the gospel.

The gospel includes the ministry of Jesus. It is the story of Jesus’s proclamation of the Good News; in Jesus, the kingdom of God has come near to us. I invite you, Reformed Church in America, to embrace the gospel.

It is the story of Jesus's identification with the suffering and brokenness of humanity. It is the story of healing and the story of casting out of demons. It is the invitation of Jesus to love one another, to carry our crosses and to follow him. It is a story of forgiveness. It is a story of repentance. And it is the story of transformation.

The gospel includes the death of Jesus on the cross for salvation to the world. Jesus is the only way to God. There is no other way for people to come to God. From Matthew to Revelation, there is only way to God: Jesus. Jesus is the only way to God, period. The cross is the centrality of the gospel. It is impossible to live a cross-less Christianity. We cannot follow Jesus without a cross.

We want to make up our own Christianity. But we cannot live a cross-less Christianity. In my opinion, this is perhaps the greatest problem we are facing in the North American church. The cross of Jesus does not mean anything for many people these days. Many people want to "follow Jesus" and leave their crosses behind. Let us not do that, Reformed Church in America. Let us carry our crosses and be disciples. Discipleship includes carrying the cross of Jesus.

The gospel includes the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus is risen! In Jesus, we have a new life. It is through his death and resurrection that we can get new life. Friends, let us focus on believing and proclaiming the gospel with passion and boldness.

God is inviting us to create a new future for the Reformed Church in America, a future full of hope and great potential. A future focused on what's really important.

God is doing something new among us and is allowing this disruptive moment to do something new among us.

Mr. President, this concludes my report.