

# Report of the Committee of Reference on New Business

## New Business Item #1

To send a formal communication from the general secretary and president of General Synod to the White House, the U.S. Department of State, and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, to express the biblical reasons for supporting a humanitarian moratorium on forced returns to Haiti until proper asylum screenings are implemented for all.

And further, to ask the general secretary to set aside time for us as a synod to pray for Haitians seeking asylum at the southern border of the U.S.

### Reasons:

In Matthew 25, Jesus tells his disciples that a core value of the kingdom of God is hospitality. When describing the righteous, before the throne, the Son of Man says, "Come ... take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you. For ... I was a stranger and you invited me in." The righteous answer him, "When did we see you a stranger and invite you in?" The Lord replies, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

I am asking this esteemed assembly to take a stand against the current U.S. administration's policies and practices that are leading Haitian asylum seekers to be expelled from our borders without them first receiving a comprehensive screening for asylum eligibility.

The unfair usage of Title 42 that was started (understandably in the first months of the pandemic) under the previous administration has completely wrongfully been continued by the current administration. Title 42 allows the potential of a contagious disease to enable the president to block individuals from coming to our borders, even if they are victims of torture and grave injustice.

Similar presidential powers were used to keep Haitians away from our shores during the HIV/AIDS crisis in the 80s and 90s.

In both cases, HIV/AIDS and Covid-19, the infection rate in Haiti was far lower than in the United States when these policies were utilized.

In the case of Haitians, the rejection by the current administration seems very cruel. The vast majority of Haitians who were recently chased from our borders or expelled to Haiti haven't been in Haiti in years. Thousands of Haitians at our borders in the fall of 2021 left Haiti between 2011 and 2015, after the massive earthquake, or a few years later, as extreme poverty and incredible insecurity rocked the island. The Biden administration recently expelled dozens of children (at least) to Haiti who were never in Haiti, but were, rather, born to Haitian parents who have been wandering, without a permanent state, for many years.

Haiti just experienced the assassination of its president. Then, just weeks later, thousands were killed and hundreds of thousands lost homes, in the August 14th massive earthquake. Haiti needs attention and love from governments and from the global church. Haitians at our borders should not be forced back without comprehensive screening for asylum eligibility.

It is our duty as Christians to receive the stranger. It is our duty, as servants of Christ, to insist that our government not hinder the paths of protection and love for all God's children.

May we, the General Synod, call out our government for injustice and may we call for a humanitarian moratorium on forced returns to Haiti.

*Response*

In response to item #1 of new business presented to the General Synod, the Committee of Reference recommends:

**EC 21-24**

**To accept item #1 as new business and to refer it to the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business for report back to this session of the General Synod.**

Reason:

The humanitarian crisis in Haiti is a development that has arisen recently, and as such, it seems to the Committee of Reference that this could not have been presented through normal channels.

**New Business Item #2**

To instruct the General Synod Council, in consultation with all necessary commissions, staff, and legal counsel, to dissolve the Reformed Church in America and return all assets to the churches on a per-member basis.

Reasons:

This was not able to come as an overture because the Vision 2020 report was not made available until July of 2020, in the midst of a pandemic, which has limited our ability to convene as a classis. Furthermore, Classis Illiana has endured significant losses and is struggling to fill leadership positions and perform its basic function in the face of a pandemic.

Also, before General Synod 2020, classes were discouraged from sending in overtures, limiting our ability to present this business through the regular process.

*Response*

In response to item #2 of new business presented to the General Synod, the Committee of Reference recommends:

**EC 21-25**

**To not accept item #2 as new business.**

Reason:

While we sympathize with the challenges posed by the pandemic, there have been 15 months since the Vision 2020 report was published (as noted in the reasons presented within the new business, it was first published in July 2020), so there was time for this to be brought through the ordinary means provided in the *BCO* (the assemblies, agencies, or commissions of the church).

### **New Business Item #3**

To instruct delegates to follow their conscience and refrain from speaking or voting on matters related to the future of the RCA if they have already decided to leave the RCA.

Reasons:

- The Vision 2020 report noted the importance of the commitment to remain in determining the future of the RCA.
- While delegates may have authority from the rules of order, morally, it is inappropriate to speak to something in which you do not intend to be a part. There is an inherent conflict of interest; as such, a delegate will no longer be in covenantal community and cannot commit to fulfill and support the decisions made as the delegate's accountability and covenantal relationship will be with another body, not this one.
- Many are questioning and wrestling, which is welcome and an expected part of being here. However, some have already declared they will be leaving. At such a time as a delegate determines to leave the denomination, respectfully, that delegate is requested in good conscience to refrain from speaking to the future structure of the RCA and any matter of future identity.

*Response*

In response to item #3 of new business presented to the General Synod, the Committee of Reference recommends:

**EC 21-26**  
**To not accept item #3 as new business.**

Reason:

This does not qualify as new business, as it could have been brought up in time to come to the synod through the assemblies, agencies, or commissions of the church.

### **New Business Item #4**

To encourage the General Synod Council's Investment Advisory Committee to add fossil fuels to its current list of restricted investments, to begin divestment from any fossil fuel investments, and to begin considering 'impact investing' (a defined term in the investment world), a form of positive screening, rather than just exclusionary screening, as a socially, faithfully, and fiscally responsible investment policy for the RCA going forward.

*Response*

In response to item #4 of new business presented to the General Synod, the Committee of Reference recommends:

**EC 21-27**  
**To not accept item #4 as new business.**

Reason:

This does not qualify as new business, as it could have been brought up in time to come to the synod through the assemblies, agencies, or commissions of the church.