CALL TO ORDER
The president called to order the twelfth meeting of the General Synod at 1:30 p.m. on Monday, October 18, 2021. Upon the request of the president, Devonna Cousins, corresponding delegate from the Classis of Brooklyn, offered prayer.

The General Synod viewed a brief video presentation highlighting the work of mission personnel Doug McClintic. The Rev. Phillip Assink offered prayer.

ELECTION OF PRESIDENT
The president called upon the general secretary to review the procedures for electing the president of General Synod (GS Workbook p. 33). The general secretary addressed the General Synod. The tellers distributed and collected the ballots for the election of the president.

ECUMENICAL GREETINGS
The president called upon representatives of ecumenical partners who were present at the meeting to bring greetings. The president also called upon several members of the Commission on Christian Unity to share greetings from ecumenical representatives unable to attend the meeting. Kathryn Lohre, corresponding delegate (as the ELCA ecumenical member of the General Synod Council) on behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Mark Pettis, ecumenical delegate from the United Church of Christ, and Colin Watson, ecumenical from the Christian Reformed Church in America, each addressed the Synod. The Rev. Stacey Duensing Pearce, regular delegate from the Classis of Orange and member of the Commission on Christian Unity, and the Rev. Dr. Nathan Busker, regular delegate from the Classis of Passaic Valley and member of the Commission on Christian Unity, read letters from representatives of the United Methodist Church and Presbyterian Church (USA), respectively.
REPORT OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON OVERTURES AND NEW BUSINESS

The president called upon Charles Swoboda, regular delegate from the Classis of Cascades and moderator of the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business, to present the committee’s report (Report of the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business, part 1, p. 1).

In response to Overture 1 (GS Workbook p.117), ONB 21-1 was presented to the house. It reads as follows:

To deny Overture 1.

Reasons:
1. Given the current work in front of General Synod 2021 in regard to the Vision 2020 Report this year, this does not seem to be the right time to task the Commission on Church Order, in consultation with the Commissions on History and Theology, with this assignment.

2. A similar overture was denied by the General Synod in 2018 (Minutes of the General Synod 2018, OV 18-2, pp. 115-116).

VOTED: To adopt ONB 21-1 (yes 179; no 24)

In response to Overture 2 (GS Workbook pp. 116-117), ONB 21-2 was presented to the house. It reads as follows:

To instruct the Commission on Theology to review the paper “Affirmed and Celebrated,” prepared by a committee of and adopted by the Classis of New Brunswick, with an eye as to the paper’s doctrinal soundness in the context of a Reformed understanding of Scripture, and to report on its findings to the 2023 General Synod.

Reason:
1. While this committee takes no position on the merits of this paper, we refer to the role of the Commission on Theology as stated by the Book of Church Order: “The commission shall study theological matters arising in the life of the church and referred to it by the General Synod or initiated within the commission itself” (BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 9b [2019 edition, p. 117]).

A motion was made and supported to amend ONB 21-2 by adding the following:
And further, to encourage all Classes, in a spirit of unity, to share their Reformed understanding on questions of gender and sexual identity with the Commission on Theology as the Spirit guides them.

And further, in the spirit of Vision 20/20, may we not vote on a denomination position on this matter for 20 years.

**VOTED:** To not adopt the amendment to ONB 21-2 (yes 20; no 182).

ONB 21-2 in its original form was before the house.

A motion to was made and supported to cease debate.

**VOTED:** To cease debate (yes 168; no 38).

**VOTED:** To adopt ONB 21-2 (yes 112; no 94).

In response to Overture 3 (GS Workbook p.117), ONB 21-3 was presented to the house. It reads as follows:

To instruct the Commission on History to study what constitutes a preferred process for keeping records permanently for report to the General Synod of 2023.

Reasons:
1. New technology is always developing for keeping records.

2. This is part of the mandate for the Commission on History, as stated in BCO Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 5.b.1 (2019 edition, p. 113): “Through a sub-committee of two or three of its members, chosen on the advice of the RCA archivist, the commission shall advise the General Synod on the collection of official records and documents of the Reformed Church in America, its churches, assemblies, and agencies.

**VOTED:** To adopt ONB 21-3 (yes 184; no 14).

In response to Overture 4 (GS Workbook pp. 119-121), ONB 21-4 was presented to the house. It reads as follows:

To deny Overture 4.
Reason:
1. We think this is a worthwhile idea, but this is something that would be better developed through a classis or communication between two churches.
2. This idea could be presented directly to these and possibly other commissions and agencies for collaboration and support.

**VOTED:** To adopt ONB 21-4 (yes 184; no 12).

In response to Overture 5 (GS Workbook pp. 123-130), ONB 21-5 was presented to the house. It reads as follows:

To deny Overture 5.

Reasons:
1. This is a duplication of numerous other student exchange programs and opportunities.
2. To ensure proper care and protection for minors (such as high school students), we feel such a proposal would take more resources than one volunteer position serving pro bono.

**VOTED:** To adopt ONB 21-5 (yes 185; no 5).

In response to Overture 6 (GS Workbook p.118), ONB 21-6 was presented to the house. It reads as follows:

To encourage the Commissions on Christian Unity and Christian Action to explore widening the RCA’s presence in non-religious national and international organizations.

Reasons:
1. We see the potential benefit for the RCA through increased contact to organizations such as UNICEF, the World Health Organization, and the World Bank.
2. More information is needed as to the specific organizations and their processes for having representatives to their organizations, including if funding/assessments are needed to serve in a representative role.

**VOTED:** To adopt ONB 21-6 (yes 161; no 41).
In response to Overture 7 (GS Workbook pp. 118-119), ONB 21-7 was presented to the house. It reads as follows:

To deny Overture 7.

Reasons:
1. Establishing and maintaining these academies would require additional RCA staff.
2. We affirm the idea of these academies but would encourage their development at the grassroots level rather than at the denominational level.

**VOTED:** To adopt ONB 21-7 (yes 193; no 12).

In response to Overture 8 (GS Workbook p.119), ONB 21-8 was presented to the house. It reads as follows:

To deny Overture 8.

Reasons:
1. We are concerned about privacy and legal implications of sharing such information.
2. Currently, the denomination does not collect individual membership information.
3. Collecting and maintaining this data would require additional RCA staff.

**VOTED:** To adopt ONB 21-8 (yes 195; no 8).

In response to Overture 9 (GS Workbook pp. 119-121), ONB 21-9 was presented to the house. It reads as follows:

To deny Overture 9.

Reason:
1. Since the overture was drafted, more ESG funds have been added, and there continues to be one fossil fuel free fund. However, we encourage the Investment Advisory Committee to continue to add socially responsible funds and to provide education to ministers regarding their investment options.
A motion was made and supported to substitute the following for ONB 21-9:

To instruct the Board of Benefits Services and the Investment Advisory Committee to continue working toward offering additional socially screened funds (funds that consider environmental, social, and governance [ESG] issues in investment analysis), especially fossil fuel free funds, as options in the RCA retirement plan and the 403(b) plan.

VOTED: To accept the substitute motion (yes 104; no 93).

VOTED: To adopt the substitute motion (yes 118; no 83).

In response to Overture 11 (GS Workbook pp. 123-130), ONB 21-11 was presented to the house. It reads as follows:

To deny Overture 11.

Reasons:
1. While we affirm the need for discipline in the RCA, and the overture, in mandate 3, outlines a process for discipline, the RCA’s Book of Church Order already contains a process for discipline.
2. We are unclear of the funding structure for this proposed commission.

VOTED: to adopt ONB 21-11 (yes 160; no 40).

In response to the one item of new business accepted (Report of the Committee of Reference on New Business, pp. 4-5), ONB 21-12 was presented to the house. It reads as follows:

To direct the general secretary and the president of the General Synod to send a formal communication to the White House, the Department of State, and the Department of Homeland Security, urging a humanitarian moratorium on forced returns to Haiti until proper asylum screenings are implemented for all and including the biblical reasons for supporting such a moratorium; 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. before the close of this General Synod.
Reasons:
1. It is our duty as Christians to receive the stranger. It is our duty, as servants of Christ, to insist that governments not hinder the paths of protection and love for all God’s children.
2. We are called to pray for those who are experiencing injustice and suffering.

**VOTED:** To adopt ONB 21-12 (yes 172; no 30).

**RECESS**

The president declared the General Synod recessed at 2:55 p.m.

The delegates viewed a brief video presentation featuring the work of mission personnel Joshua and Sally Vis. The Rev. Judy Nelson, General Synod chaplain, offered prayer.

**ELECTION OF PRESIDENT, CONTINUED**

The president announced that as a result of the electing ballot cast for president, Rev. Philip Assink was declared president-elect of the General Synod. James Nakakihara, immediate past General Synod president, offered prayer. Rev. Assink addressed the Synod.

**REPORT OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON OVERTURES AND NEW BUSINESS, CONTINUED**

The president called upon the Rev. Charles Swoboda, regular delegate from the Classis of Cascades and moderator of the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business, to continue the committee’s report. Rev. Swoboda addressed the Synod.

In response to Overture 10, ONB 21-10 was presented to the house (Updated Report of the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business p. 4). It reads as follows:

“To direct the RF 21-1 team to consider affinity regional synods in accordance with principles 1 and 4 of the Vision 2020 report; and further,

“To instruct the Commission on Church Order to study the structure and implications of affinity synods, with a report to General Synod in 2022.”

Reasons:
1. RF 21-1 specifies considering affinity classes, but not specifically affinity regional synods.
2. The Vision 2020 report questions whether regional synods are sustainable in the future.
3. This recommendation allows the RF 21-1 team to discern their work as directed by General Synod, but allows the Commission on Church Order to resource them to allow the team’s work to be done in a timely manner.

A motion was made and supported from the floor to amend ONB 21-10 as follows (additions underlined; deletions stricken):

“To direct the RF 21-1 team to consider affinity regional synods in accordance with principles 1 and 4 of the Vision 2020 report; and further,

“To instruct the Commission on Church Order to study the structure and implications of affinity synods, with a report to General Synod in 2022:”

“To form two new regional synods as of December 31, 2022: The Central Synod, comprised of affinity-based churches who seek to be relationally aligned by adherence to existing General Synod statements regarding human sexuality; and the New Boundaries Synod, comprised of affinity-based churches who seek to be relationally-aligned by their conviction that existing General Synod statements regarding human sexuality should not be adhered to with regard to marriage and ordination; and further,

“To transfer the classes and churches from these existing regional synods into the two new regional synods as follows: Far West, Great Lakes, Heartland, and Mid-America into the Central Synod, and Albany, Mid-Atlantics, and New York into the New Boundaries Synod (the Regional Synod of Canada would remain unchanged); and further,

“Any consistory may petition the General Synod for transfer to the other new synod following the provisions of RF 21-3 Regulation B-2 “Petition to Transfer to another Classis;” and further,

“To strongly encourage the General Synod to give deference to the petitions of such local congregations to approve such transfer requests; and further,
“To recommend to the new regional synods to adopt a substructure resembling their respective current regional synod groupings to sustain administrative continuity initially; and further.

“To recommend to the new regional synods to develop statements describing their respective theological distinctives for the furtherance of the gospel within their bounds and to consider revising their synod name; and finally.

“To instruct the General Secretary, General Synod Council, and General Synod staff, in consultation with the Commission on Church Order, to prepare further recommendations to expedite the implementation of these new synods, including a revised General Synod agenda and assessment implications for report back to General Synod 2022.”

A motion was made and supported from the floor to cease debate.

**VOTED:** To not cease debate (yes 101; no 94).

Discussion continued regarding the amendment to ONB 21-10.

**VOTED:** To not amend ONB 21-10 (yes 47; no 157).

ONB 21-10 in its original form was once again before the house.

A motion was made and supported from the floor to amend ONB 21-10 as follows (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

“To direct the RF 21-1 team to consider affinity regional synods in accordance with principles 1 and 4 of the Vision 2020 report; and further,

“To instruct the Commission on Church Order to study the structure and implications of affinity synods, with a report to General Synod in 2022; and further,

“To instruct the General Synod Council to petition each RCA classis and regional synod to provide their opinion(s) by the deadline for General Synod 2022 overtures on whether or not the RCA should restructure into three Synods as outlined in the “Affinity Synods Restructuring Plan” Overture 10 (i.e. New Boundaries, Central, and Canada) stating reasons why, and if such restructuring is desired, to state a preferred effective date, and for GSC to report these findings to General Synod in 2022.”
The president announced that Synod would recess and return to discussing the proposed amendment to ONB 21-10 in its next meeting.
RECESS

The president declared the General Synod recessed at 4:58 p.m., following prayer by the Rev. D. Marc de Waard, regular delegate from the Classis of Dakota.