Report of the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business

UPDATED

*Note: This updated Overtures and New Business report includes the material presented in the original Part 1 of the committee's report, posted on Thursday, October 14, as well as new work from the committee's second meeting on Sunday, October 17. Please note that the numbering of the committee's recommendations has also been updated; this was done in order to minimize confusion, so that the number of the recommendation is aligned with the number of the overture to which it is responding.

Overture 1: Preamble Clarification (workbook p. 116)

In response to Overture 1 from the Classis of New Brunswick, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommends the following:

**ONB 21-1**
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).

Overture 2: Instruct Commission on Theology to Review Paper (workbook pp. 116-117)

In response to Overture 2 from the Classis of New Brunswick, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommends the following:

**ONB 21-2**
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 ed. p. 117]).

Overture 3: Keeping Permanent Records (workbook, p. 117)

In response to Overture 3 from the Classis of New Brunswick, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommends the following:
ONB 21-3
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 ed., 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.”

Overture 4: Facilitate Pastoral Exchanges (workbook pp. 117-118)

In response to Overture 4 from the Classis of Rockland-Westchester, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommends the following:

ONB 21-4
To deny Overture 4.

Reasons:
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.

Overture 5: Facilitate Student Exchanges (workbook p. 118)

In response to Overture 5 from the Classis of Rockland-Westchester, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommends the following:

ONB 21-5
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.

Overture 6: Appoint RCA Representatives to International Bodies (workbook, p. 118)

In response to Overture 6 from the Classis of Rockland-Westchester, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommends the following:
ONB 21-6
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.

Overture 7: Establish Professional Academies (workbook, pp. 118-119)

In response to Overture 7 from the Classis of Rockland-Westchester, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommends the following:

ONB 21-7
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.

Overture 8: Collection of Professional and Educational Data (workbook, p. 119)

In response to Overture 8 from the Classis of Rockland-Westchester, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommends the following:

ONB 21-8
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.

Overture 9: Additional Socially Responsible Retirement Funds (workbook pp. 119-121)

In response to Overture 9 from the Regional Synod of Albany, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommends the following:

ONB 21-9
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.

Overture 10: Restructure Into Affinity Synods (workbook pp. 121-122)

In response to Overture 10 from the Classis of Great Lakes City, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommends the following:

ONB 21-10
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.

Overture 11: Create Grace and Truth Commission (workbook pp. 123-130)

In response to Overture 11 from the Classis of Rocky Mountains, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommends the following:

ONB 21-11
To deny Overture 11.

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.

New Business (From the Report of the Committee of Reference on New Business)

In response to Item #1 of new business referred to it by the General Synod, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommends the following:

ONB 21-12
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.