

Report of the Commission for Women

The Commission for Women (CFW) seeks to understand the life of women within the RCA and is committed to the support of and advocacy for the full inclusion and participation of women within all contexts of church life. The commission is committed to raising awareness, to providing opportunities for women in the church, and to providing information so that women can participate in the leadership and life of the church.

The CFW is dedicated to seeking systemic change in the church for the full inclusion of women; we recognize there has been some progress, but there continues to be work to be done and we cannot work at this alone. On that note, CFW looks forward to a close working relationship with the Office of Women's Transformation and Leadership. We recognize the value that this relationship will bring to the Reformed Church in America (RCA) as we collaborate toward the goal of full and equitable participation for all women in the life and ministry of the RCA. Rev. Liz Testa, coordinator for Women's Transformation and Leadership, has been a guest at two of our commission meetings since the 2021 General Synod, and we look forward to further engagement with this office of the RCA, as well as with other commissions.

The commission is dedicated to fostering continued solidarity and partnership with the Office of Women's Transformation and Leadership, recently joining with them by adding the individual names of CFW members on the fourth anniversary of the #WeAreSpeaking statement. This statement has been sent to the approximately 1,000 signatories and to the RCA General Synod Council (GSC) senior staff leaders, celebrating the systemic changes and culture shifts that have begun, and asking each of us to celebrate and continue our commitment to the critical and important work of ensuring a church and a world where all people are treated with dignity as people made in the image of God. We remind you and encourage you to access the We Are Speaking Resources available at www.rca.org/wearespeaking as we continue in this good work together.

"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:4-7, emphasis added).

God has activated varieties of spiritual gifts in all followers of Jesus Christ, just as the Spirit chooses. These gifts are given for the common good. At General Synod 2021, the Commission for Women was concerned regarding the formal lack of voice for women in leadership. The commission is committed to raising awareness of the inequity portrayed here, considering that women are the majority in the RCA. A letter was written to general secretary Eddy Alemán and to the General Synod officers urging the general secretary and the president of General Synod to design more equitable worship at the 2022 General Synod.

The RCA declares an egalitarian stance denomination wide, but we recognize there are geographical pockets in the United States and Canada in which egalitarianism is not practiced, and many voices remain absent. There remains the necessity for systemic change and cultural shift recognizing this is a collaborative effort. Throughout discussions, CFW identified that there are many "isms" that continue to insidiously undermine equitable participation in the life and leadership of the church for many. It has been drawn to our attention that educational resources being offered and at times recommended throughout the denomination are inequitable.

Therefore, reflecting our participation in the larger advocacy work of the RCA and the challenge of recognizing intersectionality, the Commission for Women makes the following recommendation to the General Synod:

W 22-1

To direct the general secretary to ensure that all resources and training materials on the RCA website and recommended to be used by RCA leaders and congregations are anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-ableist, egalitarian, and inclusive.

Commission Meetings

The Commission for Women has met virtually four times since the 2021 General Synod: December 6, 2021, and January 19, February 10, and March 9, 2022. CFW began by reviewing the conversations we engaged in these past two years and where we would like to focus our energy in the future. Many actions have been taken by General Synod over the years, and we see that implementation has not always happened. We expect to work with the Office of Women's Transformation and Leadership to identify and remedy these gaps. We recognize that CFW has been running a marathon since its permanent inception in 1980. The baton has been passed on a number of times. We recognize we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, so we cling to Hebrews 12:1: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses ... let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us." There is much work to be done. We take the baton and are dedicated to the good work that the Commission for Women has been called to: equitable participation in the life and leadership of the church. We are grateful that the Holy Spirit is active and alive, committing to the good work that is put before us.

Thank You

The Commission for Women is deeply grateful for the dedicated and faithful service of Rev. Dwayne Jackson for the past six years. His term of service will be completed at the end of June 2022. May the grace and peace of Christ be with you as you continue your service in the RCA as the next General Synod president.

We also are deeply grateful for the dedicated and faithful service of Jane Dickie, Melisa Blankenship, and Mary Morgan, as their service is completed and wish them the best as they embark on new areas of service in their respective contexts.

We also mention with gratitude the dedicated and faithful service of Mornier Rich as our GSC staff liaison.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Debra Rensink, moderator