

Report of the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business

Part 3

New Business Item #1: Stance on Russia's and Belarus's War Against Ukraine

To instruct the general secretary to convene a meeting with other appropriate RCA ecumenical officers and at least two representatives from the Commission on Christian Unity to craft a resolution to be brought to the World Council of Churches (WCC), calling for the dismissal of the Russian Orthodox Church from WCC membership until it repents of and retracts its support for Russia's unprovoked, unjustifiable and brutally inhumane war against Ukraine; and further,

To instruct the Commission on Theology and the General Synod professorate to examine whether the conditions surrounding Russia's unprovoked war against Ukraine meet the criteria for a declaration of *status confessionis*, a full break in communion due to the gravity of the breach of faithfulness to the gospel by any Christian communion supporting Russia's (and Belarus') war against Ukraine.

Reasons:

1. Russia's aggression against Ukraine violates both international agreements and moral standards.
 - a. Russia had pledged in the 1994 Budapest Memorandum not to threaten or use military might or economic coercion against Ukraine, except in self-defense or in accord with the UN Charter.
 - b. In return for Russia's pledge of non-aggression, Ukraine gave Russia all of its nuclear arsenal as a good faith pledge of its own commitment to Russia's security.
 - c. The level of violence ordered by Russia's president and carried out by Russia's armed forces defies imagination.
2. Patriarch Kirill, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, has repeatedly given full moral endorsement to this use of violence against the Ukrainian people.
3. The United Nations, a secular agency, has removed Russia from its Human Rights Commission, the UN's voice of moral conscience when it comes to treatment of other people. Several world governments have extended sanctions to include Patriarch Kirill. The Church of Christ dare not exercise moral hesitation when the governments of the world exercise moral courage.
4. This action recognizes Patriarch Kirill's resistance to the call of global church leaders to advocate for peace, including general secretary Alemán and general secretary emeritus Granberg-Michaelson as co-signers of a letter which stated: "Before God, we bear witness that there is no religious justification from any side for the destruction and terror the world is witnessing daily."
5. While some voices call for continued conversation rather than removal, the current reported levels of violence, murder, rape, and other signs of disregard for human life and dignity demand an immediate response. Conversation can indeed continue, but every lever of influence to bring an end to this unjustified and intensely brutal aggression needs to be brought to bear.
6. *Status confessionis* has been invoked twice: in response to Nazi Germany and in response to apartheid South Africa, recognizing times of profound loss of life and wanton disregard for human dignity. The conditions reported out of Ukraine merit consideration as potentially parallel and equally deserving of this firm public stand of the Church of Jesus Christ.

In response to the first item of new business, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommends the following:

ONB 22-9

To instruct the general secretary to convene a meeting with other appropriate RCA ecumenical officers or representatives and at least two representatives from the Commission on Christian Unity to craft a resolution to be brought to the World Council of Churches (WCC), calling for the suspension of the Russian Orthodox Church from WCC membership until it repents of and retracts its support for Russia's unprovoked, unjustifiable and brutally inhumane war against Ukraine; and further,

To instruct the general secretary to distribute the resolution to all RCA assemblies and congregations; and further,

To instruct the Commission on Theology and the General Synod professorate to examine whether the conditions surrounding Russia's unprovoked war against Ukraine meet the criteria for a declaration of *status confessionis*, a full break in communion due to the gravity of the breach of faithfulness to the gospel by any Reformed or Lutheran communion supporting Russia's (and Belarus's) war against Ukraine, for report and recommendation to the 2023 General Synod.

Reasons:

The committee supports all the reasons stated in the new business as presented. The committee emphasizes the following reasons that directly apply to the Russian Orthodox Church:

1. The head of the Russian Orthodox Church has repeatedly given full moral endorsement to this use of violence against the Ukrainian people.
2. This action recognizes the Russian Orthodox Church's resistance to the call of global church leaders to advocate for peace, including general secretary Alemán and general secretary emeritus Granberg-Michaelson as co-signers of a letter which stated: "Before God, we bear witness that there is no religious justification from any side for the destruction and terror the world is witnessing daily."
3. *Status confessionis* has been invoked twice: in response to Nazi Germany and in response to apartheid South Africa, recognizing times of profound loss of life and wanton disregard for human dignity. The conditions reported out of Ukraine merit theological consideration as potentially parallel and equally deserving of this firm public stand of the Church of Jesus Christ.

New Business Item #2: Shareholder Resolution in View of Energy Price Spikes

To instruct the General Synod Council, the Board of Benefit Services, the Church Growth Fund and any other appropriate agent of the General Synod, in consultation with the Commission on Christian Action, to introduce shareholder resolutions for any investments owned by said agents in gas and oil companies, for those companies to lower their profit share by 50% to help reduce

the price of gas and ease the economic burden particularly for low-income wage earners; and further,

to encourage RCA regional synods, classes, congregations, officially related institutions and other appropriate parties to do the same.

Reasons:

1. Lower-income wage earners are disproportionately affected by the rise in gas prices, and are needing to decide what to sacrifice in order to make ends meet: purchase fuel to get to work, or give up groceries, medicine, utilities, mortgage or rent payments, etc.
2. It is morally unjust, ethically inappropriate and economically unsustainable for oil companies to continue to rake in billions of dollars of profit while many consumers are needing to make difficult decisions about daily necessities.
3. Several states have implemented or are considering “gas tax holidays,” eliminating all or a portion of state gas taxes to help alleviate the burden on consumers. This is a good example of care for neighbors, even while it will have some cost to the states.
4. The profit margin of oil companies is an as-yet untapped reserve which could also alleviate the burden on consumers and ease the hardship for those most economically impacted.

In response to the second item of new business, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommends the following:

ONB 22-10

To deny the second item of new business.

Reasons:

1. The committee understands the significant problem and real suffering that is taking place due to the extreme rise in gas prices. However, due to the complicated nature of this issue and the lack of in-depth information in this proposal, the committee is not able to recommend this action at this time.
2. The committee does encourage congregations and individuals to study this issue and to take the moral and ethical stand that they feel led by the Holy Spirit to take.

New Business Item #3: Sign Open Letter to Lawmakers

To direct the general secretary of the Reformed Church in America to sign the “Open Letter to State Lawmakers from America’s Pro-Life Organizations” by June 30, 2022

(<https://www.nrlc.org/uploads/communications/051222coalitionlettertostates.pdf>).

Reasons:

1. It is consistent with General Synod statements on abortion, which advocate for the life of the unborn and to show compassion to women in vulnerable positions because of unplanned pregnancies (1973, 1984, 1990, 2005).
2. It is an opportunity for us to add our voices with over 70 pro-life organizations that while we strongly advocate for the life of the unborn, we do not want vulnerable women to be criminalized.
3. The voice of the pro-life movement in speaking against the criminalization of women who have abortions has been shown already effective on state lawmakers considering proposing legislation criminalizing women who have abortions in one state (Louisiana).

In response to the third item of new business, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommends the following:

**ONB 22-11
To deny the third item of new business.**

Reasons:

1. The committee affirms the intent of not criminalizing women who have abortions and the importance of advocacy for the unborn. However, portions of the letter do not bear witness to the gracious nature of Christ.
2. The signers of the letter are leaders of advocacy groups and not denominational heads and therefore it does not seem appropriate for the general secretary of our denomination to sign.