The Acts and Proceedings of the 215th Regular Session of the GENERAL SYNOD

REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

Convened on the campus of
Central College
Pella, IA
June 9-14, 2022

2022 Acts & Proceedings

Vol. CI

RECENT OFFICERS OF GENERAL SYNOD

A list of presidents, from the first in 1794 to 1955, can be found on pages 308-311 of the 1956 *Minutes of General Synod*. The list of presidents from 1956–2002 can be found on page i of the 2002 *Minutes of General Synod.* The list of presidents from 1979–2010 can be found on page i of the 2010 *Minutes of General Synod.*

PRESIDENTS

Year of Election	*From*	*Place of Election*
2011—The Rev. Lisa Vander Wal	New York	Grand Rapids, MI
2012—The Rev. Thomas Smith	Iowa	Palos Heights, IL
2013—The Rev. Carl Boersma	South Dakota	Pella, IA
2014—The Rev. Gregory Alderman	California	Pella, IA
2015—Elder Evan Vermeer	Iowa	Palos Heights, IL
2016—The Rev. Daniel Gillett	Michigan	Palos Heights, IL
2017—Elder Lee DeYoung	Michigan	Holland, MI
2018—Elder James Nakakihara	California	Grand Rapids, MI
2019—The Rev. EJ de Waard	Ontario	Holland, MI
2021—The Rev. Philip Assink	Washington	Tucson, AZ
2022—The Rev. Dwayne Jackson	New Jersey	Pella, IA

STATED CLERKS

The Rev. John A. Ingham	1932–1942
The Rev. James E. Hoffman	1942–1961
The Rev. Marion de Velder	1961–1968

GENERAL SECRETARIES

The Rev. Marion de Velder	1968–1977
The Rev. Arie R. Brouwer	1977–1983
The Rev. Edwin G. Mulder	1983–1994
The Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson	1994–2011
The Rev. Thomas R. De Vries	2011–2017
The Rev. Donald Poest (interim)	2017–2018
The Rev. Eddy Alemán	2018–

PERMANENT COMMISSIONS, BOARDS, AND AGENCIES 2021–2022

(as of 03-21-22)

*Indicates serving a final term

GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL

Pedro Agudelo	2023*	CHM
Philip Assink	2022*	P, GS
Carole Barber	2023	
Ned Beadel, *moderator*	2022*	RSFW
Michelle Chahine	2024*	
Devonna Cousins	2024*	
Susan Davis	2025*	
EJ de Waard, *first vice moderator*	2022*	PP, GS
Bruce Deckinga	2023*	RSGL
Hellen Harvey	2022*	AABC
Dwayne Jackson, *second vice moderator*	2022*	VP, GS
Robert Johnson	2022*	
Kathryn Lohre	2025*	Ecumenical ELCA
Kent McHeard	2022*	RSA
Michael Meyer-Veen	2025*	
Eric Moreno	2022*	
Sheila Moses	2024*	RSNY
Eric Nichols	2025*	RSMAt
Albert Plat	2023*	RSC
Neale Roller	2025*	RSMAm
Jidong Shan	2023	
Glenn Spyksma	2025*	
Kimberly Van Es	2024*	
Leigh Van Kempen	2023*	
Lee Vande Voort	2025*	
Harris Van Oort	2024*	RSH
Patricia Varga	2024*	
Shuo-min (Imos) Wu	2022*	CPAAM
Eddy Alemán (*general secretary*)		*Ex officio*

RACIAL/ETHNIC COUNCILS

AFRICAN AMERICAN BLACK COUNCIL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Sharon Atkins, *chairperson*
Dwayne Jackson
Earl James, *vice chairperson*
Regina Reid
Maudelin Willock

COUNCIL FOR HISPANIC MINISTRIES EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Pedro Agudelo, *president*
Fabio Sosa
Rafael Martín Torrealba
Ana Cristina Zarate

COUNCIL FOR PACIFIC AND ASIAN AMERICAN MINISTRIES EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Jae Hyun Ahn
Pei-Huang Chen
Stephen Kim
Kelvin Hui Kong
Ming-Chen (Grace) Rohrer
Ancela Fransisca Rumokoy, *president*
Kyunghoon Suh, *past chair, ex officio*

COMMISSIONS

CHRISTIAN ACTION

Scott DeLeeuw....2022*
Anne Elzinga....2023
Leah Ennis....2024
Mark Ennis....2023*
Edward Lungu....2022
Bradley Prince....2023
Dianna Smith....2024
Mark Stephenson (*interim Reformed ecumenical observer*)....2023
Robin Suydam, *secretary*....2022*
Cameron Van Kooten Laughead, *moderator*....2024*
Vacancy (*ELCA ecumenical observer*)....2023

CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP AND EDUCATION

Ellen Balk....2022
Rebecca Koerselman....2023
Troy Nanninga....2022
Mark Swart, *moderator*....2024*
Pamela Van Beek....2023*
Bradley VanderWaal....2024
Jason White....2024

CHRISTIAN UNITY

Dale Buettner	2024	
Nathan Busker	2024	
Carlos Corro, *moderator*	2024*	
Stacey Duensing Pearce	2022	
Anthony Elenbaas (*CRCNA ecumenical*)	2023	
Carol (Kitt) Jackson, *vice moderator*	2023	
Sun Jong Ju	2022*	
Jeffery Lampen, *secretary*	2023	
S. Mark Veldt	2023	
Eddy Alemán (*general secretary*)		*Ex officio*

CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Geimy Alvarado	2023
Kent Frens	2024*
Dirk Gieser, *moderator*	2023*
Cory Grimm	2022
Dennis TeBeest	2022*
Troy Van Beek	2024*
Vacancy	2022

CHURCH ORDER

Brian Andrew	2024
Christopher Jacobsen	2024
Howard Moths	2022
Joshua Scheid, *moderator and secretary*	2023*
Jennifer Van Regenmorter	2023*

HISTORY

Corstian Devos	2023
Lynn Japinga	2022*
Daniel Meeter	2024
Steven Pierce, *moderator*	2023*
Douglas Shepler	2024
David Zomer	2022

JUDICIAL BUSINESS

Stephen Breen, *secretary*	2023*	RSH
Brion Brooks	2024	RSMAm
Erin Parker	2022	RSA
John (Chip) Sauer	2022*	RSGL
Thomas Terpstra, *vice moderator*	2022*	RSFW
Edward Thornton	2024	RSMAt
Kendra Van Houten, *moderator*	2023*	RSNY
Carl Visser	2024	RSC

NOMINATIONS

Jeffrey Allen	2022*	RSFW
Tricia Berry	2024	RSH
Ock Kee Byun	2024*	CPAAM
EJ de Waard	2022*	PP, GS
Lawrence Dove	2023	AABC
Rainey Enjady	2023*	Native American/ First Nations
Jose Garreton	2024	RSC
Rebecca Hudak, *secretary*	2022*	RSA
Carol Mutch, *moderator*	2023*	RSMAt
Judith Nelson, *vice moderator*	2022	RSGL
Dean Schramm	2023	RSMAm
Patricia Sealy	2024	RSNY
Jael Serrano-Altamirano	2022	CHM

RACE AND ETHNICITY

June Denny	2023*	
Rolfi Elivo Lopez	2024	CHM
Earl James, *secretary*	2022	
Stephen Kim	2022	CPAAM
Janice Merino	2022*	
Young Na	2023	
Nathan Pyle, *vice moderator*	2023	
Kelvin Spooner, *moderator*	2024*	AABC

THEOLOGY

John Alfred	2024	
Aaron Baart (*ecumenical observer – Reformed body*)	2023	
Steven Bouma-Prediger	2023	
James Brownson	2022*	
William (Ruggles) Church	2022	
Elizabeth Estes	2023*	
David Komline	2022*	
John Lunn	2023	
Micah McCreary	2024	
William Russell (*ecumenical observer – ELCA*)	2023*	
Stephen Shaffer, *moderator*	2022*	
Robert Whittington	2024	

WOMEN

Philip Bakelaar	2024	
Florence Dekker	2023	
Jane Dickie	2022*	
Dwayne Jackson	2022*	
Mary Morgan	2023	
Claudette Reid	2024	
Debra Rensink, *moderator*	2022	
Vacancy	2023	
Vacancy	2024	

AGENCIES

BOARD OF BENEFITS SERVICES – NEW YORK

Philip Assink	2022*	P, GS
Lynn Barnes	2022	
Ned Beadel	2022*	GSC Moderator
Ralph Condis	2024*	
Timothy Cumings	2023	
Jack Doorlag, *president*	2023*	
Dwayne Jackson	2022*	VP, GS
Joseph Laswell	2022*	
Douglas Struyk, *vice president*	2023*	
Eddy Alemán (*general secretary*)		
Vacancy	2024	

BOARD OF BENEFITS SERVICES – MICHIGAN

Philip Assink	2022*	P, GS
Lynn Barnes	2022	
Ned Beadel	2022*	GSC Moderator
Ralph Condis	2024*	
Timothy Cumings	2023	
Jack Doorlag, *president*	2023*	
Dwayne Jackson	2022*	VP, GS
Joseph Laswell	2022*	
Douglas Struyk, *vice president*	2023*	
Eddy Alemán (*general secretary*)		
Vacancy	2024	

CHURCH GROWTH FUND

Michael Bos, *president*	2023	
Larry Koops	2022*	
Nicole Kouba, *secretary*	2023*	
Anne Putnam	2024	
Ronald Rukambe	2022	
George Schneiderman, *vice president*	2023	
Karl Silberstein	2024	
Eddy Alemán (*general secretary*)		*Ex officio*

MINISTERIAL FORMATION CERTIFICATION AGENCY

Scott Christiansen, *moderator*	2024*	
Norma Coleman-James	2022	
Robert Johnson	2022*	GSC
San-Yi Shirley Lin	2024*	
Frances Nelson	2023*	
Willie Si	2022	
Nancy Van Heerde, *secretary*	2022*	
Cathleen Wolff, *vice moderator*	2022	
Eddy Alemán (*general secretary*)		*Ex officio*
Vacancy	2023	

PASTORAL FORMATION OVERSIGHT BOARD

Israel Camacho	2024	
Norma Coleman-James	2022	MFCA
Gregory Dunlap	2023	NBTS
Daniel Gillett	2023	
Kristen Johnson	2024*	WTS
Eun Jae (Dan) Joo	2022*	
Micah McCreary		NBTS president
Eric Moreno	2022*	GSC
Carol Mutch	2022	CPAT
Chad Pierce	2023	
David Schutt		MFCA interim exec. director
Cora Taitt	2024*	
Felix Theonugraha		WTS president
Eddy Alemán (*general secretary*)		*Ex officio*

A GUIDE TO RCA ALPHABETESE

AABC ..... African American Black Council
AAR ..... Approved Alternate Route
BCO ..... *Book of Church Order*
BOBS ..... The Board of Benefits Services
CCA ..... Commission on Christian Action
CCDE ..... Commission on Christian Discipleship and Education
CCO ..... Commission on Church Order
CCT ..... Christian Churches Together in the USA
CCU ..... Commission on Christian Unity
CCW ..... Commission on Christian Worship
CFM ..... Certificate of Fitness for Ministry
CFW ..... Commission for Women
CGF ..... The RCA Church Growth Fund, Inc.
CHM ..... Council for Hispanic Ministries
CJB ..... Commission on Judicial Business
COH ..... Commission on History
CON ..... Commission on Nominations
CORE ..... Commission on Race and Ethnicity
COT ..... Commission on Theology
CPAAM ..... Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries
CPAT ..... Commissioned Pastor Advisory Team
CRCNA ..... Christian Reformed Church in North America
CRE ..... Certificate of Readiness for Examination
ELCA ..... Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
GSC ..... General Synod Council
MFCA ..... Ministerial Formation Certification Agency
MGS ..... *Minutes of General Synod*
NBTS ..... New Brunswick Theological Seminary
NCCC ..... National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA
PFOB ..... Pastoral Formation Oversight Board
RCSC ..... Reformed Candidates' Supervision and Care
RS ..... Regional Synod
RSA ..... Regional Synod of Albany
RSC ..... Regional Synod of Canada
RSFW ..... Regional Synod of the Far West
RSGL ..... Regional Synod of the Great Lakes
RSH ..... Regional Synod of the Heartland
RSMAm ..... Regional Synod of Mid-America
RSMAt ..... Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics
RSNY ..... Regional Synod of New York
WCC ..... World Council of Churches
WCRC ..... World Communion of Reformed Churches
WTS ..... Western Theological Seminary

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REGIONAL SYNOD OF ALBANY

Matthew van Maastricht

Classis of Albany
Ministers
Dirk Gieser
Christopher Vande Bunte

Elders
Tina Marie Bottini
Noreen Fargione

Classis of Columbia-Greene
Elder
Savitri Devi Mark

Classis of Montgomery
Ministers
Ryan Cogswell
Brian Engel

Elders
James Peck
Debra Sanburn

Classis of Rochester
Ministers
Steven Meyer
Sarah Palsma

Elders
Robert Knapp
David Ondra

Classis of Schenectady
Ministers
Daniel Carlson
Kent McHeard

Elders
Bradley Lewis
Linda Young

Classis of Schoharie
Ministers
Jeffrey Kelley
Heather Kramer

REGIONAL SYNOD OF CANADA

Willie Si

Classis of Canadian Prairies
Minister
John (Doug) Smith

Elders
Denis Mugabo
Hank Vrielink

Classis of Ontario
Minister
Jose Garreton
Ricardo Gouvea
Humberto Lopes

Elder
Gildo Vieira

REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE FAR WEST

Mark Sanders

Classis of the Americas
Elder
Claudia Flores

Classis of California
Ministers
Ned Beadel
Ronald Spence

Elder
Susan Davis

Classis of Cascades
Ministers
Kyle Nesbitt
Charles Swoboda

Elder
Richard Benham
James Harleman

Classis of Central California
Ministers
Steve With
Andrew Yamamoto

Elder
Glenn Spyksma

Classis of Rocky Mountains
Ministers
Timothy Grade
Bradley Kautz

Elder
Ken Samela

Classis of the Southwest
Ministers
Corinne Ellis
Edward Lungu

Elders
Israel Camacho
James TenElshof

REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE GREAT LAKES

Daniel Gillett

Classis of Great Lakes City
Ministers
Gregory Brower
Bruce Hunt
Mark Kleinheksel
Daniel Sewell

Elders
Lee DeYoung
Jared Heddens
Rindt Jones
Timothy Medendorp

Classis of Holland
Ministers
Judith Nelson
Nathaniel Schipper
Gordon Wiersma

Elders
Linda Jacobs
Lois Maassen
Kathy Ten Brink

Classis of Muskegon
Ministers
Sherwin Brantsen
Richard Van Dop

Elders
Ross Falkowski
Laura Holwerda

Classis of North Grand Rapids
Ministers
Nancy Boote
Sarah Bruins

Elders
Linda Cline
Janet Koopman

Classis of Northern Michigan
Minister
Drew Poppleton

Elders
Barb Aja
James Van Sickle

Classis of Southwest Michigan
Ministers
Brandon Beebe
Suzanne Hart
Robert Link

Elders
Bradley Landrum
Kathy Skippers

Classis of Zeeland
Ministers
Katlyn DeVries
Jonathan Elgersma
Mark Kamper
Todd Krygsheld
Jonathan Opgenorth

Elders
Sara Donkersloot
Robert King
Linda Kolk
Mark Timmer
Dirk Weeldreyer

REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE HEARTLAND

Janet Van Wyk

Classis of Central Iowa
Ministers
Mark Andersen
Michael Holleman
Stephen Mathonnet-VanderWell
Josh Van Leeuwen

Elders
Lois Gates
Steve Landhuis
Gene Poortinga
Jason Taylor

Classis of Central Plains
Ministers
Randy Blumer
Andrea Godwin-Stremler

Elders
Adam Harris
Linda Kroese

Classis of East Sioux
Ministers
Kristin Brouwer
Michael Hardeman
Brian Keepers

Elders
Mary Sloan
Glenn Van Der Vliet
Kimberly Van Es

Classis of Minnesota
Ministers
Aaron Punt
Glenn (Ben) Shoup

Elders
Byron Hayunga
Heather Stoesz

Classis of Pleasant Prairie
Ministers
Jason Semans
David VanNetten

Elders
Gary Abbas
Thomas Cellilli

Classis of West Sioux
Ministers
Steve Meester
Michael Metten
Mark Schwarz
Barry Wynveen

Elders
Mark DeKock
Larry Landegent
Kenneth Mallory
Brad Nagel

REGIONAL SYNOD OF MID-AMERICA

Chelsea Lampen

Classis of Chicago
Ministers
Marjorie Vander Wagen
Steve Young

Elder
Richard VanSwol

Classis of Illiana
Ministers
Mike Hoppe
Donald MacDonald

Classis of Illinois
Ministers
Stephanie Doeschot
Jeffery Lampen

Elders
Clair Hoeksema
Dean Schramm

Classis de las Naciones
Ministers
David Hubbartt
Jesus Perez

Elders
Yolanda Aviles
Jim Parker

Classis of Wisconsin
Minister
Laura Wessels

Elder
Marc Theune

REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE MID-ATLANTICS

James Brumm

Classis of the City
Minister
Frances Nelson

Classis of Delaware Raritan
Ministers
Corstian Devos
David Ruisard

Elder
Sarah Gorton

Classis of Greater Palisades
Ministers
Rodney Haveman
Jay Kim

Elders
Elvis Alvarez
Todd Green

Classis of New Brunswick
Ministers
Scott Harris
George Montanari

Elders
Patrick Beckford
Mark Mulholland

Classis of Passaic Valley
Ministers
Anna Gordon
Nancy Hoerner

Elders
Jeffrey Carlson
Patricia Gordon

REGIONAL SYNOD OF NEW YORK

Maudelin Willock

Classis of Brooklyn
Elder
Barbara Pimentel

Classis of Mid-Hudson
Ministers
Aaron Schulte
Gary Sissel

Elders
Julie Legg
James Walrath

Classis of Nassau-Suffolk
Ministers
Ellen Balk
Donna Field

Elders
David Philips
Donald Spruck

Classis of New York
Ministers
Cora Taitt
Susanah Wade

Elder
Irma Williams

Classis of Orange
Ministers
Rolfi Elivo Lopez
Michael Sweeney

Elders
Elba Arias Lopez
Peter Newman

Classis of Queens
Ministers
Sally Ann Castle
John Chang

Elders
Nancy Gessner
John Martin

Classis of Rockland-Westchester
Ministers
Samuel Clover
Richard Hasselbach

Elder
Karie Brown

GENERAL SYNOD PROFESSORS

James Brownson
Micah McCreary
Chad Pierce

GENERAL SYNOD PRESIDENT

Philip Assink

GENERAL SYNOD VICE PRESIDENT

Dwayne Jackson

CORRESPONDING DELEGATES

GENERAL SECRETARY
Eddy Alemán

COMMITTEE OF REFERENCE
Pedro Agudelo
Ned Beadel
Michelle Chahine
Devonna Cousins
Susan Davis
Bruce Deckinga
Hellen Harvey
Kent McHeard
Michael Meyer-Veen
Sheila Moses
Eric Nichols
Neale Roller
Jidong Shan
Glenn Spyksma
Kimberly Van Es
Leigh Van Kempen
Harris Van Oort
Shuo-min (Imos) Wu

NEW BRUNSWICK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
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President
Micah McCreary
Students
Vivian Campbell
Patricia Johnson

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Board of Trustees
Steve Spoelhof
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Felix Theonugraha
Students
Reghan Harms
LaCosta Van Dyk

MINISTERIAL FORMATION CERTIFICATION AGENCY
Board of Trustees
Scott Christiansen

CHURCH GROWTH FUND
Michael Bos

BOARD OF BENEFITS SERVICES
Jack Doorlag

CENTRAL COLLEGE
President
Mark Putnam

GENERAL SYNOD COMMISSIONS
Commission on Christian Action
Cameron Van Kooten Laughead
Commission on Christian Discipleship and Education
Ellen Balk
Commission on Christian Unity
Jeffery Lampen
Commission on Christian Worship
Dirk Gieser
Commission on Church Order
Joshua Scheid
Commission on Judicial Business
Stephen Breen
Commission on History
Daniel Meeter
Commission on Nominations
Judith Nelson

Commission on Race and Ethnicity
Nathan Pyle
Commission on Theology
Stepher Shaffer
Commission for Women
Debra Rensink

ADDITIONAL COMMISSION DELEGATES
Commission on Race and Ethnicity
Ruth Langkamp
Commission for Women
Lorie Jonkman

REGIONAL SYNOD EXECUTIVES
Regional Synod of Albany
Abby Norton-Levering
Regional Synod of Canada
Marijke Strong
Regional Synod of the Far West
Bruce Bugbee
Regional Synod of the Heartland
Thomas Smith
Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics
Stephen Eckert
Regional Synod of New York
Micheal Edwards

REGIONAL SYNOD WOMEN
Regional Synod of Canada
Grace Slot
Thais Lima
Regional Synod of the Far West
Melissa Assink
Regional Synod of the Heartland
Bethany (Bep) Reeves
Liz Vande Voort
Regional Synod of the Great Lakes
Debbra Yurk
Jennifer Holmes Curran
Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics
Ancela Fransisca Rumokoy
Joanne Van Sant
Regional Synod of New York
Mary Collier
Nancy Gessner

REGIONAL SYNOD YOUTH
Regional Synod of New York
Robert Bendelius

ECUMENICAL DELEGATES
Christian Reformed Church in North America
Lyle Bierma
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Chris Olkiewicz
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Y. Dianna Wright
United Church of Christ
Lisa Gaston
World Communion of Reformed Churches
Philip Tanis

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE PEOPLE

General Synod Chaplain
Kathy Jo Blaske

Parliamentarian
Russell Paarlberg

Seminarian Seminar Leader
Tim TenClay

SEMINARIAN SEMINAR PARTICIPANTS

David Bordy
Brett Busch
Vivian Campbell
Patricia Gilmer-Van Dorp
Reghan Harms
Patricia Johnson
Jeremiah Mitchell
Leonardy Poluan
Vanessa Stokes
LaCosta Van Dyk

ACTS AND PROCEEDINGS

The General Synod of the Reformed Church in America convened in its two hundred fifteenth regular session on the campus of Central College in Pella, Iowa, on Thursday, the ninth of June, A.D. two thousand twenty two, at 3:00 p.m., Central time.

FORMATION OF THE SYNOD

OPENING OF SYNOD

The General Synod was opened by president Philip Assink on Thursday afternoon, June 9, 2022. The president introduced the vice president, parliamentarian, general secretary, and meeting recorders, and recognized others in attendance as corresponding delegates or seminarian seminar program leaders and attendees. The president presented a brief orientation regarding how the General Synod will conduct its business, including the process for voting electronically. The parliamentarian explained parliamentary procedures to the General Synod. The president explained how reports are presented to the General Synod. The general secretary explained certain procedural matters, including ways to access the General Synod workbook electronically and the method of reviewing the journal of actions.

On Thursday, June 9, 2022, Mark Putnam, Central College president, welcomed the delegates and other General Synod attendees.

WORSHIP

Thursday evening (June 9, 2022) the delegates gathered at 7:00 p.m. in Douwstra Auditorium on the campus of Central College for an opening worship service. The service was led by a worship team composed of the Rev. Philip Assink, the Rev. Kathy Jo Blaske, Arena Collin, Gezelle Kingdom Grier, Grandy Soleman Oley, Barbara Pimentel, Vidal Sequeira, Erica Simpson, Jeremy Simpson, Melani Amelia Situmorang, and the Rev. Shuo-min (Imos) Wu. The Word was preached by Rev. Dr. Micah McCreary. The sacrament of communion was shared, with general secretary Rev. Eddy Alemán and synod chaplain Rev. Kathy Jo Blaske serving as co-celebrants. An offering was received to provide support to RCA Global Mission partners who are providing humanitarian aid to displaced people as they are forced to flee their homes in Ukraine.

In addition to the opening worship service, delegates worshipped in Douwstra Auditorium on Sunday morning (June 12, 2022) and also worshipped on Friday, Saturday, Monday, and Tuesday mornings (June 10, 11, 13 and 14). On Friday morning (June 10, 2022) the Word was preached by Rev. Susanah Wade and other worship leaders included Vivian Campbell, Devonna Cousins, the Rev. Dr. Micheal Edwards, Sheila Moses, Irma Williams, Arena Collin, Gezelle Kingdom Grier, Grandy Soleman Oley, Barbara Pimentel, Vidal Sequeira, Erica Simpson, Jeremy Simpson, Melani Amelia Situmorang, and the Rev. Maudelin Willock. On Saturday morning (June 11, 2022) the Word was preached by Rev. Fransisca Rumokoy and other worship leaders included Rev. Dr. John Chang, Arena Collin, the Rev. Jay Kim, Gezelle Kingdom Grier, Savitri Devi Mark, Grandy Soleman Oley, Leonardy Poluan, Vidal Sequeira, Jidong Shan, Erica Simpson, Jeremy Simpson, Melani Amelia Situmorang, the Rev. Shuo-min (Imos) Wu, and the Rev. Andrew Yamamoto. On Sunday morning (June 12, 2022) the Word was preached by the Rev. Dr. Pedro Agudelo, and other worship leaders included Elvis Alvarez, the Rev. Philip Assink, Claudia Flores, the Rev.

Dirk Gieser, Elba Arias Lopez, the Rev. Rolfi Elivo Lopez, and Thais Lima. On Monday morning (June 13, 2022) the Word was preached by Kenneth Mallory; other worship leaders included the Rev. Eddy Alemán, Michelle Chahine, Arena Collin, the Rev. Bradley Kautz, Gezelle Kingdom Grier, Grandy Soleman Oley, Ken Samela, Vidal Sequeira, Erica Simpson, Jeremy Simpson, Melani Amelia Situmorang, and the Rev. Shuo-min (Imos) Wu, and the worship service included a liturgy crafted by the Native American and Indigenous Ministries constituency. The liturgy included a statement of denominational confession from the general secretary, apologizing to Native American and First Nations communities for the hurts the denomination has caused them.

On Tuesday morning (June 14, 2022) a closing worship service was held in Douwstra Auditorium on the campus of Central College. It began at 10:23 a.m. and included the installation of the Rev. Dwayne Jackson and the Rev. Judith Nelson as General Synod president and vice president, respectively. The Word was preached by the Rev. Dr. Felix Theonugraha. The sacrament of communion was celebrated, with the Rev. Philip Assink, the Rev. Dwayne Jackson, and the Rev. Judith Nelson serving as co-celebrants. Additional closing worship service participants included Rev. Sally Ann Castle, Rev. Jay Kim, Gezelle Kingdom Grier, Thais Lima, Barbara Pimentel, Rev. Bethany (Bep) Reeves, Rev. Ancela Fransisca Rumokoy, Ken Samela, Jidong Shan, Vanessa Stokes, and Rev. Shuo-min (Imos) Wu. An offering was received to provide humanitarian aid to displaced people as they are forced to flee their homes in Ukraine and to support international church planting by preparing more coaches and trainers who are bilingual and cross-cultural. Closing prayer was offered by the Rev. Dwayne Jackson.

Meetings of the General Synod were opened and closed with prayer by the following persons:

Thursday, June 9
Afternoon Opening Prayer — Philip Assink, General Synod President
Afternoon Closing Prayer — Nancy Boote, Classis of North Grand Rapids

Friday, June 10
Morning Closing Prayer — Elvis Alvarez, Classis of Greater Palisades
Afternoon Opening Prayer — Jidong Shan, General Synod Council
Afternoon Closing Prayer — Israel Camacho, Classis of the Southwest
Evening Opening Prayer — Reghan Harms, Western Theological Seminary
Evening Closing Prayer — Charles Swoboda, Classis of Cascades

Saturday, June 11
Morning Closing Prayer — Kent McHeard, Classis of Schenectady
Afternoon Opening Prayer — Noreen Fargione, Classis of Albany
Afternoon Closing Prayer — Andrew Yamamoto, Classis of Central California
Evening Opening Prayer — Dwayne Jackson, General Synod Vice President
Evening Closing Prayer — Debra Rensink, Commission for Women

Sunday, June 12
Evening Opening Prayer — Patricia Johnson, New Brunswick Theological Seminary
Evening Closing Prayer — Josh Van Leeuwen, Classis of Central Iowa

Monday, June 13
Morning Closing Prayer — Ruth Langkamp, Commission on Race and Ethnicity
Afternoon Opening Prayer —Patricia Gilmer-Van Dorp, seminarian seminar participant

Afternoon Closing Prayer — Brian Keepers, Classis of East Sioux
Evening Opening Prayer — Hellen Harvey, General Synod Council
Evening Closing Prayer — Gildo Vieira, Classis of Ontario

Tuesday, June 14
Morning Opening Prayer — Frances Nelson, Classis of the City
Morning Closing Prayer — Jennifer Holmes Curran, Regional Synod of the Great Lakes

PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR

So that the parliamentarian and General Synod Council executive staff might respond to questions for clarification and participate as requested by the General Synod president in presentations to the General Synod and in other activities that appear on the agenda, the General Synod:

VOTED: To grant privilege of the floor to the parliamentarian and General Synod Council executive staff who are asked to speak.

SEATING OF DELEGATES/DECLARATION REGARDING QUORUM

The general secretary informed the synod that there were no irregularities and all delegates could be seated. The possible membership of General Synod was 220, with enrolled membership at 179, therefore, a quorum was declared present.

MINUTES AND JOURNAL/TELLERS

The Acts and Proceedings of the 214th regular session of the General Synod were read by title.

VOTED: To approve the minutes of the 2021 General Synod – "The Acts and Proceedings of the 214th Regular Session of the General Synod – 2021."

The Rules of Order were read by title, and it was indicated that copies were available online.

Devonna Cousins and Leigh Van Kempen (Committee of Reference members), Joshua Scheid (corresponding delegate from the Commission on Church Order), and all Seminarian Seminar participants were appointed as tellers.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA AND SCHEDULE

The General Synod approved a schedule based upon the agenda of General Synod prescribed in the Special Rules of Order of the General Synod (*BCO* Chapter 3, Part II, Article 1 [2021 edition, pp. 127-128]). See p. 31 for the General Synod's adoption of EC 22-1.

In addition to the prescribed agenda, the schedule provided for a hymn sing in the Chapel on the campus of Central College on Sunday afternoon, June 12, 2022.

During each session delegates were shown a brief video, each prepared by RCA

missionaries regarding their work. Missionaries who prepared the videos include Bob Abel, Martha Amaro, Cheryl Barnes, Susan and Jeremy Beebout, Nozomi Brownell, Rawee Bunupuradah, Andrew and Amy Fields, Jennifer Lucking, Keith Krebs, Angel Lopez, Gretchen Schoon Tanis, and Chad Vanden Bosch.

During the Friday evening session (June 10, 2022) the delegates received a report from the Restructuring Team appointed as a result of RF 21-1 and engaged in guided discussion.

During the Sunday evening session (June 12, 2022) the following ecumenical delegates addressed the General Synod: Rev. Chris Olkiewicz (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), Rev. Lisa Gaston (United Church of Christ), Lyle Bierma (Christian Reformed Church in North America), Y. Dianna Wright (Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.]), and Philip Tanis (World Communion of Reformed Churches). Additionally, the General Synod recognized five congregations for which new congregation plans have been approved since General Synod 2021, two local churches that have been newly organized since General Synod 2021, and 33 "Missional Impact Partner" churches for 2021, which are churches that gave annual gifts of at least $40,000 or a minimum of 10 percent of their income to carry out GSC initiatives locally and globally.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The following delegates were designated by the president to serve on advisory committees that considered specific business on church order and governance and overtures and new business.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHURCH ORDER AND GOVERNANCE
Moderator: Jonathan Opgenorth (minister, Classis of Zeeland)
Vice Moderator: Timothy Grade (minister, Classis of Rocky Mountains)
Ministers:
Kristin Brouwer (Classis of East Sioux)
Kyle Nesbitt (Classis of Cascades)
Ryan Cogswell (Classis of Montgomery)
Brandon Beebe (Classis of Southwest Michigan)

Elders:
Sara Donkersloot (Classis of Zeeland)
Savitri Devi Mark (Classis of Columbia-Greene)
Barbara Pimentel (Classis of Brooklyn)
Willie Si (Synod of Canada)

General Synod Professor:
Micah McCreary

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON OVERTURES AND NEW BUSINESS
Moderator: Cora Taitt (minister, Classis of New York)
Vice Moderator: Corinne Ellis (minister, Classis of the Southwest)

Ministers:
Sarah Bruins (Classis of North Grand Rapids)
Dirk Gieser (Classis of Albany)
David Hubbartt (Classis de las Naciones)
Marjorie Vander Wagen (Classis of Chicago)

Elders:
Lois Gates (Classis of Central Iowa)
Elba Arias Lopez (Classis of Orange)
Kenneth Mallory (Classis of West Sioux)
Denis Mugabo (Classis of Canadian Prairies)

General Synod Professor
James Brownson

DISPOSITION OF COMMUNICATIONS

The Office of the General Synod received no communications that were directed to or intended for the General Synod.

PRESENTATION AND REFERRAL OF NEW BUSINESS

Three items of new business were presented to and received by the General Synod, and then referred to the Committee of Reference for further referral or disposition as appropriate. The items of new business were as follows:

1. 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.

Reasons given for the submission of the foregoing as new business were:

1. This item is related to the war in Ukraine; the conditions of which have been rapidly changing, with losses from it greatly expanding in scope and cruelty beyond imagination in ways *that precluded meeting* the deadlines for submission of this item through regular channels of the church.
2. The General Synod workbook contains only two other cursory references to the war in Ukraine; but as a matter of recent yet global significance, in response to this war the Church of Christ must offer its voice of advocacy for the victims of this aggression and offer its call of peace for the healing of the nations. We cannot be complicit by silence on this matter.

The foregoing was accepted as new business and referred to the Committee of Reference. See EC 22-12 in the report of the Committee of Reference regarding New Business on page 41.

2. 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.

The reason given for the submission of the foregoing as new business was that the recent spike in prices of gasoline has occurred after the deadlines for submission of this concern through the regular channels of the church.

The foregoing was accepted as new business and referred to the Committee of Reference. See EC 22-13 in the report of the Committee of Reference regarding New Business on page 41.

3. To direct the general secretary of the Reformed Church in America to sign the "Open letter to State Lawmakers from America's Pro-life Organization" by June 30, 2022. (https://www.nrlc.org/uploads/communications/051222coalitionlettertostates.pdf).

Reasons:
1. It is consistent with GS 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).

The reason given for the submission of the foregoing as new business was that the letter was not published until May 12, 2022, and thus could not have been submitted through regular channels.

The foregoing was accepted as new business and referred to the Committee of Reference. See EC 22-14 in the report of the Committee of Reference regarding New Business on page 41.

REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT

Philip Assink

Mr. General Secretary, delegates at the 215th meeting of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, and those who are joining us online, I want to begin by expressing my gratitude for the privilege of serving the RCA as an officer for the past three years. I also want to say thanks to my wife, Melissa, for giving me permission to serve.

A variety of circumstances have led me to add a piece to my message less than a week before synod. The recent horrible tragedies in Buffalo, New York; Laguna Woods, California; Uvalde, Texas; Tulsa, Oklahoma; Ames, Iowa; and sadly many others compel us to stop business as usual and ask God for help to guide us beyond prayers and words into action. As Dr. Micah McCreary asked last night in his message, "Lord, what would you have us do?"

I have been in conversation with the chairperson of our Commission on Christian Action to consider what response we might offer. Because time does not allow for the proper vetting before we make a proposal to the synod and the RCA, we will offer you a preliminary suggestion and ask for you to pray to guide our efforts to act in ways that change the violence in our culture.

In our conversation, we are convicted that positive actions with those making a difference are better than words alone. The Alliance for Hope is an agency that exists to seek to intervene before angry shooters commit these horrible acts of violence and murder. Now, I need to mention, the president of The Alliance for Hope International, Casey Gwinn, happens to be my brother-in-law. I will gladly recuse myself of any formal action this body might choose to take related to this organization. I hope that the Alliance for Hope will be a partner to give us an avenue of constructive response in protecting some of the most at-risk people in our society.

One program in the alliance is Camp HOPE America. To protect the confidentiality, I am going to use general terms, but I believe you will understand the significance. Camp HOPE is for children who have witnessed or experienced abuse and domestic violence. These children are lifted out of their circumstances for a week and given a different perspective on life—a perspective that offers hope. Casey tells of one young man who shared his suicide plans while attending a week at a Camp HOPE. The intervention of the staff not only saved this young man's life, but it also cultivated the path for this young man to become a future Camp HOPE mentor and counselor.

My first proposal is:

> P-1
> To direct the Commission on Christian Action to explore the Alliance for Hope International as a possible partner to equip congregations and members of the Reformed Church in America to support the intervention and prevention of violence, for report to General Synod 2023.

Our Transformed & Transforming vision states, in part, "Being led by the Holy Spirit, serving with each other, embracing our diverse world and striving for a multicultural future freed from racism, and working with all the partners that God provides" (emphasis added). Could the Alliance for Hope be one such partner?

As I said, we need to stop and do things differently. I'd like to invite us to take a two-

minute table time to pray for these terrible, violent tragedies that have happened as of late, and for God to help us as a church and as his people to intervene and remove some of the violence from our society.

And now to return to our regularly scheduled message…

If you haven't checked in on the prayer room yet, there is a quilt project I would invite you to see. It is a watercolor quilt. If you look closely, you will see each of the sets of five squares form a small cross. All sewn together, these individual crosses form the larger picture. The artist, Anna Assink Peterson, had planned to have it finished before synod; however, she fell and broke her arm, so she was not able to complete it. However, it may stand as a more appropriate metaphor for the RCA: not a completed work but a work still in progress.

This is an interesting time to share reflections with the synod. I will state up front, that if I don't say something that makes you feel a little offended and called out, I will have missed the prophetic voice I sense we need to hear. Equally, if I don't say something that encourages you and gives you hope, I will have missed the prophetic voice I sense God wants us to hear! My hope is that these words will invite us to ask ourselves, "What is God saying to us?"

When I accepted this office in October of 2021, I mentioned that the RCA is broken. My assessment has not changed. As I said last fall, we need to decide if we are broken beyond repair, or broken and humbled to open up to let God tear through the callouses we have developed on our souls. This synod will not likely make many decisions deeply impacting the answer, but we have the opportunity to make decisions in a manner that reshapes our culture of deliberation and confrontation. I wonder how our dialogue would sound if, on matters of difference, we started by at least thinking, if not saying, "I could be wrong." As I share these thoughts with you, I realize I could be wrong. Let's talk…

A lot of talk focuses on the unity of the church. In order for that conversation to be helpful, we need an initial assessment of the current condition of the church. We need to start with the understanding that the relational covenant between the churches and classes in the RCA is broken. *We do not have a unity to maintain, but a unity to repair.* Our brokenness is multifaceted, but much of it resides in a polarizing debate between our polity and our doctrine. As I have read the Gospels over the years, I have had an unsettling discovery. I always want to be Jesus in the story. Perfect insight. Redemptive response. Kingdom impact. However, in passages like the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18, I more resemble the Pharisee. While I don't like that, I am trying to learn what God is saying to me through this dis-ease.

Let me risk alienating most of you early on. In looking back on our RCA history, the Rev. Dr. Daniel Meeter, an RCA historian, observes that the RCA has been shaped by two major immigration movements. Those arriving in the New York area came to be a part of the new world and the new colonization. Those who arrived in Western Michigan were more interested in being set apart from those around them. I see many of us in the RCA falling into one of two camps that have roots in this history. Both are eager to cite Scripture and history to support their position—one I'll call the Doctrinal Pharisees. This group is characterized by leaders who can neatly package Christianity and give a clear answer to any question or issue that may arise. Every question or conflict can be answered with a response where our doctrine clearly distinguishes between right and wrong. Just cite a verse, a question and answer from the Heidelberg, or an article from the Belgic Confession, and you have it!

The second group I'll call the Polity Sadducees. This group is characterized by leaders who can find a section in our *Book of Church Order* that clearly charts the path we can or should take. As long as we can cite chapter, part, article, section, and paragraph, we are justified. Whether this is used to find a way through or a way around, we are content as long as it is in our polity.

I don't think either group is malicious in their focus. Being aware of our roots can help us better understand our current reality and hopefully forge our future. If we can hold our convictions with humility, we will be more likely to come to a deeper understanding and a better outcome.

In his book, *Building a Discipling Culture*, Mike Breen shares an observation that reflects our tendency. "Repentance [humility] is necessary if we are to grow as disciples, but it is not always easy. Facing our failings, our pain, and our fears is something we want to put off like going to the dentist or washing the cat. … In a culture where our disciples look to our example and where our own pride often gets the best of us, we find ourselves running away from the sins and faults of our lives and toward the goal of fixing the problems in the lives of others." I'm not sharing this to try to identify the "guilty party." I want to find a kingdom solution!

Our current discussions and debates have led to the departure of friends and colleagues from our denomination. I have seen groups and individuals leaning away from the RCA even before recommendation three was adopted by last year's synod [see RF 22-3, *MGS 2021*, pp. 98-109]. As some of these churches leave, it will have a profound impact on our future as well as theirs. Learning to bless each other and be at peace as we part is not an easy path. Vice president of the General Synod, Dwayne Jackson, and I have often reflected that no one is making an irrevocable decision. We hope that people will remember the door swings both ways.

I have also seen groups and individuals leaning toward the RCA and finding fresh ministry insights. I was introduced to Friends to Friends Community Church in Ridgewood, New Jersey, and their pastor, Joanne Van Sant. Friends to Friends is a unique ministry that welcomes families and individuals of all abilities. I was in Canajoharie and enjoyed the community third space being created in a coffee shop hosted by pastor Matt Drafton and the church. From Washington State to New Jersey, I saw food pantries engaging volunteers and serving communities. I saw churches reaching across languages and cultures by embracing bilingual ministry. We saw the church in Warwick, New York, with pastors Stacey Duensing Pearce and Rolfi Elivo Lopez embracing an Hispanic and English-speaking partnership. We heard pastor Daryl Redmond in Paterson, New Jersey, sharing the vision of the multicultural communities they are seeking to reach. I have listened to elders and classes wrestle with some of the big moral challenges we face. They are exploring avenues to develop a deeper pastoral approach along with a broader vocabulary to reach more effectively. Many of these groups are discovering mistakes that have been made, particularly over the past 40 years. One church framed their ministry plan and then engaged friends in the LGBTQIA+ community in reviewing it. More significant than that they have a relationship with the community is that they have created a safe space for people to talk about it even though they have arrived at a different conclusion.

All of us need to recognize that issues facing the RCA are complicated. Yes and no questions are tidy but seldom reflect life. Eugene Peterson wrote in *Christ Plays in 10,000 Places*:

> The Trinity is of particular use to Christians in times of confusion. Our age

> certainly qualifies on that score. With the theological, religious, and cultural traditions in disarray, the options offered by opportunistic teachers and religion marketers for dealing with God and/or the soul are beyond calculation. In desperate times we are tempted to go for the quick answer and the efficient solution. But the quick answer is almost always the over simplified answer, leaving out all the complexities of actual truth; the efficient solution is almost always the depersonalized solution, for persons take a lot of time and endless trouble. In such conditions the Trinity is our most practical theological formulation for staying in touch with Christian basics: It keeps us in touch with the immense largesse of God and at the same time the immediate personalness of God. Meditating and praying in the name of the Trinity is essential for keeping our lives both large and personal during these times when the devil is using every strategy he can come up with to make us small and mean.

Our table times are an intentional effort to engage this slower work of the Trinity. We are building on the work of the Commission on Christian Action's recommendation CA 21-9 about civil, compassionate, Christ-honoring conversations [see *MGS 2021*, pp. 209-210]. This is not a new set of laws for us to follow but a challenge for us to live into. It is insufficient to practice these disciplines for a few days at synod. They need to reshape the way we relate and interact.

The church in general and the RCA in particular have too long been at the forefront of the "cancel culture," where those we disagree with are shunned, disparaged, defamed, and publicly shamed. Our human nature is to believe information that supports our biases, exaggerate facts that underscore our perspective, and spin our presentation to put ourselves in the best light. We launch toxic letter, email, and social media campaigns with a self-righteous sense of superior understanding and insights. The worst of these are regularly launched toward our general secretary. This is not a new practice. It assumes a quick resolution. It is a too deeply seated culture in the RCA that fosters tension and division. There are constructive but slower ways to engage disagreement and change. Using misinformation and public campaigns to ask for removal or termination over disagreements is an unacceptable practice for Jesus-followers. This is not something that will be easily purged from our midst. It will take an intentional and gracious accountability to one another where we not only refuse to become participants, but we also ask peers to refrain from or stop such behavior.

While our wounds and flaws threaten to define us, I also want us to consider what God is saying to us through the mission and ministry that flourishes across the RCA. The RCA has important work it is engaged in to celebrate.

Foremost, I want to thank the amazing staff we have serving us. I have found nothing but humility and sacrifice in my work with them. I would try to call out individuals, but that would be a disastrous exercise in omission! Please join me in thanking them here and wherever they are confined this week!

I'm excited to be in conversation with staff member Anna Radcliffe about the Next Gen work she is engaging. I invite you to get in line behind me to schedule her to come to your church, classis, or community to challenge you to consider how emerging leaders will shape the church today. On Whidbey Island, this will be an ecumenical gathering where we will have multiple partners, including Young Life, the Christian Reformed Church in North America, the Evangelical Covenant Church, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Christian Missionary Alliance, and more. A cooperative endeavor that captures the ministry partner model needed as we move forward. However, our Call Waiting program was canceled at

synod this year due to the limited number of youth corresponding delegates. What do we need to do to reach and include this generation?

On the second and fourth Tuesday of each month, we have a team leading a prayer gathering focused on dismantling racism in the RCA, in our churches, and in the communities we serve. This group presents a patient platform for us to gather and listen to the Spirit of God. It encourages us to move away from a frenzy of activity in reaction to a single event, to what I first heard from professor Travis Shaw at Western Seminary: "sustained indignation." If you are looking for a grace-filled opportunity to be stretched and engaged, please join us as we ask, "How is God calling us to dismantle racism and promote reconciliation?"

I am encouraged to hear the many ways our Women's Transformation and Leadership is equipping women and men to work together. Congregations are engaging the Bible study "Building God's Church Together." We have a wonderful avenue of discovery and encouragement in the She Is Called retreat ministry identifying the gifts and calling of women in the RCA and helping them to ask, "What is God saying to me?" To the whole church I ask, how will we unleash all the gifts of all of God's people?

We are seeing God stretch the boundaries of our denomination, geographically and linguistically. These are not easy or accidental changes. We need the work that Randy Weener, our Church Multiplication leader, is spearheading in church planting. Classes like Central Plains and Classis de las Naciones are engaging to reach people for Christ. Church planters are being gathered, equipped (taught Reformed theology and polity), and supported in their work. I sat in Managua, Nicaragua, with a pastor and his wife asking our Latin America Missions coordinator, Luis Ruiz, how at least five churches can join with the RCA.

From Nepal to Norway, from Chiapas to Chile, the Holy Spirit is opening doors and we are forging a new way of doing ministry in a world that is becoming a global village. Our Multiplication and Global Mission staff are working together to forge a new ministry paradigm. Still valuing our principles of local control and responsibility, we are discovering ways to form new and different mutually beneficial partnerships with churches globally. How is God at work and inviting us to join in?

Church planting is great, but I pray it can be a catalyst for church renewal. I know that statistically more new disciples are made in church plants than in established churches. My conviction is that this is sociological, not theological. By that, I mean that God wants *every* church focused on sharing Jesus in ways that makes new disciples who make new disciples. I was so encouraged as I listened to Heather Dood share her journey at Grace Reformed Church in Wyoming, Michigan. From her seat on the pastoral search committee, God called her to be the pastor of the church that she was on the search team for. Her story emboldens the whole classis as they recount the Easter after their revisioning and rebirthing where there were 12 professions of faiths and baptisms on that first Easter.

The journey toward discerning what God is saying to us has a built-in focus. In the Vision 2020 report, recommendation one established a Restructuring Team to report back not later than General Synod 2024 [see RF 22-1, *MGS 2021*, p. 94]. That feels like a long time to hold our breath for an uncertain future. I can't encourage us to adopt any ideas from this team as there are none yet formed. However, I can lay before this body some words that I hope will echo until at least June of 2024. We have to come behind this team with prayers and patient support. It is an enormous task taken on by a group of people who are already carrying a heavy load. If we learned anything from the Vision 2020 Team, it is that this work is demanding and exhausting. When we hear ideas being considered, rather than

slamming them as unreasonable or unacceptable, we need to engage in dialogue offering our assessment and feedback in constructive ways. In a post–synod 2021 debrief, I heard this team described as unconstitutional and illegal, and the challenge was offered for synod 2022 to overturn it. I do not find this attitude helpful if we want to see where God wants the RCA to go. Our history tells us we need to do something different. Before you say to the team, "That is a bad idea," or, "That won't work," please ask, "What might God be saying to us?"

The "doom loop" is a concept Walter Brueggemann has overlayed with themes from the psalms. The doom loop's thesis is that an organization will make a bold, healthy, missional decision. When it does, the status quo, the institutional preservationists will raise a voice that can create enormous organizational tension. When this happens, the bold, healthy, missional leaders consider their action and are often inclined to revert back to the old calm. The problem is that every reversion goes further back and ultimately a desire to avoid anxiety leads to an organization's death. At some point, the organization has to lean into a time of change in order to discover the new thing God is calling it to. Brueggemann's analysis identifies themes, such as the stability in Psalm 23, the destabilization in Psalm 22, the new orientation or new hope in Psalm 96. Another familiar definition that comes to mind is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results is that it sounds insane. But I would invite you to consider how many times in the past 40 years the RCA has had the opportunity to make a bold missional step and we have cowered in the anxiety of the organization, seeking institutional calm and creating institutional chaos.

My plea is that we will not lock the RCA into a doom loop by limiting the thinking and creativity of this group. I have no idea what they will come up with. I have my ideas of what they should come up with as well as you do. However, this task force has one shot. We are the ones who need to begin to prepare our hearts and the heart of our denomination for one of the most radical changes in our history. Who knows? One of the craziest ideas might be taking the RCA out to the desert in October to listen to the Holy Spirit!

I am convinced we need to let this team know that everything, absolutely everything, about the RCA organization and structure is on the table. A pastor in Chicago said it well, "Please don't try to tweak the RCA. We need a complete makeover." We cannot ask for an exemption for our pet emphasis. Every page and paragraph of the *Book of Church Order*, every organizational piece from commissions to councils needs to be assessed, evaluated, and be open to revision and change.

I'd like to delve a little more deeply into one example that can help us see the challenge. Our ecumenical relations are an emotional part of this assessment. I have been involved in interdenominational work since I was in high school. I have spoken in front of this body in support of our ongoing membership in the National Council of Churches. I have been a supporter of the Formula of Agreement. I believe the body of Christ working together can be a powerful witness to the presence of Jesus.

I am greatly encouraged to hear of organic and local expressions of ecumenical cooperation. I enjoyed listening to Stacey Duensing Pearce, our RCA representative at the Global Christian Forum, talk about the emphasis on gathering and listening she experiences as she represents the RCA in the forum. I hope you are enjoying and maybe even benefiting from the partnership the RCA has had with the Evangelical Covenant Church on the Vitality Pathway with its emphasis on healthy missional markers. Another global example from our missions team is our partnership with the biblical seminary in Medellin, Colombia. Through this ministry where RCA missionaries Andrew and Amy Fields serve, we engage a broad swath of Christianity in Latin America and even back into North America.

Our history has spent a great deal of time, money, and energy on formal ecumenical agreements. Has our focus on formal agreements contributed to us missing the more organic work of the Spirit? A disturbing image filled my mind as I participated in one of our ecumenical conversations. As I listened to one of our ecumenical partners speak of the ways we have been systematically taking down the bricks that have built a wall between us as denominations, I saw those same bricks being laid in a new wall that now divides us as a denomination. Can you feel the institutional anxiety that evaluation and change creates? What is God saying to us about ecumenical partnerships?

Nowhere are the benefits of our ecumenical relations greater than in our Global Mission work. A troubling element came when I sat with some of our global missionaries. As if the RCA isn't filled with enough uncertainty for us state-side, try to imagine what it is like to maintain your focus and spirit when you are dependent upon churches who are in flux with their relationship to the denomination. The heartbreaking words to me were our missionaries recounting hearing that churches are informing them they dropping or reducing support of RCA missions.

My second proposal to this body is

> P-2
> To urge all congregations that support RCA Global Mission through Partnership-in-Mission shares to maintain those partnerships, and, for congregations that have transferred or are transferring out of the RCA, to consider staying engaged with their RCA mission partners even when they are no longer formally connected to the RCA to sustain this kingdom witness.

Synod 2021 clearly and resoundingly affirmed that Global Mission is one of the most significant elements in our history. Our Global Mission director, JP Sundararajan, provided the sound bite, "General Synod just gave Global Mission a great big hug." Our current mission's staff and missionaries are among the best. With devotion and dedication, they serve sacrificially and selflessly. While I recognize we cannot force or enforce this recommendation, I do not believe any PIM share or other Global Mission partnership should be allowed to end without a significant call to consider the potential kingdom impact. I pray our domestic divisions will not negatively impact our global witness.

While on missions, I'd like us to set our sights on a future goal as well. The RCA has had a long and strong history in the area of disaster response. Always willing to accept offerings and send volunteers, the RCA rallies to the cause when disaster strikes. We have used our global missionary partners to maximize the impact of our gifts and services. We have responded early with needed supplies and money, and we have stayed late to rebuild when the crisis has passed from the popular spotlight. This is happening in real time in and around the Ukraine today. Our missionaries and partners on the border in Hungary and Romania are adapting daily to help the refugees fleeing the war.

In the past, the RCA has adjusted its budget to say these disaster response offerings are being received without any overhead being assessed. An evaluation of this practice revealed that some ministries were suffering to make this happen. The decision was made to re-institute an overhead percentage to cover the additional costs for staff time and travel. In an effort to minimize the impact of this necessity, the staff reassessed the need and squeezed the percentage to the lowest possible measure.

I am convinced on a much broader scale than just the RCA, poor stewardship is one of the most damning evidences of disciples lacking a vibrant understanding of what it means to

follow Jesus Christ. Near where I live is one of the largest philanthropic organizations in the world: The Gates Foundation. Its assets are rather staggering to the average person. (Its assets are $49 billion.) However, studies show that if Christians in the United States were to tithe, in one year, the additional income that would be generated could create a foundation more than four times the size of the Gates Foundation. And every year after that...

To give the RCA an opportunity to exercise the spiritual discipline of stewardship through special gifts, to encourage us with Paul's encouragement in 2 Corinthians 8:7, to excel in the grace of giving, I am working with the general secretary and our Advancement staff and Global Mission team to develop ideas and plans for raising funds for a future endowment fund for disaster response. The income from this endowment would be used to fund administrative and other overhead costs for disaster response efforts so that 100 percent of donated funds go directly to those in the field responding to the disaster. We felt this would not be the time for a formal proposal, which carries with it the implications of a mandate that must be fulfilled in a specific way. However, the possibilities are worth exploring.

The endowment can be set up in such a way that should RCA disaster relief ever cease to be, this endowment would have a restricted distribution that can only be used for disaster relief. The past year gives us a glimpse of what this could mean. We have received disaster relief gifts in the past 12 months for the Haitian earthquake, India COVID relief, Afghanistan refugee assistance, a building destroyed in a storm in Brazil, and the war in Ukraine. If the overhead were funded by an endowment, that would mean that just this year alone, an additional $83,000 would have gone directly to relief efforts. For the war relief effort, a special gift for administration was received so that 100 percent of all money received for this crisis is being used for disaster relief. This means that, to-date, an additional $26,000 have gone to disaster relief that would have otherwise been needed for response logistics. This endowment would allow us to do this in perpetuity, adding another shining facet to our Global Mission and witness.

Remember our quilt? Yes, Anna is my mother! She is making the quilt to remind us that thousands of individuals make up the RCA. It reminds us that God is still at work in our midst. May the Spirit unite us into a larger body as we explore the question, "What is God saying to us?" I invite you to ask yourself the question: What did you hear this afternoon that unsettles you? What did you hear that encourages you? What gives you hope? What is God saying to you? What is God's unfinished work in your life?

Thank you, and God bless you.

Upon recommendation of the Committee of Reference, the president's two proposals (P-1 and P-2) were referred to the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business for consideration. *See p. 109 for the resulting recommendations, ONB 22-7 and ONB 22-8.*

REPORT OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY

Eddy Alemán

Dear delegates of the General Synod 2022, the Lord be with you!

It is an honor for me to address you this morning to share my report with you. If my report to you today were a sermon, I would title it: "From Lament to Hope." Hope is a beautiful thing and it is what helps us carry the heaviest burdens of life. Biblical hope is not only the desire for something good to happen in the future; it is the confident expectation that it will happen. Hope is holding on to the promises of God that he will be with us to the ends of the age. Friends, we cannot live in this life without hope, but we cannot hope without lamenting first; we cannot ignore the need to lament. We come to hope through lament. This is so true for us in the world we are living in today and in the Reformed Church in America.

As you all know, our beloved denomination is going through one of the most challenging seasons of its life. This is not the first challenging season, and I'm sure it won't be the last. Throughout the course of our almost 400 years of history as a denominational family, we have gone through many difficult times, and we have been able to come to the other side stronger, and this time is not the exception. By God's grace, we will be able to come to the other side stronger and healthier. I can see it! Can you see it?

I have said it many times and in different contexts that the first half of this decade—the '20s—is going to be tough because we are re-organizing, re-structuring, and re-defining our ministry. These are major organizational changes, and change is difficult and painful. People usually are not afraid of change itself because change is good, healthy, and necessary, but they are afraid of loss, and when change takes place, loss becomes a reality. We are experiencing that now. As a denomination, we must lament all of the loss we are currently experiencing and will continue to experience in the next few years. But, the second half of this decade is going to be great! I can see the church of 2030. God has been at work in the past—we have seen it—and we will continue to see him at work in the future. I am a witness of the great things God does in our ministries.

Last October, in response to the Vision 2020 Team report, General Synod formed a team to develop a restructuring plan for the denomination for sustained spiritual and organizational health. A month ago, the restructuring team had its first in-person meeting, and it was a great time of prayer, discernment, and connecting. You will hear an update from several of the team members this evening.

It is not a secret to anyone that, as a denomination, we are walking through a dark time, and we need to lament that reality. We must not only recognize the need for lament, but we also need to practice the discipline of lament both within and beyond the walls of our churches.

We need to lament because of the reality we are experiencing in the world today.

- We continue to deal with the devastating impact of a global pandemic. We are not post-COVID-19 yet. We need to lament the devastating impact we continue to see in our world and our churches.
- We continue to experience social and racial injustice in North America.
- We continue to witness the senseless deaths of young and old people in places that are supposed to be the safest places, like schools and churches.

We need to lament because of what we are experiencing within our beloved denomination.

- We are seeing RCA churches leaving our family to form their own networks or to join other denominational families. We need to lament that.
- We are seeing regional synods, classes, and local congregations discerning if it's time to leave the denomination or to stay. We need to lament the process that churches are going through today.
- In my role of general secretary, I'm lamenting the loss of important staff members who have accepted other calls to serve God in other ministries, including Rev. Dr. Jill Ver Steeg and pastor Eliza Cortés Bast.

We need to lament well because the past three years have been extremely difficult. Since General Synod in October of 2021, 68 churches have left the denomination, and another four churches have closed. An additional 60 churches have filed a petition to withdraw and are still in the process of leaving the denomination. Some churches, classes, and regions are still discerning whether to stay or go. My friends, this hurts. Sometimes, it's personal—when it's a church we've served as pastors, a church we grew up in, a church where we taught Sunday school or visited family members or friends, a church where we do any of these things currently and not just in the past. When we see them having these conversations of leaving, this hurts. Separation has not always been as generous in spirit as it has been generous in resources; this, too, hurts. It hurts when people who are leaving vilify people who are staying. It hurts when they make disparaging comments about the denomination we love. But this goes both ways, and we who are staying have also lashed out. At times, I need to remind myself to be generous in spirit; I need to confess my anger and disappointment and judgment and instead commit myself to prayer. I pray with pastors every Friday and that is a highlight of my week. We confess and pray together.

We need to lament the hurt that we cause each other. We need to lament the loss of each other. We need to lament not living up to General Synod's vision of a mutually generous separation, and we need to recommit ourselves to generosity of spirit.

We lament the misinformation that is circulating about the Reformed Church in America. We lament the loss of RCA identity for people for whom that was important, but whose church has left the denomination. We lament the loss of stability. We lament the collateral damage of these decisions: friction within congregations, attention deflected from mission and ministry, strained and broken relationships. We lament the divisions that we could not overcome.

When I think about all this, Psalm 13 comes to my mind:

"How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I bear pain in my soul,
and have sorrow in my heart all day long?
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

Consider and answer me, O LORD my God!
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,
and my enemy will say, 'I have prevailed';
my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.

But I trusted in your steadfast love;
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.
I will sing to the LORD,
because he has dealt bountifully with me."

This sounds like a journal entry, doesn't it? This psalm sounds familiar to many of us who have gone through some of the darkest days of our lives. This psalm is a beautiful example of going from lament to hope.

In the first two verses, the psalmist asks a set of painful questions to God that clearly describe the pain and sorrow of his heart:

"How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I bear pain in my soul,
and have sorrow in my heart all day long?
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?"

Notice the recurring phrase, "how long?" As in, "when will this be over?" or "when will you relieve me of my grief and agony?" What is happening to David is unpleasant. It's hard. He wants to be done with it. And so he asks, "How long?" How many times have we asked that question? I have asked that question many times in my life. He addresses this to the Lord. It's a desperate, miserable plea for the Lord to intervene for him.

I believe this a great example for us to follow as a denomination. We need to cry out to the Lord in a similar fashion. The situations we are going through are troubling. They are not enjoyable. They are causing us grief, pain, and anguish. We need to cry out to the Lord and ask him, "how long?" It is not a sin for us to express our deep grief about the situations we are going through that are hurtful and frightening.

Verses three and four include David's humble petition to the Lord:

"Consider and answer me, O LORD my God!
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,
and my enemy will say, 'I have prevailed';
my foes will rejoice because I am shaken."

In these two verses, David gives a request and then reasons as to why the Lord should answer him. He starts by asking God to "consider" and "answer" his request. He wants God to look at and be mindful of him. But he won't settle for just a look. He wants an answer from God. His request is for God to "give light to his eyes." In essence, what David is saying is: "I know there is a solution to my problem. I just need You, Lord, to open my eyes so that I can see it."

This reminds me of another person from the Bible who was in a hopeless situation. Hagar, Sarah's slave who had given birth to Ishmael, had been sent away from Abraham's home. She and her son were alone in the desert with no more food or water. At that point, Hagar resolved that she and her young son would die. She walked away from her son so that she would not have to watch him die and then she sat down and wept.

An angel appeared to Hagar and told her that God had heard her son's cries and that they both would live. The Bible tells us, "Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water" (Genesis 21:19). Hagar and her son were saved that day.

Notice that Scripture does not say that God miraculously created a well of water. The well had been there all along, only Hagar could not see it. It's only when God opened her eyes that she could see the solution to her problem, which had been right in front of her.

Sometimes when we are feeling hopeless, stressed, or afraid, we lack the vision to see how we can help ourselves. We lack the vision to see what God has in store for us. Sometimes, we can be feeling great and still lack the ability to see what is best for us. At all times, we must turn to God and pray as David prayed that God will "Give light to my eyes"—that God will open our eyes and illuminate our souls so that we can see the path that leads to our salvation. Then, when our eyes are opened, like David, we, too, will joyfully sing, "my heart rejoices in your salvation" (verse 5). That's my prayer for our beloved RCA family. We need God to open our eyes wide for us to see what he is doing in our midst.

Finally, in verses five and six, we can see the beautiful affirmation of hope.

"But I trusted in your steadfast love;
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.
I will sing to the LORD,
because he has dealt bountifully with me."

Hope removes all fears because it allows us to see the wonderful acts of God. Hope allows us to trust in God's steadfast love. And thus, we can sing to the Lord and rejoice in his salvation.

If I were to rewrite Psalm 13 for us today, it might sound like this:

"How long, O Lord? Will you forget us forever? How long will you hide your face from us? How many more farewells must we endure? How much more drastic change must we ride out? How long will the enemy keep us divided?

Consider and answer us, O Lord our God! Give light to our eyes; unless you open our eyes and show us the way, we're doomed, and critics will say, 'They got what they deserved,' and our foes will rejoice because we are smaller, because they think we won't make it.

But we trust in your steadfast love and believe you have a bright future for us. We will rejoice in your salvation; we know you can make a way.

We will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with us; for 394 years, through many trials and dangers, he has provided for us abundantly."

Friends, even as we lament, there is so much to be hopeful for and to celebrate in the ministry of the Reformed Church in America.

Transformed & Transforming

Reasons for hope start with the progress that we are seeing through the work of Transformed & Transforming, the RCA's 15-year strategic initiative to equip RCA congregations in discipleship, leadership, and mission. You will hear other reasons for hope later this week in reports about RCA Global Mission and Church Multiplication.

We have made significant progress in many important areas of ministry this year through Transformed & Transforming; these are some of the highlights.

- Disability Concerns is looking to young leaders to lead us into a future marked by discipleship, servanthood, and equity-based hospitality. They are working to particularly identify and invest in disability advocates age 30 and younger. One way they are doing this is by leading the Disability Advocacy Journey in partnership with Next Generation Engagement. The Disability Advocacy Journey is an eight-month virtual experience for young people in their 20s to study the disability rights movement in North America and apply their own advocacy skills in community-based initiatives. This experience elevated the passion of young leaders and equipped them for advocacy right where they are. Ten young people have been selected to develop grant-funded projects toward advocacy work that will help their communities better love and serve alongside people with disabilities. Revs. Anna Radcliffe and Terry DeYoung led this cohort of young leaders.
- More than ten women are enrolled in the She Is Called cohorts for New Brunswick Theological Seminary's certificate program in church leadership and theological studies, exploring their callings to become preaching elders or commissioned pastors, to go further in their seminary studies, or to simply become better equipped ministry leaders.
- In early 2022, our first Generation Spark group launched with ten participating congregations. Generation Spark partners youth with mentors in their congregations in order to fully integrate another generation into the life and leadership of the church. It shows young adults why being part of the church matters. Rev. Anna Radcliffe and Ruth Langkamp lead Generation Spark in partnership with the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA). The program is funded by a grant from the Lilly Endowment Inc.
- Speaking of partnerships with the CRC, RCA and CRC Disability Concerns released an updated and expanded third edition of the *Inclusion Handbook* last summer, retitled *Everybody Belongs, Serving Together*. This practical resource helps advocates, church members, and pastors improve accessibility in their churches and recognize people with disabilities as ministry partners. The third edition includes many more perspectives of people with disabilities. It is available on the RCA's Faithward website, in print, and in audio. Spanish, Korean, and French translations are available.
- As pandemic concerns curtailed and continue to curtail in-person events, Rev. Liz Testa and the Women's Transformation and Leadership team she leads have continued to create sacred spaces that foster community and combat isolation, including small groups, book studies, retreats, and prayer gatherings.
- The *Lavish Hope* podcast, now in its third season, shares incredible stories of resilience and overcoming. Each episode's guests share their story and offer tips and tools to help listeners embrace hope and build resiliency as Christ-followers in today's world. Their stories are really remarkable.
- Two cohorts allowed ministry leaders to journey together and hone their leadership skills as solo pastors and as senior pastors. Another cohort helped leaders flourish through change and disruption.
- The Local Missional Engagement team helped churches develop new local mission practices in the midst of a pandemic. They provided tools like a prayer-walking guide, helped churches understand their community through MissionInsite demographic analyses, and coached pastors and consistories.
- Beginning in the summer of 2021, Next Generation Engagement began a partnership with five young leaders, elevating their voices on Faithward.org as regular content contributors on issues pertaining to finances, environment, spiritual formation, and more.
- A second volume of the popular She Is Called Women of the Bible study series

has been released on the RCA Store and on Faithward. Volume 2 takes biblical women's stories deeper, coming from a Reformed perspective with relevant practical application. It is available in both English and Spanish and is being used by people in North America and beyond.

- In early 2023, Next Generation Engagement will launch its first online course for children's ministry leaders. The course has been developed by Shelley Henning as a way to better serve and prepare children's ministry leaders for the shifting reality of congregations post-pandemic as well as shifting generational dynamics.

Shifts in Transformed & Transforming

In 2014, I joined staff as the coordinator for Leadership Development, part of the ministry of Transformed & Transforming. Given the reality that we are living today, we are trying to make some changes. The reality that we are living today is different. It is challenging, and it is hard. This year, GSC staff work around Transformed & Transforming experienced multiple shifts that continued to shape and re-shape its identity within the RCA. On top of the challenges and impact of COVID-19 and the impact of decisions made at General Synod 2021, the way that we have been structuring our work around Transformed & Transforming was reviewed as part of my plan to reorganize the GSC denominational staff.

As part of the ongoing Transformed & Transforming vision mandated by General Synod, as well my own commitment to give an answer to the reality we are living today, I asked Rev. Sung Kim to initiate a new integrated vision for equipping in 2022 and beyond. We are in the midst of an internal structure shift to honor both the spirit and goals of Transformed & Transforming, while also embracing the Spirit's movement toward a new global future for the RCA.

Sung is working closely with the Church Multiplication and Global Mission team to house a new center for leadership and mission. This center will offer training for discipleship, leadership, local mission, Women's Transformation and Leadership, Disability Concerns, Next Generation Engagement, as well as holistic discipleship work for church planting locally and around the world.

During the pandemic, we realized that we could do a better job of responding, listening, and working alongside churches and leaders. The need for additional Sabbath and mental health resources for ministers, the need for training on adaptive leadership and innovation processes, the pain of mid-pandemic challenges, the desire for advocacy opportunities and avenues to pursue anti-racism, the fear of churches not being able to sustain themselves and remain open beyond the pandemic, and the need for resources for ongoing next generation work have led us to retool Transformed & Transforming.

We are committed to developing a more nimble and responsive way for the Transformed & Transforming team to provide quality services for both the present and future RCA. Part of that retooling will be greater partnership with regional synods, classes, and classis leaders, recognizing and supporting the work that God is already doing in and through the regions and classes in the Reformed Church in America.

During this season of change and restructuring, and with a smaller ministry staff, we need to be creative and strategic. We no longer can continue to do things the way we always did. Bringing all the ministry staff together in a new center is an effort to respond with creativity to the current reality we are facing as a denomination.

The center will train the head, heart, and hands of leaders, and strengthen the soul of our churches.

The training and learning opportunities offered to churches and ministry leaders will empower them for greater discipleship, leadership, and local mission, as it has in the past, whether they serve long-established congregations or new church plants. I want you to hear from me the importance of our churches that are staying—small, big, and mid-size, 200 years old or 400. We cannot go into the future without paying attention to and blessing those long-established congregations in the Reformed Church in America

Different levels of learning will be available, from content such as blog posts or toolkits, to more in-depth coaching or consulting, or connecting with other leaders through a cohort learning experience.

New ministry connections in Central and South America

In this past year, I have had the wonderful opportunity to connect with leaders from different parts of the world who would like to have a closer connection with the Reformed Church in America. It is wonderful to read the book of Acts. All of these are "Macedonian calls" of leaders and churches asking us to come and help them.

Nicaragua

In December of 2021, I went to Nicaragua with Rev. Andres Serrano, who is our coordinator for Hispanic Ministries and a strategist for Church Multiplication. We met with a group of about 40 leaders who are seeking our help to establish an equipping center to train pastors and church planters.

It was a beautiful thing for me to go back to the place where I was born, to meet with these leaders and train them for mission work in my own birth place.

Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile

In February, I had the opportunity to respond to another "Macedonian call," this time coming from South American leaders. I joined a trip organized by Rev. Fabio Sosa of Central Plains Classis, which had connections with pastoral networks in Buenos Aires, Mendoza, Montevideo, and Santiago. The pastors we met with are familiar with the RCA through Central Plains Classis or Classis de las Naciones, and are interested in joining our denomination through those classes. We are walking into new territory, responding to the opportunities that God is giving us. Traveling with the Revs. Andres Serrano and Fabio Sosa, I was impressed to see that what is attracting all of these leaders is our Reformed theology. In my meetings with them, I just gave a simple explanation of the five solas of the reformation:

- *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone)
- *Solus Christus* (Christ alone)
- *Sola Fide* (faith alone)
- *Sola Gratia* (grace alone)
- *Soli Deo gloria* (glory to God alone)

A pastor from the Classis de las Naciones teaches the Heidelberg Catechism to a couple hundred people every Saturday via Zoom because they really value our creeds, confessions, and Reformed understanding of Scripture. Friends, in the midst of the challenging season

we are going through as a denomination, even as we are lamenting, God continues to do great things. This gives me hope. It should give us all hope. Let us stay alert for the work of God's Spirit with hopeful expectation, so that we can join in that work. I invite you to pray and help us discern how to answer these "Macedonian calls."

Encouragement from RCA churches

This spring, I have traveled a lot, and I thank God for the visits I have been able to make to RCA churches and leaders across the denomination. This is a really important time for connection. I have had wonderful visits with leaders from churches that are committed to the Reformed Church in America long-term. From Wisconsin to New York, from Iowa to California, from Florida to Ontario to New Jersey, these visits have been an encouragement to me during this challenging season. We are honest with each other about the challenges facing the church and the denomination, and we are able to bless each other and pray for each other and seek God's face together.

Seeking transformation

Reformed Church in America churches and leaders, I ask you to explore new ways of doing ministry in the communities God called you to serve. Please watch this video as a beautiful example of transformational ministry for the community: www.rca.org/theboulevard.

Friends, this is an example of one of our churches going from lament and death to resurrection and hope. This is the transformation story of Fourth Reformed Church becoming the BLVD Church in Holland, Michigan. I give thanks to my dear friends Jonathan Brownson and Ben Aguilera for sharing their beautiful story with us. I believe this is a great example of the transformation that the Reformed Church in America is going through right now. We're in the midst of that, experiencing death in many different ways, to seeing and experiencing new life and hope about the future—a hope that is multiethnic, multiracial, and multi-generational, and a future that includes doing ministry with people in every walk of life, a future that involves us listening to the gospel, and a future that looks like Jesus.

If you read the Gospels, Jesus always hung out with the wrong people—having dinner with tax collectors, talking with a woman from Samaria, and allowing a prostitute to cry and wash his feet. I am praying for a future of the Reformed Church in America that will look more like Jesus's ministry. I am praying for a church that looks more like the kingdom of heaven, where people of all nations and tongues will worship God together, as described in Revelation 7:9. That's the future we're hoping for. I invite leaders in the Reformed Church in America to try new things. Don't be afraid of the work God is doing. Embrace the work God is inviting us to follow.

Dear friends of the Reformed Church in America, God is up to something great in our future. Keep the faith, keep lamenting, and keep hoping!

Mr. President, this concludes my report.

After the conclusion of the general secretary's report, the following motion was made and supported:

VOTED: To commend the general secretary's report to all classes and consistories.

Report of the General Synod Council Serving As the Executive Committee of the General Synod

The Son of God gathers, protects, and preserves the church by his Spirit and his Word (Heidelberg Catechism, Answer 54). The church exists to announce, teach, and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. The church speaks, and it acts. For those of us in the Reformed tradition, the church governs its life, and it determines how best to carry out its mission through its assemblies.

God seeks certain characteristics, and the world also watches to see if those characteristics are evident in our life and work together. Our ability to go forth and preach the gospel is supported by the work of our congregations, classes, and synods. Together, we are a body of committed believers in covenant with one another. Christ's mission is enhanced when the Word of God and our love for each other are the foundation for order, discipline, and effectiveness. This Reformed understanding of the church and the manner through which we govern our life together are foundational.

Our prayer throughout the year and as we meet as a General Synod body is that our unity and attention to governance will glorify God.

> The General Synod Council is established by and responsible to the General Synod. It shall act as the executive committee of the General Synod and it shall administer the affairs of the Reformed Church in America between the sessions of the General Synod. It shall implement decisions, policies, and programs of the General Synod through proper channels and agencies. It shall support, strengthen, and coordinate the work of the several commissions, boards, institutions, and agencies of the Reformed Church in America, thus seeking to increase the effectiveness of the mission and witness of the church (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 7, Section 1 [2021 edition, p. 73]).

The General Synod Council serves "as the Executive Committee of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, as the Committee of Reference at meetings of the General Synod, and as the Board of Trustees of the General Synod as may be required by law" (*BCO*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6a [2021 edition, p. 110]).

For a full listing of the responsibilities of the General Synod Council, refer to the Bylaws of the General Synod (*BCO*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6 [2021 edition, pp. 110-111]).

The work of the General Synod Council, as directed by previous General Synods, is reported to the General Synod in two areas:

1. Matters of governance—the work the General Synod Council (GSC) has done with respect to a) the meeting of the General Synod; b) matters of its own organization, including its oversight and stewardship of the financial resources given to it; c) its support and supervision of denominational staff and the general secretary; d) the work of its committees, teams, and racial and ethnic councils; and e) a general overview of the work of the church as reported by the GSC in its role as the General Synod Executive Committee.

2. The work the GSC has done with regard to the oversight of the mission and ministry assigned to it by the General Synod under the rubric of Transformed &

Transforming, the General Synod's 15-year ministry goal, and which is reported by the GSC in its role as the General Synod's program agency.

Review of Regional Synod Minutes

The General Synod Office has received and read the 2021 minutes of the regional synods of Albany, Canada, the Far West, the Great Lakes, the Heartland, Mid-America, the Mid-Atlantics, and New York.

GENERAL SYNOD MEETING

Referral of Business

The business of General Synod was assigned to the appropriate committees as presented in the General Synod Workbook.

EC 22-1
To approve the agenda and schedule of the General Synod as presented in the General Synod Workbook. (ADOPTED)

The Seating of Delegates

The Bylaws of the General Synod require that a classis be current in the payment of its General Synod assessments before its delegates may be seated as members of the General Synod (*BCO*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 1, Section 1a [2021 edition, p. 107]). The general secretary reported on classes' payments of General Synod assessments and reported that there were no delegates who could not be seated because of irregularities.

Amendments to the *Book of Church Order*

The General Synod of 2021 adopted and referred to the classes for approval five amendments to the *Book of Church Order* (*BCO*). The amendments are recorded in the *2021 Minutes of the General Synod* as noted. Forty-six classes were eligible to vote on these amendments (per *BCO,* Rules and Amendments of the Government of the Reformed Church in America and Disciplinary Procedures, Section 2b [2021 edition, p. 77]). As of April 25, 2022, four classes had not reported votes to the Office of the General Synod on the questions of whether to approve the amendments. The votes of the other 42 classes, as reported in writing by the classes' stated clerks, were as follows:

	Book of Church Order Amendments	Disapproved	Approved
1.	**Formulary No. 18 (New)—Certificate for the Transfer of a Minister of Word and Sacrament to Another Denomination** (*MGS 2021*, CO 21-1, pp. 230-231)	0	42
2.	**Formulary No. 9—Certificate for the Transfer of a Minister of Word and Sacrament to Another Classis within the Reformed Church in America** (*MGS 2021,* CO 21-2, pp. 231-232) *BCO*, Formulary 9 (2021 edition, p. 140)	0	42

3.	**Sessions of General Synod** (*MGS 2021*, CO 21-4, p. 240) *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 4, Section 1 (2021 edition, p. 71)	2	40
4.	**Amending the RCA Constitution at Stated Sessions** (*MGS 2021*, CO 21-5, pp. 240-241) *BCO*, Rules and Amendments of The Government of the Reformed Church in America and Disciplinary Procedures, Section 2 (2021 edition, p. 77)	0	42
5.	**Discipline of a Member of a Local Church** (*MGS 2021*, CO 21-7, p. 242) *BCO*, Chapter 2, Part I, Article 3, Section 1 (2021 edition, pp. 81-82)	1	41

All five amendments received the approval of the required two-thirds of classes, and so all were presented to the 2022 General Synod for final declarative action.

EC 22-2
To declare Amendment 1 to be approved for incorporation into the 2022 *Book of Church Order*. (ADOPTED)

EC 22-3
To declare Amendment 2 to be approved for incorporation into the 2022 *Book of Church Order*. (ADOPTED)

EC 22-4
To declare Amendment 3 to be approved for incorporation into the 2022 *Book of Church Order*. (ADOPTED)

EC 22-5
To declare Amendment 4 to be approved for incorporation into the 2022 *Book of Church Order*. (ADOPTED)

EC 22-6
To declare Amendment 5 to be approved for incorporation into the 2022 *Book of Church Order*. (ADOPTED)

The 2021 General Synod also approved in first reading for recommendation to the next stated session of the General Synod the following amendments to the Bylaws and Special Rules of Order of the General Synod:

Committee on Emergencies—BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, new Article 10 (*MGS 2021*, CO 21-3, pp. 238-239)

Add Final Declarative Resolutions to Agenda of General Synod—BCO, Chapter 3, Part II, Article 1, Section 2, new subsection b (*MGS 2021*, CO 21-6, p. 241)

EC 22-7
To declare the amendment to the Bylaws of the General Synod specified in CO 21-3, adopted in first reading by the 2021 General Synod, to be approved for incorporation into the 2022 *Book of Church Order*. (ADOPTED)

EC 22-8
To declare the amendment to the Special Rules of Order of the General Synod specified in CO 21-6, adopted in first reading by the 2021 General Synod, to be approved for incorporation into the 2022 *Book of Church Order*. (ADOPTED)

Proposed Delay in Final Implementation of Covenant Shares

General Synod 2019 approved changes to the General Synod bylaws that would allow a change in the manner in which assessments are calculated to a percentage of income method from the per-member method. Changes to the General Synod bylaws require approval by two General Synods in order to become effective. The General Synod did not meet in 2020, and the October 2021 General Synod voted to postpone that second vote, at the recommendation of the GSC.

While there are pros and cons to either delaying again or moving forward, the GSC recommended to General Synod that it once again postpone the second vote on the General Synod bylaws change to implement covenant shares for the following reasons.

1. **Frequently changing data**. It is not possible to predict with sufficient accuracy which churches will be leaving and the impact that would have on covenant shares. Before going forward, the GSC would like finance staff to complete a full analysis of the impact of a change to covenant shares on the classes based on the churches that remain and also the impact on the denomination.

2. **Impact on classis clerks and treasurers**. Classis clerks and treasurers have a lot of work to do related to departing churches and implementing "gracious separation" measures. The addition of a change in method of assessment may be an undue burden during an already high-stress time for those serving at the classis level. In the first year of implementation of covenant shares, it is anticipated that there will be a higher number of questions than usual about completing the Consistorial Report Form (CRF), and in many cases the classis stated clerk and treasurer will need to address those questions.

3. **Membership and a per-member assessment is more predictable**. During a very uncertain time in the RCA, this is a simple, straightforward way to predict and budget denominational income and the payments due at the local level.

4. **Review committee changes**. When the covenant shares method was first passed by General Synod, the GSC appointed a review committee to evaluate the first three years of covenant shares implementation. Some of the members of this committee have since left the denomination. New committee members need to be appointed from the pool of RCA

members who are remaining in the RCA, and who are willing to commit to participating in the review committee for three years, since the committee will be most effective if its members are building on their experiences from year to year.

5. **Covenant shares was approved at the 2019 General Synod nearly three years ago**. Because so much time has passed, do classis and church leaders need to be educated on the new method prior to the second vote? We need time to educate those at the local level again on how the new method works.

One of the arguments for moving forward with covenant shares is that General Synod approved the adoption of the new method because proportional assessments is a better system—more fair, balanced, and even—and keeping the old system just to avoid change may end up putting more strain on local churches. This is a valid concern; however, due to the concerns above, the GSC believes it will be most prudent to delay the vote and the implementation of the covenant shares method one more time.

Thus, the GSC recommended the following to the 2022 General Synod:

EC 22-9
To delay the second vote on the change to the General Synod bylaws in *Book of Church Order* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6c (2021 edition, p. 110) to make Covenant Shares effective until the next stated session of General Synod. (REJECTED)

A motion was made and supported to cease debate.

VOTED: To cease debate.

VOTED: To reject EC 22-9.

Following the rejection of EC 22-9, the following motion was made and supported:

EC 22-9a
To declare the amendment to the Bylaws of the General Synod specified in EC 19-11, adopted in first reading by the 2019 General Synod, to be approved for incorporation into the 2022 *Book of Church Order.* (ADOPTED)

Appointment of the General Synod Treasurer

In accordance with its corporate bylaws, the General Synod must annually appoint a treasurer of the General Synod corporation (Corporate Bylaws of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, Article V).

EC 22-10
To appoint Jillisa Teitsma as treasurer of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. (ADOPTED)

General Synod Meeting Location

The location for the next annual meeting of the General Synod in 2023 is Central College in Pella, Iowa. The 2023 meeting of the General Synod is planned to take place on June

8–13. The General Synod is able to respond to invitations from the assemblies of the church to meet in other locations. Planning for the meeting requires invitations to be submitted at least two years in advance of the proposed meeting.

Land Use Acknowledgement

The 2021 General Synod, in its adoption of CA 21-1, instructed the GSC to "annually state a land acknowledgement for any location in which General Synod meets" (*MGS 2021*, p. 203). The Commission on Christian Action assisted in the preparation of this acknowledgement.

We respectfully acknowledge that the land we gather on this year is part of the traditional land of the Osakiwug and Meskwaki peoples, who were removed from this place, often by government entities, and usually by violent means. We acknowledge the history of their people in this place, and lament any role the Reformed Church in America or her members may have played in their displacement.

This acknowledgement was read aloud during the report of the Commission on Christian Action.

OVERVIEW OF THE GSC'S WORK ON MATTERS OF ITS INTERNAL GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

The General Synod Council (GSC) operates internally according to a not-for-profit governance practice known as "policy governance" developed by Dr. John and Miriam Carver. Policy governance allowed the GSC to enhance its ability to monitor the various "ends" and objectives that were established to fulfill the General Synod's directives regarding Our Call, the General Synod's ten-year goal for mission and ministry that ended in 2013. In October 2014, the GSC adopted new ends and objectives to fulfill the directives of the new ministry goal adopted at General Synod 2013, Transformed & Transforming. Policy governance has also enhanced the GSC's ability to both support and monitor the work of its general secretary and staff through a series of "limitations" policies. The GSC has established and holds itself accountable for its own work through polices concerning its own internal governance and its relationships with the general secretary and staff.

The Ministerial Formation Certification Agency and the Board of Benefits Services also operate in accordance with the principles of policy governance. This work required extensive discussion over a period of two years to clarify the governing relationship of these agencies with the GSC in its capacity as the executive committee of the General Synod.

RCA Salary Structure for Fiscal Year 2021 (October 2021–September 2022)

The GSC policy (EL-8) pertaining to staff compensation states: "With respect to employment, compensation, and benefits and recognition of employees, consultants, contract workers, and volunteers, the General Secretary will not cause or allow jeopardy to fiscal integrity or to public image or decisions that are unrelated to the relevant market."

The GSC compensation program allows for the evaluation of positions based on the essential requirements and responsibilities of the job as defined in the job description. Job descriptions are created together by the supervisor, employee, and Human Resources. As responsibilities change or when there is an open position, the job description is reviewed, updated as needed, and reevaluated to ensure that it is still classified in the correct range. The program incorporates geographic differentials to recognize variances in distinct

regions. This has become more important as we have more and more employees working remotely. Positions are benchmarked against comparable external positions through the use of compensation surveys in the nonprofit and church sectors.

There are thirteen salary ranges that span between 11 and 23. Grade 11 represents the most entry-level positions and Grade 23 represents the highest level, held by the general secretary. The majority of positions fall within the middle ranges (14 to 17).

Staff are evaluated annually by their supervisors. Any increases or adjustments in wages are approved by the general secretary. The general secretary is evaluated by the General Synod Council. Executive staff who are accountable to the Board of Benefits Services (BOBS), the Church Growth Fund (CGF), and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA) are evaluated by their respective boards.

The following table represents the ranges that were used for fiscal year 2021. The ranges are utilized to establish beginning wages and annual salaries and do not represent the actual compensation of any individual employee. Most employees' salaries fall in the mid-range of the table. The following table represents Grand Rapids–based staff; this table is adjusted for cost-of-living differences for staff who live and work in other areas.

GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN
2021–2022
ANNUALIZED SALARY RATE

GRADE	LOW	25%	MID	75%	HIGH
11	$24,960	$27,620	$30,280	$32,940	$35,600
12	$32,240	$35,880	$39,520	$43,160	$46,800
13	$35,200	$38,975	$42,750	$46,525	$50,300
14	$41,800	$46,950	$52,100	$57,250	$62,400
15	$47,000	$52,800	$58,600	$64,400	$70,200
16	$56,000	$62,900	$69,800	$76,700	$83,600
17	$61,000	$68,510	$76,020	$83,530	$91,040
18	$66,500	$74,688	$82,875	$91,063	$99,250
19	$79,000	$89,625	$100,250	$110,875	$121,500
20	$89,500	$101,550	$113,600	$125,650	$137,700
21	$101,376	$118,257	$135,138	$152,019	$168,900
22	$115,983	$135,237	$154,492	$173,746	$193,000
23	$144,662	$168,697	$192,731	$216,766	$240,800

Commission Review Process

The GSC moderator and General Synod president met with two commission moderators in February 2017 to begin drafting a specific process the GSC subsequently used in fulfilling its *BCO*-assigned responsibilities of both providing support for the work of the General Synod commissions and reviewing them once every five years. As *BCO* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6g (2021 edition, p. 111) says, one of the GSC's responsibilities is:

> To review all General Synod commissions at least once during each five-year period and to recommend to General Synod a continuation of, a reconstitution

> of, or a discontinuation of such commissions, with the understanding that the necessity of continuation shall not be assumed.

The GSC adopted a new commission review process in March 2017 and has completed several annual cycles of review under the new process. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the process was put on hold while in-person meetings were paused. Though a limited number of in-person meetings have been starting up again, many meetings continue to be conducted electronically. While meeting solely electronically is not ideal from a relational standpoint, given decreasing budgets and the increased functionality and practicality of electronic meeting platforms, it seems likely that a larger percentage of RCA meetings may be held electronically going forward. This has led to a shift in the timing and frequency of meetings.

Because the timelines laid out in the commission review process developed by the GSC rely on the traditional in-person meeting schedule followed by most commissions and the GSC in the past, it seems prudent for the GSC to take this opportunity to review and update the process to function better within the new meeting rhythm that has been evolving.

The GSC moderator has appointed a small team of GSC members to review the process and bring any proposed changes to the fall 2022 meeting of the GSC.

Change to Publication Schedule of GSC Minutes

It has been a longstanding practice of the GSC to wait to publicly post minutes of its meetings until the minutes have been formally approved at a future meeting of the GSC (typically the next stated session) in case corrections need to be made by the GSC before the minutes are approved. In practice, this creates a delay of multiple months between the date of GSC meetings and the publication of minutes of those meetings. While the reason for this is logistical—ensuring that the GSC has the opportunity to correct any errors in its minutes before they become public—this has at times created a perception in parts of the wider RCA that the GSC is reluctant to share information about its decisions.

The GSC decided at its March 2022 meeting to make a change to the publication schedule for its meeting minutes in order to make them publicly available earlier, approving the following motion:

> GSC 22-11
> To make minutes of General Synod Council meetings publicly available in a provisional form within 15 business days following the close of each meeting (following circulation via email to the full GSC for any necessary corrections), to be replaced with the final approved copy once formal approval has been obtained at the next stated GSC meeting.

While GSC minutes do need to receive official, formal approval at a subsequent meeting of the GSC, beginning with the March 2022 minutes, the GSC will do an informal review process via email once the recorder has finished writing the minutes in order to give GSC members a chance to catch potential errors, then staff will post provisional versions of the minutes until they receive final, formal adoption via a vote at the next stated session.

At this time in the life of the RCA, tensions and disagreements have caused rising levels of mistrust and misunderstanding, exacerbated by an ongoing pandemic. Publishing GSC minutes sooner is intended to be a good faith effort on the GSC's part to increase transparency and trust.

This process will make GSC minutes publicly available several months earlier than they are under the current practice of posting minutes once they have been officially approved at the GSC's next stated meeting.

Discontinuation of Joint Fall GSC/Commissions Meeting

In 2002, the Task Force to Study the Relationship between the General Synod and the General Synod Council brought a report to General Synod that listed several recommendations for changes to the structure and function of the GSC, some of which were approved by the General Synod by means of adopting changes to the *Book of Church Order*. Part of the report read:

> …Fourth, it is proposed that all the commissions of the General Synod and the General Synod Council meet together each fall in the same venue and at the same time. It is hoped that this coordinated meeting will not only receive a common report of the previous General Synod, but will develop a style of leadership and consultation in service of the priorities, mission, and ministry of the church…(*MGS 2002*, p. 240).

While the language used in the report was "it is proposed," this proposal was not presented to the General Synod as an actionable recommendation and so the General Synod did not vote to approve it. As such, it is not officially a General Synod mandate; however, it has been treated as one for years.

Starting in the fall of 2003, the GSC and the commissions met together in October or early November each year; participation in the joint meeting was required, with the exception of the Commission on Judicial Business due to the case-by-case nature of its work.

This meeting continued annually up until the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020, resulting in the cancellation of the 2020 joint meeting. A joint meeting did not take place in 2021, largely because of the October timing of the General Synod meeting. A joint meeting is not being planned for 2022, for a number of logistical reasons.

The idea behind the joint meeting, that of fostering communication, collaboration, and relationship building, is an excellent one, and in the early years of this meeting, it likely did meet that need. Communication and collaboration among the GSC and the General Synod commissions is very important, and the suggestion to discontinue meeting together in person each fall is not meant to suggest that the RCA, the GSC, or the commissions do not value that communication and collaboration. However, in more recent years, it has become clearer that there are more efficient and effective ways for commissions and/or the GSC to do collaborative work than requiring them all to meet in person at the same time and location every year.

Although General Synod did not officially adopt the original joint meeting format, because it has been treated essentially as a General Synod mandate for years, it seems most prudent to have General Synod make the decision to discontinue it, upon recommendation of the GSC.

For the following reasons, GSC recommended to the General Synod the discontinuation of the joint meeting:

- **The location and dates of a joint meeting are not ideal for all commissions.** Meeting simultaneously means that commissions do not have the opportunity

to select the fall meeting dates that work best for their individual members and, as a result, some commissions have found that they are often missing a number of members in the fall, and their fall meeting was much less efficient as a result. In addition, the location of the meeting had to be chosen based on the most economical overall location that could accommodate a large meeting with the unique space requirements of the joint meeting, and that location was not necessarily the most economical location for individual commissions. In past years, this has placed a strain on commission budgets, which are modest. Survey comments from participants at past years' joint meetings have expressed some of these frustrations.

- **A joint meeting with mandatory plenary sessions reduces the amount of time that commissions and the GSC have to complete the work of their specific mandates.** Traditionally, at the Friday–Saturday joint meeting, the majority of both mornings was taken up by corporate worship and joint sessions in which all attendees were required to participate. Survey comments for a number of years indicated that a number of attendees found limited value in those joint meetings (the topics were typically chosen by the GSC or by the general secretary, and commissions did not always find them helpful). They were not necessarily focused on facilitating or giving space for collaborative work between several commissions, but on workshops or presentations that were attended by all commissions and the GSC.
- **Electronic meeting technology has become much more available and useful.** In 2002, when the joint meeting was proposed, popular videoconferencing programs such as Zoom, Google Meet, and Skype didn't yet exist yet. While videoconferencing technology existed in 2002, it was not widely used or accessible, and so in-person meetings were a much more practical way of providing opportunities for collaboration. In 2022, it is much more efficient and effective for commission representatives to schedule a Zoom meeting to work on a joint project with another commission. Especially over the past two years in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, people have grown increasingly comfortable and familiar with videoconferencing technology, and the technology itself has become increasingly accessible and supportive.
- **GSC staff capacity is more limited than it was pre-pandemic.** An in-person joint meeting with the GSC and ten commissions takes a significantly larger amount of staff planning time than smaller, individual meetings; there are simply a lot more moving parts and logistical considerations involved in putting together a meeting for over a hundred participants than in putting together a meeting for ten. At this point in time, as the RCA has experienced a decline in membership, we also have fewer denominational staff members.

Accordingly, GSC offers the following recommendation:

EC 22-11
To discontinue the practice of the annual joint in-person GSC and commissions meeting each fall in order to better conserve both budget and individual commission meeting time, but to continue to encourage commissions and GSC to pursue opportunities for collaboration and connection. (ADOPTED)

Creation of Board-Designated Endowment Fund

In recent years, the GSC has been mindful of the impact of denominational assessments on the local church and has chosen not to ask for increases to the GSC per-member assessment rate in order to make up for the decline in revenue from departing churches. Instead, GSC staff have made significant budget cuts. As indicated in the report from the Office of Finance, the requested $1 per member increase to the GSC assessment this year follows years of no increases to assessments and only partially offsets the cost of inflation. It is not intended to make up for assessments from departing churches.

In addition to significant budget reductions, the GSC has been seeking alternate sources of revenue to replace some of the lost assessment income. One additional source of income that the GSC has approved is utilizing a portion of the GSC's reserves to establish a board-designated endowment that will generate annual income to the GSC.

According to GSC policy, the GSC must retain six months of operating expenses in reserves; anything above this amount is excess reserves. The excess reserves have grown in recent years due to a decision to invest more in equities, which has provided an investment return that was greater than budgeted, and due to underspending on travel, events, and personnel.

At its March meeting, the GSC voted to utilize a portion of excess reserves to create a board-designated Operations Endowment Fund. This newly created endowment fund will generate annual income to the GSC that will help offset declining revenue due to departing churches and help limit increases in future assessments to congregations who remain in the RCA. If invested in perpetuity, the principal in the fund will grow and will generate more income annually for years to come.

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF REFERENCE ON NEW BUSINESS

In response to the three items of new business presented to the General Synod (see pages 11-13), the Committee of Reference made the following recommendations concerning their disposition.

In response to the proposed item of new business regarding a resolution to be brought to the World Council of Churches (WCC) calling for the suspension of the Russian Orthodox Church from WCC membership, the Committee of Reference made the following recommendation:

> **EC 22-12**
> **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. (ADOPTED)**

Reason:
The situation in Ukraine has been changing rapidly, and the response of the Russian Orthodox Church has become more apparent since the deadlines for submission of classical or regional synod overtures have passed, which supports that this could not have been submitted through regular channels.

For additional information, see ONB 22-9 on page 111.

In response to the proposed item of new business regarding shareholder resolutions for investments in gas and oil companies, the Committee of Reference made the following recommendation:

> **EC 22-13**
> **To accept item #2 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. (ADOPTED)**

Reason:
The recent spike in prices of gasoline occurred after the deadlines for submission of this concern through the regular channels of the church, which supports that this could not have been submitted through regular channels.

For additional information, see ONB 22-10 on page 112.

In response to the proposed item of new business regarding the "Open letter to State Lawmakers from America's Pro-life Organization," the Committee of Reference made the following recommendation:

> **EC 22-14**
> **To accept item #3 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. (ADOPTED)**

Reason:
The letter was not published until May 12, 2022, which supports that this could not have been submitted through regular channels.

For additional information, see ONB 22-11 on page 112.

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF FINANCE

The Office of Finance provides centralized finance and accounting services to the denominational corporations, including the General Synod, the General Synod Council (GSC), the Board of Benefits Services (BOBS), and the Church Growth Fund (CGF). The Office of Finance strives to ensure that financial systems, procedures, and controls are in place to support the mission and ministry of these entities and to assist the officers and directors of the corporations in fulfilling their fiduciary responsibilities. The finance staff is available to respond to financial questions from local congregations, classes, and regional synods as together we carefully manage the financial resources with which we have been blessed.

2021 Annual Audits

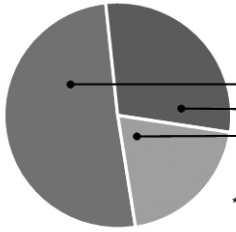
The 2021 financial statements of the GSC, BOBS Retirement Program and General Fund, and CGF were audited by CapinCrouse, LLP, certified public accountants. All corporations received unmodified (or "clean") audit opinions. The audited statements are available at www.rca.org/finance. The GSC's Audit and Risk Management Committee reviewed the audited financial statements of each entity and the management comment letters from the auditors and reported the audit results to the boards of the respective corporations. Financial highlights of each organization are presented below.

Financial Summaries—Fiscal Year Ended September 30, 2021

General Synod Council (GSC)

The GSC's total income was $20.3 million and expenses totaled $16.6 million, resulting in a net income of $3.7 million. This surplus was not earned entirely on operational areas; rather, $1.7 million was earned on endowed funds and a $1.3 million Lilly Foundation grant was received for a specific purpose, to be used over the next three fiscal years. $700,000 of assessments that were collected in fiscal year 2021 were set aside to pay for the General Synod held in October 2021 (which took place in fiscal year 2022). Total net assets were $44.9 million, of which $19.7 million is without donor restrictions and $25.2 million is with donor restrictions.

The generosity of donors—churches, individuals, and foundations—provided over half of the cost of carrying out the work of the General Synod. Assessments provided 29 percent of income and continue to be consistently paid to GSC by classes. Funding for the work of the General Synod, including the operating budget and all other designated and restricted funds, is presented in the following chart:



2021 INCOME SOURCES

	Fiscal Year 2021		Fiscal Year 2020	
Contributions and Grants	$ 10,331,918	51%	$ 10,783,045	54%
Assessments	$ 5,916,752	29%	$ 5,410,187	27%
Other Income*	$ 4,086,167	19%	$ 3,941,006	20%
TOTAL INCOME	**$ 20,334,837**		**$ 20,134,238**	

**Includes investment earnings and fees for services provided to related entities*

Contributions and grants decreased by $451,000 from 2020 to 2021. In 2020, the GSC received a PPP forgivable loan and a Lilly grant totaling $2,347,600. In 2021, the

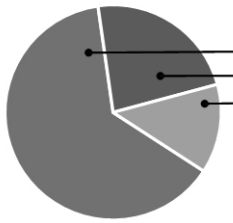
GSC received a grant from the Lilly Foundation for Generation Spark in the amount of $1,310,000, and Global Mission received estate gifts of approximately $500,000.

Assessments increased by approximately $500,000 over the prior year. The difference was due to assessment relief of over $900,000 provided to classes during fiscal year 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the postponement of General Synod. The increase in assessment revenue in 2021 was offset by a decrease in church membership.

Other income increased by $145,000 compared to the prior year. This slight change was due to the combination of an increase in investment earnings and a decrease in fees collected. Investment income was higher in 2021 due to increases in market values in the endowment fund and third-party perpetual trusts. Fewer events were held in 2021 than 2020, resulting in fewer fees collected from participants. For example, Global Mission had two events that collected $250,000 in fee income in 2020 before the pandemic struck. There were no similar events in 2021.

The GSC's total expenses decreased from the prior year by $581,000. Expenses included the release of $2.1 million of assets held in the New Jersey Fund to New Brunswick Theological Seminary. Without the additional expense of the endowment transfer, all other expenses were $2.6 million less than the prior year. Payroll and related expenses decreased by approximately $1.7 million due to eliminated positions from the early retirement program and other eliminated positions.

The chart below shows expenses by functional category and is followed with a summary of each functional expense category.



2021 EXPENSES

	Fiscal Year 2021		Fiscal Year 2020	
Ministry Expenses	$ 10,549,668	64%	$ 11,651,277	68%
Work of the General Synod*	$ 3,822,841	23%	$ 2,845,032	17%
Ministry Support Services	$ 2,218,170	13%	$ 2,674,933	15%
TOTAL EXPENSES	**$ 16,590,679**		**$ 17,171,242**	

**Includes GSC, General Synod and general secretary's office*

Ministry expenses (64 percent) include the costs related to carrying out the GSC's three strategic areas of ministry—Global Mission (65 percent), Transformed & Transforming (26 percent), and Church Multiplication (9 percent). Ministry expenses decreased by $1.1 million from 2020 to 2021. Personnel expenses were reduced by $670,000 due to vacant positions that were eliminated and early retirements in 2020. There were also several meetings and events that were not held in 2021, resulting in a savings of approximately $660,000.

Work of the General Synod (23 percent) includes costs related to the annual General Synod meeting and officers' expenses, commissions, task forces, the Office of the General Secretary, GSC meetings, and Communication and Production Services. The Work of the General Synod expenses increased by $980,000 from 2020 to 2021. This increase is due to the transfer of the New Jersey Fund ($2.1 million) to New Brunswick Theological Seminary. This one-time grant was offset by reduced travel and meeting expenses as well as reduced expenses related to Vision 2020 work.

Ministry support services (13 percent) includes costs relating to the general and administrative support needed to carry out the ministry work and the work of the General Synod. This includes human resources, data management, information technology, financial services, legal counsel, and fundraising. Expenses decreased by approximately $460,000 in 2021 due to reduced personnel costs. These ministry support services are also provided to BOBS and CGF for a service fee.

The source data for these charts are the audited financial statements, which can be viewed in full at www.rca.org/finance.

Board of Benefits Services—Retirement Program

As of September 30, 2021, the date of the Board of Benefits Services' (BOBS) most recent audit, $565 million is held in participant accounts in the RCA Retirement Plan and the RCA 403(b) Retirement Program and in annuities outside of the funds purchased on behalf of participants. In fiscal year 2021, participant and employer contributions to the plan were $11 million, and distributions to participants totaled $29 million for the same time period.

Together as a denomination we, through decisions of General Synod, have agreed to contribute 11 percent of the eligible salaries of RCA ministers of Word and sacrament to their retirement accounts each year. An estimated $1.1 million has not been paid into participant accounts from local congregations for benefits owed between January 1, 2009, and September 30, 2021. BOBS staff continues to work with pastors, congregations, and classes to obtain necessary information to monitor compliance with *Book of Church Order* Formulary No. 5 requirements. RCA ministers of Word and sacrament should review their quarterly statements to verify that 11 percent of their eligible salary is being contributed. Elder delegates to synod should ask questions in their local congregation to ensure that their congregation is providing this important benefit for their pastor(s).

For additional information about the retirement plan, see the report of the Board of Benefits Services on pages ___ and the audited financial statements available at www.rca.org/finance.

Board of Benefits Services—General Fund

The BOBS General Fund administers the retirement programs, life and long-term disability insurances, and assistance and retiree chaplains programs for active and retired RCA-ordained ministers, their dependents, and their surviving spouses. The General Fund is financially healthy, with $28 million in net assets as of September 30, 2021. The General Fund ended fiscal year 2021 with a net surplus of $3.5 million. Investment earnings on reserves and endowments amounted to $3.2 million, and other revenue generated $1.7 million of income, for total income of $5.9 million. Administration costs for the retirement plans, which are covered primarily by a fee on employer contributions to the RCA 403(b) Retirement Program and the RCA Retirement Plan accounts, totaled $960,000 in 2021.

Due to a projected surplus in fiscal year 2021, fees were not charged for the quarter ending December 31, 2021. Effective January 1, 2022, BOBS implemented a fee reduction for participants from 19 basis points (bps) to 10 bps. Since 2012, the administrative fee has dropped by 30 bps. Earnings from the ERISA Insurance Endowment Fund, a decrease in operational expenses, plus investment earnings from other sources and increased values in the retirement plans, allowed for this significant drop in fees.

Support for the assistance and retiree chaplains programs came from a General Synod

assessment, designated contributions, and annual investment income from endowment funds. Assistance grants and retiree chaplains' ministry expenses were $509,000 in 2021. The premiums received for life and long-term disability insurances cover the costs of administering those insurances. For additional information about the BOBS General Fund, see the report of the Board of Benefits Services on pages 153-171 and the audited financial statements available at www.rca.org/finance.

Church Growth Fund

The CGF makes affordable-rate loans to current and former RCA churches and related agencies for building projects used in ministry. Loans are funded by current and former RCA churches, agencies, and individuals that purchase CGF savings certificates, which are interest-bearing investments offering a favorable rate of return. In fiscal year 2021, the CGF continued its plan to grow and service more RCA congregations, reaching $85 million in total assets.

As of September 30, 2021, the CGF had $29 million in cash and short-term investments and $56 million in loans to churches. The loans were funded by $35 million in savings certificates and $50 million in net assets (capital). Net income totaled $1.8 million after contributing $780,000 to the GSC to be used for grants to church plants and grants for church revitalization. Since 2018, the CGF has operated under a goal of being able to contribute up to 50 percent of net operating income annually back to the denomination.

The CGF has very strong liquidity, capital, and cash flow when compared to standards established by the North American Securities Administrators Association. For additional information about the CGF, see the report of the Church Growth Fund on pages 149-152 and the audited financial statements available at www.rca.org/finance.

Investments

The investments of the GSC, BOBS, and CGF are managed by professional investment managers. Performance and compliance with defined investment policy statements are reviewed twice a year by the Investment Advisory Committee, which is made up of representatives from the boards of each corporation and at-large members with investment expertise. The Investment Advisory Committee makes recommendations for changes to investment policy or management to each RCA board for consideration.

Excess Operating Reserves

Since December 2017, the operating reserves of the GSC, BOBS, and CGF are being managed by Telemus Capital, LLC, an investment firm based out of Ann Arbor, Michigan, in an actively managed portfolio of fixed-income securities. Telemus Capital, LLC, allows for the segregation of funds for each RCA corporation. The investments for each RCA entity may then be further segregated and managed under two separate investment policies. The first policy, invested only in fixed income, is the secondary liquidity source after cash and savings for the RCA entity and uses the benchmark for investment returns of the Barclays 1–5 Year Government/Credit A+ Index. The second policy, allocating assets to longer duration fixed income and equities, is the third source of liquidity for the RCA entities and uses the benchmark for fixed income investment returns of the Barclays Intermediate Government Corporate Bond Index. The total amount invested in fixed income at Telemus Capital, LLC, was $32.2 million as of September 30, 2021. The total amount invested in index equities funds was $4.6 million as of September 30, 2021.

Endowment Funds

The GSC manages $22.8 million in funds provided by donors or set aside by management to be invested long term. Some of the endowed gifts entrusted to the GSC date back to the mid-1800s. The investment proceeds from endowed gifts are used for donor-designated purposes while preserving and growing the dollar value of the original gift. LVM Capital Management, Ltd., actively manages 100 percent of the fixed-income investments and 80 percent of the equity investments. The remaining 20 percent of equities are invested in passive index funds at the recommendation of the Investment Advisory Committee. The benchmark for investment returns is 70 percent S&P 500 and 30 percent Bank of America Merrill Lynch 1–10 Year Government/Corporate Bond Index.

In addition to the GSC and CGF, the endowment pool includes amounts designated for local congregations and RCA seminaries and colleges. In fiscal year 2021, the RCA Endowment Fund distributed $971,000 to the GSC, $30,000 to the CGF, and $170,000 to RCA-affiliated organizations. If you are interested in setting up an endowment for the benefit of the GSC or your local congregation, please contact the RCA's Office of Advancement (advancement@rca.org).

BOBS also manages an endowment fund valued at $16.5 million. Most of the BOBS endowment fund consists of the ERISA Insurance Endowment Fund, a board-designated endowment funded by reserves from the medical insurance program that was previously administered by BOBS. LVM Capital Management, Ltd., actively manages 100 percent of the fixed-income investments and 80 percent of the equity investments. The remaining 20 percent of equities are invested in passive index funds at the recommendation of the Investment Advisory Committee. The benchmark for investment returns is 70 percent S&P 500 and 30 percent Bank of America Merrill Lynch 1–10 Year Government/Corporate Bond Index. In 2021, approximately $500,000 was distributed from the endowment fund to the BOBS General Fund.

RCA Retirement Plans

Fidelity Investments provides recordkeeping and investment management services for BOBS' retirement programs. In collaboration with the Investment Advisory Committee, in its fiduciary role, BOBS monitors the performance of the investment options (funds) available under the two retirement programs. BOBS and the Investment Advisory Committee are assisted in this task by outside investment consultants from Lockton Advisors.

Mutual fund options available to retirement plan participants include target-date retirement funds based on a participant's retirement age as well as 19 diversified mutual funds, including 4 socially responsible options. As of December 31, 2021, 76 percent of RCA participant funds are invested in target-date retirement funds. The total market value of the mutual funds held in the 403(b) program and Retirement Plan was $560 million as of September 30, 2021. $5 million is held in insurance contracts purchased on behalf of participants, but not held at Fidelity.

For additional information about the retirement plan investments, see the report of the Board of Benefits Services on pages 153-171.

Planned Giving Programs

The GSC manages various planned giving programs, including charitable gift annuities, totaling $1.3 million. The Barnabas Foundation provides investment management and

recordkeeping services for these programs. The investments include equities and fixed income to provide cash flow to cover the required payouts. This fund is in a wind-down phase. Those wishing to establish a charitable gift annuity benefiting the RCA or a local RCA church may contact the Barnabas Foundation to do so.

Church Growth Fund Investments

The CGF invests a portion of excess operating cash in three fixed-income accounts and one equity account. As of September 30, 2021, Telemus Capital, LLC, the Barnabas Foundation, and LVM Capital Management, Ltd., manage these funds. The RCA Investment Advisory Committee reviews the investment policy and investment performance semi-annually.

Socially Responsible and Environment, Social, and Governance (ESG) Investing

All investment policy statements for each pool of investments require the investment manager to avoid investments in the securities of companies whose principal business involves gambling, for-profit prisons, or the production or distribution of tobacco or alcohol. In the fall of 2021, GSC and BOBS adopted two additional screenings: adult entertainment and pornography, and firearms and military weapons.

BOBS currently offers four environment, social, and governance (ESG) funds to its participants in the Retirement Program. Participants who wish to learn more about ESG investing and the ESG funds available to them may visit www.rca.org/esg.

There were two General Synod actions (CA 21-6, *MGS 2021*, p. 206; ONB 21-9a, *MGS 2021*, p. 119) in October 2021 related to ESG investments—both instructed the Investment Advisory Committee to follow up and one also asked BOBS to follow up. The Investment Advisory Committee has had preliminary discussions regarding these two recommendations; however, in order to give this topic the attention it deserves, the Investment Advisory Committee plans to hold a special meeting to address these two recommendations.

The GSC also invests a portion of excess operating cash with Oikocredit, one of the world's largest sources of private funding to the microfinance sector.

As the conflict with Russia and Ukraine unfolded, the RCA's exposure to investments in Russia was analyzed. It was found that the RCA's exposure to Russian holdings is very minimal. This minimal exposure is from investment in some index funds, and these index funds are divesting of Russian holdings as soon as possible. This has been difficult for them to do since the Russian stock market was closed.

2022 Budget Process

Alignment of Resources with Transformed & Transforming, Global Mission, and Church Multiplication

The general secretary has identified four ministry priorities that are in line with the GSC's ends policies—Transformed & Transforming initiatives, Global Mission, Church Multiplication, and Multicultural and Multiracial Future Freed from Racism. GSC staff focuses on equipping churches and church leaders in these four areas so that leaders are better able to follow the unique call that God has given their church. Budget managers developed 2022 budgets with the aim of making sure that resources are used wisely in light of decreased assessment revenue.

The assessments and contributions provided by RCA churches and members enable the GSC and the GSC staff to come alongside RCA congregations in many ways, start new churches, and reach people with the love of Christ through RCA mission efforts. For more on how the RCA's financial resources were used in ministry during the past year please see the reports of Transformed & Transforming, Church Multiplication, Global Mission, and Multicultural and Multiracial Future Freed from Racism.

General Synod Council Operating Budget Process

The GSC operating budget is primarily funded by assessment income and contributions. The 2022 budget was finalized by determining revenue available from assessments, contributions, investments, and other income. In October 2021, the General Synod approved a per member assessment for GSC, BOBS, and theological education of $54.51 for the 2022 calendar year. This was an increase from the prior year due to the addition of the theological education allocation to the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA), which was an increase of $2.21 per member; General Synod also approved a $0.29 assessment for the restructuring team created by the adoption of the Vision 2020 Team's recommendation (RF 21-1). The GSC and BOBS assessment rates remained flat at $46.10 and $2.00 per member, respectively. The fiscal year 2022 budgeted assessment revenue to the GSC (excluding MFCA) is $4.2 million, representing a decrease of $1.3 million from the 2021 budget. The budget was built based on an estimated decrease of 30,000 confessing members.

Contributions to the On Mission Fund are unrestricted contributions to the RCA. For 2022, contributions to the On Mission Fund are budgeted at $100,000 less than 2021 because of the uncertainty of donor commitment due to churches departing the denomination. Based on partnership-in-mission (PIM) shares pledged to support missionaries, Global Mission expects to see an overall increase in contributions of about $240,000 compared to prior year giving.

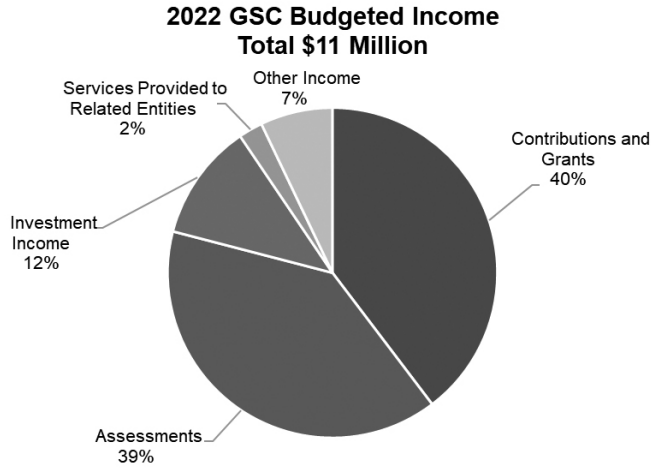
Personnel costs, including salaries and benefits, make up 67 percent of the total budget. The remaining 33 percent of the budget is used for meeting and travel costs for the GSC, commissions, and General Synod; office costs, including rent and utilities; and other costs necessary to carry out the work of the GSC.

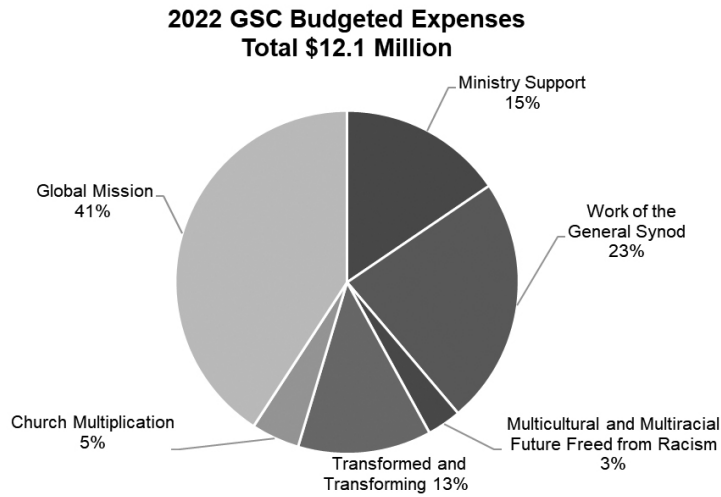
The 2022 budget was prepared assuming a draw on reserves of about $1.1 million. $700,000 of that amount was a planned use of reserves for the October 2021 General Synod, for which assessments were collected in 2021 (since there was no General Synod in the 2021 fiscal year, and two General Synods planned for fiscal year 2022). This deficit also included a planned draw on reserves of $122,000 for the MFCA.

General Synod Council 2022 Fiscal Year Budget

The charts on the next page show the budgeted operating income and expenses. This budget includes the four strategic priorities, the work of the General Synod, and ministry support services. The budgets do not include donor restricted activity.

In addition to the operating budget, gifts and grants designated for specific purposes





typically provide about $4–5 million annually. These specific purposes include funds for disaster relief, Global Mission projects, grants from foundations, and other projects beyond the scope of operational work. These designated gifts are classified as "with donor restrictions" on the audited financial statements.

Formulating the 2023 budget began in early spring 2022 and will be based on the approved assessment rate and estimated revenue for 2023. We are expecting a drop in revenue based on departures from the denomination. The negative financial impact of churches leaving the RCA will likely continue through the next couple of years. The budget will remain focused on fulfilling the priorities of Transformed & Transforming, Global Mission, Church Multiplication, and Multicultural and Multiracial Future Freed from Racism in impactful and measurable ways.

2023 Assessment Proposal for GSC, BOBS Assistance Grants, and Theological Education

General Synod Assessment Amount

Note: General Synod 2019 approved changes to the General Synod bylaws that would allow a change in the manner in which assessments are calculated by a percentage of income method (covenant shares) rather than the per-member method. The amendment process for the Bylaws and Special Rules of Order (*BCO*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 11) says that both votes by the General Synod in order to make a bylaws change effective must occur at stated sessions. Therefore, the final vote of General Synod to make this bylaws change effective could not happen in 2020 without a stated session, and thus it was necessary for the RCA to proceed with another year of per-member assessments for 2021. The 2021 General Synod approved a recommendation to delay the second vote on the changes related to covenant shares until the next stated session of General Synod (EC 21-12). Therefore, the RCA continues with the per-member assessment method in 2022.

The 2021 General Synod also adopted Rules and Regulations that apply to the interpretation of the provisions of the *Book of Church Order* (*BCO*) related to the transfer of churches. Specifically, RF 21-3 included the adoption of Rules and Regulations that will guide the application of certain provisions of the *BCO* related to the payment of assessments for departing churches. Due to the administrative implications of implementing the changes adopted in RF 21-3, GSC is proposing that the implementation of covenant shares be delayed again.

The GSC recommended to this General Synod that the second vote on the change to the General Synod bylaws in *BCO* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6c (2021 edition, p. 110) to make covenant shares effective be delayed until the next stated session of General Synod, but that motion was defeated. In its place, a motion was made to take the second vote on the related bylaws amendments immediately, and the amendments subsequently received final approval. (See motions EC 22-9 and EC 22-9a in the report of the General Synod Council Serving as the Executive Committee of General Synod on page 34.) Because this vote took place after the 2022 General Synod had already approved a per-member assessment rate for 2023 (see F 22-1 on page 53), the per-member assessment method will still be in effect for 2023; going forward, the GSC will propose a 2024 covenant shares rate to the 2023 General Synod.

The GSC assessment rate has not increased in four years. The GSC assessment-funded areas (excluding Global Mission and the MFCA) have reduced their budgets in that four year period by $1.9 million. The GSC assessment-funded areas have reduced full-time equivalent staff positions (FTEs) from 62 in 2020 to 46 in 2022. That is a reduction of 16 FTEs. Those reductions were made in anticipation of a significant decline in the assessment revenue due to churches leaving the denomination. Total confessing membership has been declining for several years in a row—at an average annual decline of over 2 percent over the past ten years. The 2020 consistorial report form (CRF) total confessing membership was just over 120,000. Since January 1, 2021, and through March 7, 2022, 112 churches with over 32,000 confessing members have either submitted a Petition to Withdraw to their classis that has been reported to the GSC, disbanded, or left the denomination. The GSC based its 2022 budget on assessment income expecting 90,000 confessing members. At this point, we anticipate basing the 2023 budget on assessment income from 70,000 members. That is a drop of 50,000 members from 2021, which equates to a loss of $2.3 million in assessment revenue ($46.10, the 2022 GSC assessment amount, multiplied by 50,000).

In recent years, the GSC has been mindful of the impact of denominational assessments on the local church and has chosen not to ask for increases to the GSC per-member assessment rate in order to make up for the decline in revenue from departing churches. In order to offset lost assessment revenue from departing churches, we have made significant budget cuts. We are also seeking other sources of income.

However, going forward, we will need additional funding from assessments in order to continue to carry out the work that is required of the GSC. The GSC has many responsibilities that we must continue to fund; while the restructuring team approved at General Synod 2021 will be working to develop a new structure for the RCA that may or may not require these same functions, until their work is complete and any necessary constitutional and bylaws changes are fully adopted, the GSC must continue to fulfill all its currently required responsibilities. These responsibilities include but are not limited to the following: the cost of the meeting(s) and work of the General Synod, the GSC, and commissions; ecumenical work, racial and ethnic councils, endorsement of RCA chaplains, and Consistorial Report Form data collection and maintenance.

We are recommending an increase to the GSC per-member rate of $1.00 per member. This increase will help retain and attract dedicated staff with competitive wages and benefits in order to carry out the work required of the GSC. An increase of $1.00 per member based on an estimated 70,000 confessing members will raise additional assessment revenue of $70,000. Even with this increase, we will need to make further reductions to our budget because this will not fully cover rising costs due to inflation and it will not cover the lost revenue from assessments due to departing churches.

The general secretary and the GSC staff realize the tremendous blessing and responsibility we have been given to manage the past and present funds entrusted to us by donors and congregations. We commit to careful stewardship of the funds with which God has blessed us.

The Board of Benefits Services' Assistance Grant Assessment Request

BOBS' assistance program provides grants to retired ministers and to their surviving spouses who are experiencing financial distress. Financial assistance is primarily awarded for needs related to housing and daily living expenses, ongoing medical insurance premiums, funeral grants to surviving spouses of RCA ministers of Word and sacrament, retirement contributions for disabled ministers, and payments for one-time emergency needs. In 2016, General Synod approved an increase from $1.50 to $2.00 per member for assistance grants. The remainder of the funds required to sustain this program are provided through donations to BOBS and endowment income. BOBS requests that the assessment remain at $2.00 per member for 2023.

Theological Education Assessment Request

The Pastoral Formation Oversight Board's (PFOB) recommendations to GSC regarding the theological education assessment for 2023 are based on the understanding that GSC is asked to bring back to the General Synod a recommendation that first came to General Synod 2021 regarding proposed changes to Western Theological Seminary's (WTS) bylaws and articles of incorporation. If approved, these changes would mean that WTS would no longer get a share of the RCA theological education assessment unless WTS is subsequently declared an agent of the General Synod by the General Synod.

Two versions of the theological education assessment have been prepared for General

Synod, but only the applicable one will be voted upon; the vote(s) on Western's bylaws changes and whether it will remain an agent of the General Synod will take place first (RF 22-1 and RF 22-2), then the outcome of that vote or those votes will determine which version of the theological education assessment is placed before the synod.

Scenario 1 (*a portion of the theological education assessment is no longer allocated to WTS; applies if BOTH of the following conditions are true: Western's bylaws and articles of incorporation changes are approved AND Western is not subsequently designated as an agent of the General Synod*):

The Pastoral Formation Oversight Board (PFOB) recommends a General Synod assessment for theological education of $4.00 per member, allocated in the following manner:

- $20,000 to cover the cost of the meeting of PFOB, the General Synod professors, and collaborative efforts among the respective agents.
- The remainder will be split as follows:
  - 80 percent of the funds are to be split evenly among the two agents for theological education (MFCA and NBTS).
  - 20 percent distributed per capita of students within each agency (MFCA and NBTS) who are formally in the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process.

Scenario 2 (*WTS continues to receive a portion of the theological education assessment; applies if EITHER of the following conditions are true: Western's bylaws changes are not approved OR Western's bylaws changes are approved and it is also subsequently designated an agent of the General Synod*):

PFOB recommends a General Synod assessment for theological education of $6.12 per-member, allocated in the following manner:

- $20,000 to cover the cost of the meeting of PFOB, the General Synod professors, and collaborative efforts among the respective agents.
- The remainder will be split as follows:
  - 80 percent of the funds are to be split evenly among the three agents for theological education (WTS, MFCA, and NBTS).
  - 20 percent distributed per capita of students within each agency (WTS, MFCA, and NBTS) who are formally in the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process.

2023 Assessment Request

The charts below summarize the General Synod assessment amounts for 2022 and the GSC proposed amounts for 2023, depending on whether WTS remains an agent of the General Synod following decisions by the 2022 General Synod.

The following chart applies if WTS ceases to be an agent of the General Synod (Scenario 1):

Name of Assessment	**2022**	**Proposed 2023**	**$ Change**	**% Change**
General Synod Council	$46.10	$47.10	$1.00	2.2%
BOBS Assistance Fund	$2.00	$2.00	-	0%
Theological Education– Scenario	$6.12	$4.00	($2.12)	(34.6%)
RF 21-1 Restructuring Team	$0.29	$0.00	($.29)	-
	$54.51	**$53.10**	**($1.41)**	**(2.6%)**

The following chart applies if WTS continues to be an agent of the General Synod (Scenario 2):

Name of Assessment	2022	Proposed 2023	$ Change	% Change
General Synod Council	$46.10	$47.10	$1.00	2.2%
BOBS Assistance Fund	$2.00	$2.00	-	0%
Theological Education– Scenario	$6.12	$6.12	-	0%
RF 21-1 Restructuring Team	$0.29	$0.00	($.29)	-
	$54.51	**$55.22**	**$0.71**	**1.3%**

F 22-1
To approve the General Synod Council 2023 assessment of $47.10 per confessing member. (ADOPTED)

F 22-2
To approve the 2023 assessment of $2.00 per confessing member for the Board of Benefits Services to provide assistance funding for retired pastors who have a demonstrated need. (ADOPTED)

Because the 2022 General Synod approved both RF 22-1 and RF 22-2 (thus approving Western Theological Seminary's bylaws and articles of incorporation changes and also designating WTS as an agent of the General Synod), Scenario 2 applied and thus the following motion was placed before the synod:

F 22-3
To approve the 2023 assessment of $6.12 per confessing member for theological education. (ADOPTED)

A motion was made and supported from the floor to amend F 22-3 as follows (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

To approve the 2023 assessment of ~~$6.12~~$5.84 per confessing member for theological education.

VOTED: To reject the amendment to F 22-3.

A motion was made and supported from the floor to amend F 22-3 as follows (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

To approve the 2023 assessment of ~~$6.12~~$4.76 per confessing member for theological education.

Subsequently the motion to amend F 22-3 was withdrawn by the delegate who made it. F 22-3 in its original form was again before the house.

VOTED: To adopt F 22-3.

REPORT OF THE GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL ON ADVANCEMENT

The Advancement team's responsibility is to encourage churches and individuals to generously give of the financial resources God has entrusted to them to support the mission and ministry of the Reformed Church in America (RCA). The team coordinates all General Synod Council (GSC) fundraising efforts while striving to develop and strengthen relationships with donors, potential donors, church leaders, business allies, and others that will inspire financial partnerships, but also promote the mission and vision of the RCA.

Team members raise financial support through outright gifts, will bequests, life income plans, and grants. These funds are primarily given as a result of personal solicitation on the part of an Advancement staff member and/or member of the RCA Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) or via direct mail appeals. Any and every gift received by the RCA may be designated for a specific area of ministry or be left undesignated. All undesignated general gifts are typically assigned to the RCA On Mission Fund (formerly known as the RCA Ministry Fund). The RCA's On Mission Fund supports:

- Global and local missions
- Church planting and multiplication
- Race relations and advocacy
- Leadership development
- Disability advocacy
- Women's transformation and leadership
- Discipleship building
- Ministries of compassion
- Next generational engagement

All undesignated gifts for global mission are typically assigned to the RCA Global Mission Endowment. The Advancement team also assists with raising resources for and awareness of the RCA Church Growth Fund through savings certificates, estate planning, special project funding, or capital campaigns.

The mission and ministry of the RCA is largely possible because of the generosity of God's people. In fiscal year 2021, 52 percent of the RCA's total income was received via voluntary support (contributions, grants, and Partnership-in-Mission shares), whereas 29 percent was received via assessment income. The remaining 19 percent was received via other sources of income (investment earnings and fee-for-services).

The ongoing funding structure of the denomination relies heavily on the generosity of individual donors, foundations, corporations, and churches who give above and beyond assessments. We remain truly grateful for all those who have chosen to invest in the mission and ministry of the RCA. For a brief synopsis of the 2021 budget recap, please refer to the Ministry Impact Report, which is available at www.rca.org/ministryimpact. You may also request a Ministry Impact Report by calling 616-541-0881 or by emailing advancement@rca.org.

The RCA continues to partner with Barnabas Foundation for resources around estate planning, planned giving, and planned gift management. The easiest gift, and oftentimes the gift with the most impact, is the gift that is made through an estate plan. For information about how you can include the RCA in your final estate plan or how you can receive income for the remainder of your lifetime from a planned gift that will benefit the RCA at the time of your passing, please contact Larryl Humme at lhumme@rca.org or 708-778-3780.

The mission and ministry of the Reformed Church in America only happens because of the generosity of people like you throughout the denomination. Please consider including a gift to the RCA in your regular giving or in your estate plan. For more information on how to make a gift please visit www.rca.org/give or contact one of our team members:

- Larryl Humme, director of Advancement (lhumme@rca.org or 708-778-3780)
- Natalie Lopez, executive assistant for Advancement (nlopez@rca.org or 616-541-0881)

* * * * *

Frequently during sessions of the General Synod a summary history of a bequest by Dominie Elias Van Bunschooten in the early 1800s is read. During his oral report to the General Synod, RCA director of advancement Larryl Humme read the following recently revised version of the summary history:

> At a meeting of the General Synod in New York City on June 9, 1814, Dominie Elias Van Bunschooten walked up the aisle and laid down on the table ten bonds amounting to $13,800 as well as $800 in cash and asked the Synod to accept the gift for the education of pious youth for ministry.
>
> On January 10, 1815, in his 77th year, Dominie Van Bunschooten went home to his reward and was buried in the churchyard of First Reformed Church in New Brunswick, New Jersey. In his last will and testament he added over $3,000 to his former donation, making a total gift of more than $17,000, which adjusted for inflation, is almost $320,000 in today's currency.
>
> We recognize that God takes imperfect persons to accomplish his work. Elias Van Bunschooten is such a person. As slaveholders, he and his family were among the many Dutch settlers who profited from, maintained, and normalized the ownership of human beings in pursuit of wealth, social mobility, and power. His profit comes with a great cost borne by enslaved people. The cost of their blood, sweat, tears, lives, and the lives of their children is furthered when their significance as human beings is made invisible, marginalized, and minimized through historical accounts that are void of their contributions. Slavery profited individuals, communities, and nations and the depth of violence in slavery provided fodder for a racial and cultural divide that persists today. More than that, slavery diminished the image of God in every person. There exists a tension between the accumulation of wealth and the cost of human depravity as evidenced in the direct, structural, and cultural violence against people of African descent.
>
> As members of the Reformed Church in America, we belong to an institution that profited from the enslavement of people. We perpetuate a shroud that contributes to an incomplete and weighted historical record when we fail to acknowledge institutional and societal wrongs, and when we fail to honor and affirm the influences of all people whose voluntary and involuntary contributions led to the formation of the Reformed Church in America.
>
> Dominie Elias Van Buschooten's example of financial generosity may be followed from time to time by others, thus realizing the desire expressed in his final bequest; to accept the gift for the education of pious youth for the ministry. The contributions exacted from the enslaved people shall never again

be replicated and must never be forgotten. It would be impossible to catalogue all the results that have flowed from contributions similar to that of Dominie Van Bunschooten. For more than a century they have made possible the education of candidates for the ministry, for work both at home and abroad. We honor the generosity of Dominie Van Bunschooten even as we acknowledge and lament his involvement in human slavery. As we honor all those whose contributions, visible and invisible, have made possible the work of God in the Reformed Church in America.

After the reading of the revised summary history the following motion was made and supported:

EC 22-15
That the General Synod commend to all regional synods, classes, and consistories the new narrative for the Van Bunschooten Bequest, as prepared and presented by the GSC Advancement staff, for use when the Van Bunschooten Bequest is shared at meetings. (ADOPTED)

REPORT OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN BLACK COUNCIL

As we stand in the midst of the year of our Lord 2022, no matter where you are in the world, your life, your surroundings, and your mission has been impacted in some way by the realization that change comes forth for us, with or without our permission.

This past February brought forth the tenth anniversary of the killing of Trayvon Martin in Stanford, Florida. This unarmed young Black man, making a quick trip to the store for snacks to feed his soul, was met with an altercation from an armed white/Hispanic man, George Zimmerman, who decided that his power, from the guidance of a pistol, provided him and allowed him with the privilege to protect those he felt he needed to guard. This altercation resulted in Trayvon's death, but it also resulted in an acquittal of George Zimmerman, leaving many to ask themselves, are we not tired of the status quo? Are we not tired of the same old song?

The anniversary of Trayvon Martin's death reminds us, especially people of color, that in full retrospect, things have not changed. There have been and continues to be numerous acts of injustice toward people of color. Yes, occasionally, we do hear the positive signs of justice, but for every movement of justice, injustice continues to rise up as a constant reminder.

It is important for us all to understand that the battle for justice continues, calling us to stand strong and push forth with the hopes and the dreams to know that, as Martin Luther King Jr. would say, "We shall overcome some day." For many of us, we are hoping that the "someday" becomes reflective in the areas of racial justice, affirmative action, equality in the work force, equality in the education field (kindergarten through sixth grade and beyond), and equality as we stand fast as the children of God to live out and proclaim together God's Holy Word, for such a time as this.

As an integral part of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) and the changing aspects of the denomination, several years ago, the African American Black Council (AABC) began to review and revise its role, not only in the overall church, but also in the vitality of the life of the members of color within the denomination. To that end, the council came forth with the following mission statement:

> The AABC celebrates God's love by empowering, educating, and encouraging its members to partner with their communities and the RCA to develop ministries and policies for:
>
> - Church growth
> - Leadership development
> - Social and racial justice
> - Economic development
>
> "What does the Lord require of you but to act justly, and to love kindness, and walk humbly with your God." –Micah 6:8

The members of the council felt that it was necessary and essential for the AABC to not only focus on what is going forth in the life of the denomination, but to spend a larger amount of time investing in what is going forth in the local church communities. This would include providing support, assistance, training, and guidance for church leaders and members of the overall community to not only embrace what they are doing on the inside of the church, but what God is calling them to do in the surrounding communities, lifting up church growth, church revitalization, and new church starts.

To move forward in embracing our mission and vision, the AABC held a variety of virtual learning opportunities for the AABC community. These learning opportunities came forth in such areas as understanding and taking part in RCA commissions, young adult ministry in the life of church, grant information and writing workshops, and two conferences in conjunction with Fresh Expressions, Inc.: "The Future Black Church Convocation" and recently our "Ministry Breakthrough Conference."

These virtual sessions and learning opportunities gave our members the opportunity to not only enhance and enrich their knowledge on a variety of subject matters, but it also encouraged them, individually and collectively as church communities, to step out and hear God's calling in the places they are called upon to embrace and guide.

The AABC continues to review and evaluate its current structure as it moves forth to provide better support for our individual members and member churches. We desire to have a more fruitful communication with all of our AABC constituents.

As it relates to the denomination, the AABC was excited that most of the previous recommendations that came forth in our 2020–2021 report, bringing forth a greater emphasis on race matters and inclusivity with the RCA, were passed at the 2021 General Synod.

Some of the highlights include:

1. An Annual Day of Prayer and Fasting for Justice and Reconciliation for the RCA.

2. Ongoing meetings with the AABC coordinator, the AABC president, the general secretary, and members of the RCA leadership team to discuss our recommendations and the RCA's response to the matters of race and social justice.

3. The council leadership is working hand in hand with members from the other racial/ethnic councils and the Commission on Race and Ethnicity (CORE) on its second in-person/virtual joint racial/ethnic council gathering, which will be held this upcoming August.

4. Regional gatherings and virtual worship and prayer sessions.

These are positive signs of movement and change within the denomination, but additional pieces are needed if all of God's children are going to stand side by side in all matters and areas of life within the denomination.

To that end, we would like to support the RCA Commission on Race and Ethnicity (CORE) in its work in developing an antiracism policy for the denomination. Truth be told, this is a long time coming and it is essential and necessary for going forth in challenging the denomination to hold fast to their truth of becoming a denomination free from racism.

This past October, during General Synod 2021, which was held in Arizona, we began to see lots of changes on the horizon for the denomination, especially as it relates to the impact of churches that are leaving the denomination. This is a deep and concerning matter for the denomination, but we must recognize, as children of God, amid the change, we must continue to press forth.

Considering these and other vast changes, the RCA is in the process of restructuring the denomination. As a council, the AABC is very concerned about the voices that are coming forth in this restructuring and where our churches and members fall into the plan. We, the AABC, do not want the plan to affect us and place us on the sidelines. We want to be engaged in the development of the overall plan, so that all cares, concerns, and aspects of the denomination are included when seeking to restructure. To that end, the AABC would like to bring forth the following recommendations for consideration.

The AABC recommends the following to the General Synod Council (GSC):

1. To direct the General Synod Council, to provide a visible and reflective membership from individual AABC members and churches on all committees involved in the development and implementation of the RCA restructuring plan. This is essential so that all voices and communities can be part of the overall plan and changes that will come forth.

2. To direct the General Synod Council, in connection with the AABC and the regional synods, to provide attention, guidance, and support to churches, especially African American churches, who are remaining in the RCA. At present, we hear so much about those churches that are leaving the denomination, as it relates to the numbers, regions, etc. Yet, it is equally necessary to address and ensure that there are adequate resources for churches that remain, within the existing classis as well as guiding transfers to classis where churches may have a better fit. (I am happy to say that after a letter to the GSC from the AABC, discussion has begun on this topic, and it is our hope that a blueprint will come forth for going forward.)

3. To direct the General Synod Council, in conjunction with the AABC and RCA Church Planting and Transformed and Transforming staffs, to establish a committee for discussion and strategic initiative for financial support, assistance, and guidance for struggling AABC church communities, with specific emphasis on those churches with buildings in desperate need of repair.

The AABC continues to go forth and celebrate the legacy upon which we stand, as well as the past and current achievements of our members and communities. We continue to lift up in prayer and praise the election of our own Rev. Dwayne Jackson, co-pastor of Second Reformed Church of Hackensack in New Jersey, the AABC Eastern Regional Convener, and a member of the AABC executive committee, to the office of General Synod vice president. Praise God!

My sisters and brothers in Christ, as we go forth, we continue to celebrate the movement of the AABC in the life of the Reformed Church in America and the kingdom of God. We know that through the engaging of our mission statement and vision, we can not only offer greater support and guidance to our members and churches, but we can also have a greater impact in the denomination where God has called us for such at this time.

Submitted by Rev. Sharon Atkins
AABC President

GSC Response to the AABC's Recommendations

At its March 22–23, 2022, stated meeting, the General Synod Council (GSC) discussed the recommendations made to GSC by the AABC.

With regard to the first recommendation, since the makeup of the restructuring team does intentionally reflect the ethnic diversity in the RCA and includes several members who are Black, along with members of a number of other racial and ethnic groups that make up the RCA, the GSC believes that the requested "visible and reflective" membership of the AABC is present on the restructuring team. (GSC was informed that the AABC report and recommendations were written prior to the public announcement of the members of the restructuring team, and thus GSC believes that the AABC is not asking for a change to the composition of the existing team.) GSC also recognizes in the AABC's recommendation a request and a reminder to be continually aware of the intentional inclusion of the voices of our racial and ethnic councils in any teams or task forces that are discussing future plans for the RCA. Should there be working groups or committees that develop out of the work of the RF 21-1 task force, GSC agrees that it will be important to intentionally ensure that the voices of our racial and ethnic councils are also represented in all of those groups or committees.

With regard to the second recommendation, GSC received a report at its March 2022 stated meeting on the discussion referenced in the AABC's report. That report highlighted the felt need for classes (especially those with a large number of congregations potentially leaving the denomination) to be in good communication with their congregations that are staying and provide them with support and guidance. In some areas, congregations that are staying in the RCA are feeling neglected, and feeling as though their classes are focusing on congregations that are leaving. The group's report conveyed to GSC that communication is key—both communication between classes and their congregations and also communication between GSC and regional synods/classes; that there is a need for care and guidance for congregations staying in the RCA, particularly in areas where a large number of congregations have expressed an intent to leave; and that there is a felt sense of urgency in creating plans for the future sooner rather than later among congregations staying within the RCA. While GSC recognizes that care for congregations is a matter under the authority of the classis, and that the potential re-formation/reorganization of classes is a matter under the authority of the regional synod, GSC voted to communicate encouragement to classes and regional synods to provide support to congregations remaining in the RCA:

> GSC 22-24
> To direct the moderator of GSC to send correspondence to the regional synod and classis stated clerks, encouraging them to provide care and support for churches that are remaining within the RCA.

In response to the AABC's third recommendation, the GSC took the following action:

> GSC 22-21
> To establish a committee for discussion and strategic initiative for financial support, assistance, and guidance for struggling AABC church communities, with specific emphasis on those churches with buildings in desperate need of repair, in conjunction with the AABC and RCA Church Planting and Transformed and Transforming staff.

REPORT OF THE COUNCIL FOR PACIFIC AND ASIAN AMERICAN MINISTRIES

The *Book of Church Order* (Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 2b) states that "the General Synod Council shall have racial/ethnic councils which express the collective vision and voice of racial and ethnic congregants and congregations as they develop ministries and advocate for policies of racial and ethnic inclusion, economic, social, and racial justice, both within the Reformed Church in America and ecumenically."

CPAAM Leadership During the Pandemic and Post-Pandemic

For the last two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, Council for Pacific and Asian American (CPAAM) churches and their pastors have been coping with the situation of lockdown, social distancing, and virtual services. Pastors, especially, have been working hard to go through an inevitable change and renewal for the mission and ministry and for member care. First of all, pastors and church leaders focused on equipping themselves with advanced technology for online worship services, small group prayer meetings, and Bible study sessions. As the strong restrictions were withdrawn and areas have begun to open up, churches have provided either in-person, socially distanced services or online services. Also, pastors needed to be creative in providing pastoral care that helps congregation members stay connected in the midst of isolation and a disconnecting environment. The use of online meeting tools, like Zoom meetings, for conducting consistory meetings and classis gatherings enabled churches and pastors to overcome the limitation of gospel ministries during the pandemic. It is by God's amazing grace that the mission and ministry of CPAAM churches have not been distracted by the global pandemic. God's unchanging love empowered our churches and leaders to advance the kingdom of God in new and unique ways.

Asian American Experiences of Racism

On February 3, 2022, Rev. Dr. James Brumm hosted a virtual webinar called "Asian American Experiences of Racism and Anti-Racism" through the Reformed Church Center at New Brunswick Theological Seminary. Three CPAAM speakers from three different Asian countries and generations shared their perspectives. Gerri Igarashi Yoshida is a third-generation Japanese American impacted by the World War II mass incarceration of her people group. Rev. Thomas Song is a first-generation Korean American minister at Steinway Reformed Church in Astoria, New York. Pastor Tiffany Fan is a 1.5-generation church leader from Taiwan at Grace Christian Church in the Bronx. Each individual shared their unique viewpoints on how racism impacts their daily lives and how it impacts their Asian American families, churches, and communities. Although they share certain cultural values from their home countries in Asia, many differences exist due to where and when their families came to America. They also shared positive ways to end racism by allying, cooperating, and collaborating with other racial/ethnic groups, educating and advocating, and getting to know one another on an individual basis. All three of them commented on how anti-Asian hate crimes have greatly increased during the COVID-19 pandemic as Asian Americans are targeted, scapegoated, and blamed for the current crisis.

A lively discussion followed in which audience members could share their insights, experiences, and opinions. A goal of webinars like this is to give Asian Americans an opportunity to openly speak out about what is true for them in a sacred, safe space where their voices can be heard, affirmed, and validated. This leads to greater understanding, cooperation, appreciation, and wholeness within the church, the denomination, and the communities where we live, work, and worship. We invite other Asian Americans to

boldly share their stories and for all of us to listen deeply to one another to promote love, peace, and unity in the body of Christ.

Joint Racial/Ethnic Council Virtual Gatherings

On August 26, 2021, the RCA's four racial/ethnic councils had a joint virtual gathering that consisted of worship, prayer, and storytelling. The meeting was long but well organized to keep the participants engaged. We are currently focusing on speaking with one voice to dismantle racism and to journey toward a truly multiracial future freed from racism within the RCA. Different members of the CPAAM community participated in various programs on dismantling racism offered by the Reformed Church Center at New Brunswick Theological Seminary.

New Officers Elected to the CPAAM Executive Committee

CPAAM was unable to hold its annual consultation in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, all executive committee members agreed to serve an extended term for the last two years. Since Rev. Kyunghoon Suh's term as chairperson ended in the fall of 2021, we elected new officers as follows: Rev. Fransisca Rumokoy as chair, Rev. Jae Hyun Ahn as vice chair, Mr. Kelvin Kong as secretary, and Mrs. Peihuang Chen as treasurer.

Update on CPAAM Pastors and Churches

Rev. Fransisca Rumokoy became the senior minister of the Reformed Church in Metuchen. There are two different language groups, English and Indonesian, under her leadership. The Classis of the Greater Palisades accepted Rev. Dong-Won Han as a new minister who leads a small mission church that will be an official RCA church after it is fully organized. Rev. Peter Chen was installed at Fair Lawn Reformed Church in New Jersey. The Taiwanese churches gathered for their annual retreat online, and Ms. Lynn Min was the keynote speaker for the English-speaking program. Mr. Kelvin Kong launched a new congregation for third culture young adults in January.

Conclusion

CPAAM continues to be a uniquely diverse group consisting of members from various different countries in Asia including China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Laos, Taiwan, Thailand, and more. Members all speak many different languages and dialects. Although many Americans tend to think that all Asians look alike, think alike, and sound alike, in fact, we are all different and our histories have often been in conflict, war, and rivalry. Today, the CPAAM churches have much to share and learn in terms of dealing with multiracial issues and breaking down the stereotypical barriers that have been dividing us. In Jesus's name and by the power of the Holy Spirit, we press onward toward the goal of racial unity and the oneness that is called for in the body of Christ. It has been an honor for CPAAM for the last 42 years to become an effective channel for connecting Asian churches and leaders and the larger denomination, including other racial/ethnic councils, in prayer and hope for moving forward toward our common goal of a multiracial future freed from racism.

Respectfully submitted by
Fransisca Rumokoy (chairperson)
Peihuang Chen, Kelvin Kong, Jae Hyun Ahn, Stephen Kim, Grace Rohrer,
Kyunghoon Suh (*ex officio*)

REPORT OF THE COUNCIL FOR HISPANIC MINISTRIES

To the General Synod Council (GSC) of the Reformed Church in America (RCA), peace and greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The Council for Hispanic Ministries (CHM) reports to the GSC for 2021–2022.

The CHM continues to work toward the implementation of Transformed & Transforming goals among our constituency and in communicating the collective vision and voice expression of our constituents. The CHM also continues to advocate for the rights of our people. Amid the divisive context in our denomination, the social and political climate in the U.S., and the COVID-19 crisis, we continue to lead by planting churches and by sharing our hope that our Lord Jesus Christ will shepherd the RCA into the future as he has done in the last four centuries. An illustration of this hope-filled future is the Classis of the Americas: we are losing some churches, but still more new churches are joining this classis.

Due to the pandemic, we did not have an annual Hispanic Summit in 2021.

CHM continues to work with classes and Church Multiplication in facilitating the process with Latino pastors and churches joining the RCA. We are also being intentional in reaching out to all classes to offer our support and help in planting churches. Rev. Dr. Andres Serrano, coordinator for Hispanic Ministries, and Rev. Fabio Sosa continue to reach and prepare Hispanic pastors in entering our denomination and in becoming active members of classes. Some of the new areas of work are Washington, Connecticut, and southern Texas.

CHM continues to encourage and assist pastors and leaders to get seminary training (certificate, MDiv, DMin) through New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS) and Western Theological Seminary (WTS). Currently, we have around 100 students. Two of our ordained pastors are receiving DMin degrees. The number of students that received RCA scholarships declined in 2021 from 50 students to 30 students due to changes in the application process and limitations of funds. We continue to work to find ways to support those seminarians who are in need as they finish their seminary training. We continue our partnership with NBTS' WELL Program, which empowers pastors to enjoy integral well-being in their leadership.

We continue to collaborate with Iglesia Reformada Dominicana (Dominican Reformed Church, IRD) as well as members of Classis de las Naciones and Classis of Central Plains in the process with Iglesia Global Reformada Argentina. In addition, we continue to communicate with churches in Chile and Nicaragua who desire to join the RCA.

CHM continues its weekly prayer Zoom meeting every Monday with our general secretary Rev. Eddy Alemán. Training and relationship building also takes place at these meetings.

We're also working with the Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries (CPAAM), the African American Black Council (AABC), and the Commission on Race and Ethnicity (CORE) in finding ways to enhance and innovate our leadership in the RCA. An expression of this is our planned joint councils meeting in August 2022.

In conclusion, we are thankful for the work and support of the general secretary, the office of Church Multiplication, the coordinator for CHM, and the GSC for the work done for the Hispanic people of the RCA. We continue to pray for the RCA and we are excited to continue the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We submit this report to you and pray for the Lord's blessings and for the anointing of the Holy Spirit to be with all of us as we continue this journey of transformation to live and love like Jesus.

Respectfully submitted,
The Executive Committee of the Council for Hispanic Ministries

REPORT OF THE GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL ON COMMUNICATION

Since its origins in 1628, the Reformed Church in America (RCA) has given testimony to the goodness and faithfulness of God. Today, we continue to share stories of how God is at work among us. We also share ideas, goals, concerns, prayer needs, and other information and resources. This happens in a wide variety of ways, utilizing longstanding communication channels alongside new ones.

Supporting Denominational Priorities

General Synod Council (GSC) communication staff communicates about and provides marketing support for key RCA initiatives, including RCA Global Mission, Church Multiplication, Transformed & Transforming, and Advocacy and Race Relations. Stories of transformation have taken the form of podcasts and website features, newsletters, social media posts, and video testimonies.

Increasing Focus on Digital Communication

In 2019, the RCA unfolded a new digital strategy with the launch of Faithward.org. The site, focused on moving faith forward, includes ideas for living out faith, reflections on Scripture, and resources for churches. Faithward.org includes many stories and resources from *RCA Today* and added content from a regular rotation of contributors from throughout the church. In its first year, Faithward helped church leaders connect with resources and spend time in thoughtful reflection about faith. It also engaged people asking big questions like "Who is God?" and "How do I know God's listening when I pray?" and "How do I know what God wants for me?" As Faithward's reach grew, it began to shift from a blog site to a resourcing hub for the wider church. In its first three years, Faithward has reached more than 1 million users, from pastors looking for tools to teens struggling with their faith. In 2021, 60 percent of site visitors were under the age of 45. In 2021, the site had 1,219,254 page views with visitors from nearly every country in the world.

Faithward includes an online learning platform, Faithward Learn (learn.faithward.org), to facilitate skill-building for ministry leaders amid the shifts of a digital world and pandemic realities. Though the world is opening back up after the pandemic, digital and hybrid equipping opportunities will continue to be provided; they make learning accessible to more people in the RCA and beyond, and they make it more affordable with lower travel costs. Courses offered on Faithward Learn in 2021 addressed disability advocacy, discipleship, and Bible study, among other things. Numerous webinars were also offered.

The RCA website, www.rca.org, continues to resource RCA leaders with RCA-specific materials, including creeds and confessions, liturgies, and information about governance.

A News and Resources email newsletter provides dynamic, responsive resourcing to church leaders twice a month; other email newsletters provide updates related to particular topics or initiatives. Subscribe at www.rca.org/subscribe.

The RCA communication team manages websites and social media interactions online. In the last year, more than 1 million people have interacted with the RCA on RCA.org, Faithward.org, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Vimeo.

Translation Efforts Continue

As the RCA grows in diversity, the need for translated materials also grows. In addition to offering the 2021 *Book of Church Order* in Spanish, Korean, and Mandarin, a number of resources from Transformed & Transforming, Advocacy and Race Relations, and Church Multiplication have been translated. Recent translation projects include curriculum for the Renovations project, a Lent discipleship calendar, and the She Is Called Women of the Bible study series, volume 2. A She Is Called edition of the Purposeful Living curriculum is the first project to be initiated in Spanish and translated into English.

Report on the RCA Store

Beginning in 2021, resources specific to the RCA are available on an online RCA Store rather than being housed and distributed through Faith Alive Christian Resources. This move significantly reduced both production and fulfillment costs for the denomination.

The RCA Store (store.rca.org) was launched in summer 2020, offering synodical resources as a pilot project. Select additional resources have been added, with more expected over time. The store is a print-on-demand platform, which requires no inventory. When an order comes in, each item is printed at that time and shipped to the purchaser.

Revenue from the RCA Store supports the ministry of the Reformed Church in America.

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF HISTORICAL SERVICES

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." –Hosea 4:6

The Office of Historical Services has been in the process of building over the last year. This time has been used to clear the way in preparation for numerous projects to be completed in the following year. One such project is the digitization of the *Christian Intelligencer*, *Mission Gleaner*, and *Mission Field*. Approval was received to bring on an archival intern starting in January 2022, which has been going well at the writing of this report.

In April 2021, a group using the LEAN process met and reached the conclusion that archives are a vital ministry of and to the Reformed Church in America (RCA). The limited findings of the group painted a picture that the office has far-reaching clientele and ever-expanding duties. See the section below titled "LEAN Process Results" for some of the information identified during the LEAN process, which gives a glimpse into the responsibilities of the Archives. The RCA Archives used that experience as it developed plans for this year.

The 2021 General Synod adopted ONB 21-3, which instructed the Commission on History to study what constitutes a preferred process for keeping records permanently for report to the General Synod of 2023. At the November 5 meeting of the Commission on History, the digital archivist submitted a proposed response to ONB 21-3, which was accepted unanimously. See "Response to ONB 21-3" later in this report.

In December 2021, a General Synod Council task force convened to discuss the current issues faced by the denomination and its records management program. There the Commission on History made several proposals, which are coming as recommendations to this synod in the commission's report; the Office of Historical Services endorses those recommendations. Of concern to the group, and to current and former archivists, was a lack of adherence to archives and records management policies set out in the Policy Manual for the Archives of the Reformed Church in America. See "Policy and Purposes of the Reformed Church Archives" later in this report.

"The church that really takes advantage of what it has lived through and accomplished in a past generation is a church that has a great future!" –John Beardslee III

LEAN Process Results

Customers (people and groups identified who use the Archives)
General Synod
RCA staff
Classes
Academic researchers
Mission partners
Missionaries
International universities
Local churches
Ecumenical partners
Regional synods
Adherents
Publishers
Reformed Church Center
Historians

People interested in genealogy
Other archivists
Librarians
RCA Historical Series
Foreign dignitaries
Local municipalities
Authors

Values
Accurate information
Intellectual control
Timeliness
Joy of learning
Functionality
Easy virtual access
Authority
Security
Priceless artifacts
Keeps us honest
Taking care
Historic preservation
Caring customer service
Ethical management
Share stories with younger generations
Spiritual value of historical knowledge

Mission/Focus of the Archives

- To preserve institutional memory in an accessible way.
- To facilitate research of RCA church history.
- To preserve valuable physical items of RCA church history.
- To manage the long-term legal records of the various RCA institutions.
- The Archives is a treasure trove of church history that helps us and others appreciate and tell the stories of our denomination's rich theological rootedness, tradition, spiritual vitality, and identity.

Functions/Services of the Archives

- Collect, catalog, appraise, preserve, retrieve, and digitize records
- Institutional memory
- Make records available
- Facilitate research
- (Section 2.4 of the Policy Manual for the Archives of the Reformed Church in America was included here)
- Church/classis visitation and meetings
- Commission on History
- Historical Series work (production, sales, promotion, etc.)
- Researchers
- Indexing General Synod minutes
- Digest & Index
- General Synod operations
- Necrology report
- Records transportation

- New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS) relations/Reformed Church Center
- Digitization (print/pictures, video and audio recordings)
- Server work/maintenance
- Social media/outreach
- Staff research requests
- Museum activities
- Accessioning/file work

Parking Lot (In a LEAN event, the "parking lot" is for questions and issues that arise that are beyond the scope of the current event, but that generally need follow up. Parking lot items from this LEAN event remain unresolved.)

- Who supervises the Archives?
- Who determines priorities of the Archives?
- Make the current location of the Archives permanent
- Lack of staffing/funding violating full compliance with General Synod mandates
- How will the Archives be sustainable with one staff person?
- Attitude of RCA staff toward the Archives
- Consider sources of funding beyond assessments
- Exempt status for Archives personnel

Response to ONB 21-3

File Naming Conventions

1. When adding a date to file names, it is best to put the date first, set as YearMonthDay, and separate the date from the file title with an underscore. (Example: 20210115_ConsistoryMinutes.pdf). This will allow all consistory minutes to flow by year and date on your file server.

2. Keep file titles brief. Instead of "Consistory Meeting Minutes Wednesday January 12 2022 7PM.pdf" use "20220112_ConsistoryMinutes."

   In previous iterations of Windows, there was a 259 character cap on file paths.
   Example: C:\Regional Synod Minutes\Regional Synod of the Mid Atlantics\Classes\Classis of New Brunswick\First Reformed Church New Brunswick\Consistory Minutes\2022\20220112_ConsistoryMinutes.pdf
   This is an example of a file structure that is 185 characters long, with a great deal of redundancy.

   Instead, try: C:\RegionalSynod\Mid Atlantics\CNB\FRCNB\Minutes\20220112_ConsistoryMinutes.pdf
   This is only 79 characters long and has removed some redundancy in foldering and naming.

3. Avoid the use of special characters. \ / : * ? ‘’ < > | are all prohibited characters that Windows will not allow you to use.

4. Follow file naming conventions with all files!

Storage of Electronic Files and Backups

The 3-2-1 backup strategy is the current standard for securely backing up files.

The 3-2-1 strategy means: have **3** copies of the data (one working file and two backups), on **2** media types (hard drive, network drive, DVD, etc.), with **1** offsite copy (cloud, RCA Archives, etc.).

File Types

Compression causes a loss of data. Even so called "lossless" compression can still degrade a file. A key thing to remember is that storage is cheap; replacing lost memories is not.

- **Still image** – Uncompressed Tiff (Tagged Image File Format)
- **Document** – PDF (Portable Document Format), PDF/A (Portable Document Format/Archival).
    - PDF is the preferred format for documents. If possible, save in PDF/A format. PDF/A does not allow features that make long-term retention difficult.
- **Audio File** – Uncompressed WAV (Waveform Audio File Format) for preservation, MP3 (Moving Picture Experts Group Audio Layer III) for audio access.
    - MP3 is not a lossless format, but it does make access easier for use. WAV files, while large, are the leading widespread audio format. Lossless compression does have a noticeable quality difference versus an uncompressed audio file.
- **Video Files** – The native format that the camera uses. (Archives staff will re-encode it to an archival format if/when it is transferred to the RCA Archives.)
    - Accepted archival video formats and codecs are changing frequently, so to select one format that may be obsolete by General Synod 2022 is impractical.

Policy and Purposes of the Reformed Church Archives

The following sections are from the Policy Manual for the Archives of the Reformed Church in America and show the scope and breadth of the work of the Archives.

2. Policy and Purposes of the Reformed Church Archives

2.1. The Archives is responsible for the custody and preservation of the archives and records of the Reformed Church in America (RCA). The archives and records of the RCA include all those produced by actions of the General Synod, regional synods, classes, and local churches. They include all boards, commissions, committees, and missions established by any of the above-mentioned bodies. In the event of dissolution of any of these bodies, their records and archives shall be transferred to the RCA archives for custody and preservation.

2.2. Records of the RCA shall not be disposed of without the authorization of the archivist. No assembly or agency of the General Synod shall deposit official records with another archival repository.

2.3. The Archives shall be made available by appointment to staff of the RCA for the conducting of business and to others who have a legitimate interest in studying the history of the denomination. The Archives shall endeavor to promote scholarly research

concerning the RCA and to that end shall publicize these records.

2.4. The functions of the RCA Archives shall be to:

a. Maintain, repair, and preserve the archives and non-current records of the RCA.
b. Establish an effective records management program for the denomination resulting in the mandatory transfer of non-current records deemed worthy of permanent preservation to the Archives according to satisfactory retention schedules.
c. Arrange, describe, and prepare suitable finding aids and guides to aid in accessing the records in custody of the Archives.
d. Inspect and appraise the records and archives in the possession of the RCA and its staff and determine suitable disposition. The archivist shall be bound to observe the confidential nature of their contents if so restricted. Restrictions on access and use shall be determined at the time of transfer, but will not be less than 20 years from the creation date. Sensitive and confidential records must be identified as such by the creating office. The Archives may request a list of the records to be made in accordance with established format.
e. Dispose of non-current records that have no further administrative, legal, historical, or other scholarly value with the agreement of the concerned bodies that produced or received the original record. The disposals shall be carried out in agreement between the Archives and these bodies. When no disposal schedules are available, disposal lists shall be prepared.
f. Encourage the deposit of archives of private individuals and organizations that are deemed to be of historical interest and reflect some aspect of the denomination's work and mission in the world.
g. Assist in the publication and promotion of the *Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America.*

2.5. Official records are defined as all documentary materials (e.g. correspondence, publications, photographs, videotapes, etc.) received or originated by the RCA and its staff in the normal course of its activities, which serve as evidence of the organization, function, policies, decisions, procedures, and operations. Such records are the property of the RCA and all rights, interests, and use of those records belong to the RCA.

(*MGS 1980*, pp. 143-145)

Retention Rules
See Permanent Retention Schedule

RS Minutes
The RCA Archives will store electronic (PDF) copies of regional synod minutes and newsletters. Paper copies will be stored when electronic files do not exist. (October 5, 2012)

3. Access to and Research in the Reformed Church Archives

3.1. The Archives of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) are the property of the General Synod. They are preserved for the administrative, legal, financial, and historical needs of the church. Access to and use of these records is in accordance with the "Policy and Purposes of the Reformed Church Archives" statement (Section 2, above).

3.2. All research in the RCA Archives is by appointment only. Researchers must fill out

a research application and return it to the archivist prior to undertaking research. The archives may not be borrowed or used outside of the RCA Archives. There are no inter-library loan privileges for archival materials. Researchers may not use pens with these records and they must be handled with the utmost care and are responsible for any damage to records.

3.3 Access generally is granted by the archivist. In the cases of the following records, access must also be granted by the appropriate office:

Mission records after 1967	Mission Services staff
Finance records	Financial Services staff
General Secretary records	Office of the General Secretary
Judicial business records	Office of the General Secretary
Personnel file	Appropriate office/Personnel Director

Minutes of GSC and GS Commissions
Restricted for twenty years after creation date. Access prior to that requires a written request (electronic or hard copy) to the Archives and then the permission of both the Archivist and the General Synod Office. Records may be accessed in the Archives of the Reformed Church in America by appointment.

3.4. Research is at a fee of thirty dollars per day. Research fees for long-term use may be negotiated as the occasion arises.

3.5. Researchers are responsible to determine the copyright limitations of all records used for their publication. The archives does not own the copyright to all records in its custody. No records may be reproduced for publication or transcribed without the permission of the RCA Archives.

3.6. In the interest of providing historical resources in various parts of the country, the RCA Archives may provide for the reproduction of pertinent records at the expense of the agency or assembly so desiring the reproduction. The reproduction is for personal research use only and may not be sold, published, or deposited elsewhere without the permission of the Reformed Church Archives. Copies of items for personal use may be requested also of some records if they are not in fragile condition.

REFERRALS FROM GENERAL SYNOD 2021

Response to *MGS 2021*, EC 21-23, p. 48

> EC 21-23
> To instruct the General Synod Council (GSC) to form a working group of 12 members, plus a facilitator, to seek clarity and resolution around the concerns that have been expressed to the GSC by the Commission on History, particularly with relation to oversight of the archives. This group would include three members of the Commission on History, three members of the General Synod Council, three members of the Commission on Church Order, and the denominational legal counsel, the current archivist, and the archivist emeritus, and would plan to meet via electronic means. The first meeting of this working group should take place before December 31, 2021.

Named to the task force were GSC members Carole Barber, Michael Meyer-Veen, and Eric Moreno; Commission on History representatives James Hart Brumm, Steve Pierce, and David Zomer; Commission on Church Order members Brian Andrew, Chris Jacobsen, and Joshua Scheid; as well as GSC staff members Paul Karssen and Matt Gasero and former staff member Russ Gasero. The GSC asked David Van Ningen to serve as facilitator for the group's meetings. The task force met four times via Zoom: December 16, 2021, and January 19, February 16, and March 8, 2022.

The task force ultimately brought two recommendations to the GSC at its March meeting, both regarding incorporating reporting around the Archives into the executive limitations reports that the general secretary submits to the GSC each year. One recommendation asked for the archives to be included in a current executive limitations policy dealing with protection of assets, and the other asked the GSC to develop a new executive limitations policy dealing specifically with the archives.

As stated in its March 22–23, 2022, minutes, the GSC approved two recommendations:

> GSC 22-25
> To ask for compliance information with Archives policies as it relates to the EL-7 monitoring report that the general secretary provides to the GSC at its spring meeting.
>
> GSC 22-26
> To explore the creation of a new Executive Limitations policy that deals explicitly with issues related to the Archives. The Archives policies could become a new EL policy in the GSC policy document, requiring an annual compliance report from the general secretary.

The task force also included in its report to the GSC two recommendations that the Commission on History planned to bring directly to General Synod 2022. The GSC assumed that the inclusion of those two recommendations were for informational purposes only; since those recommendations are already being brought to General Synod 2022 by the Commission on History, it would not be logical for the GSC to take any action if the General Synod was being asked to take the same action.

Response to *MGS 2021*, ONB 21-3, p. 113

> 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.

The Commission on History asked the digital archivist to prepare a report on a preferred process for keeping records permanently, which was presented to and accepted by the commission in November 2021 and is now being shared with this General Synod. See the report of the Office of Historical Services within the GSC as Executive Committee report to this General Synod on pages 67-72.

Response to *MGS 2021*, ONB 21-10, p. 123

> 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 and the Commission on Theology to study the structure and implications of affinity synods, with a report to General Synod in 2022.

See the appropriate sections within the individual reports of the Commission on Church Order (pages 200-209) and the Commission on Theology (pages 240-249).

Response to *MGS 2021*, TE 21-5, p. 342

> TE 21-5
> To refer TE 21-4 to the General Synod Council in consultation with the Commission on Church Order to work out details regarding:
> - whether or not there should be a clause preventing the dilution and removal of the three General Synod appointed trustees
> - whether WTS will be affiliated or officially related to the Reformed Church in America
> - whether future amendments to the articles and bylaws should require approval of the General Synod, per *Book of Church Order* Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 7, Section 3 [2019 edition, p. 71]
> - Put in a binding agreement with General Synod that RCA-affiliated students will receive a 25% tuition discount, and that students currently in ministry or with significant ministry experience can receive additional scholarships up to 40 percent off tuition.

Following General Synod 2021 and the subsequent referral of TE 21-4 (the proposed changes to the Western Theological Seminary [WTS] bylaws and articles of incorporation; *MGS 2021*, pp. 332-352), the Commission on Church Order did some initial work to identify some of the areas and issues where it felt further study and conversation was needed.

The moderator of the Commission on Church Order (CCO) shared this work with the GSC and with WTS, and several representatives from the CCO, WTS, and the GSC met via Zoom in January 2022.

Following that meeting, it was agreed that Western's board and the CCO would continue to work on refining Western's proposal for changes to its bylaws and articles of incorporation for submission to the GSC at its March 2022 meeting. From there, GSC would decide whether or not to bring the proposal back to the 2022 General Synod.

Both the CCO and Western brought reports to the March 2022 meeting of the GSC; Western's contained revised proposed changes incorporating their work with the CCO, and the CCO's contained additional information and rationale, along with a recommendation that the GSC consider bringing an additional recommendation to the synod alongside the articles and bylaws changes from WTS.

GSC agreed to bring both recommendations to General Synod 2022, so following the reports from both CCO and WTS, which the GSC feels provide important context for delegates to General Synod 2022, delegates will find RF 22-1, the revised proposed amendments to WTS's bylaws and articles of incorporation, and RF 22-2, a recommendation designating Western Theological Seminary as an agent of the General Synod.

Considerations from the CCO

The following information and considerations were sent by the CCO to the GSC's March 2022 meeting.

Acknowledging that this is uncharted territory for the General Synod, the commission's goal is to help the GSC, WTS, and ultimately the General Synod itself make an informed decision regarding Western's request to reorganize from being owned and operated by the General Synod to becoming an independent but officially related seminary.

A. What is "an RCA seminary" or "a seminary of the Reformed Church in America"?

A seminary of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) is an institution of higher learning created, or conceivably adopted, by the General Synod to provide theological training that prepares candidates for ministry in the RCA. There are currently two RCA seminaries, both of which have grown from organic beginnings. New Brunswick Theological Seminary began in 1784 when the General Synod elected Rev. John Henry Livingston to be its professor. Western Theological Seminary began in 1866 when seven Hope College graduates petitioned the General Synod to provide theological training in West Michigan. Currently, both seminaries are incorporated with the General Synod as the sole member of the corporation—the *BCO* requires that the "members of all incorporated organizations, other than the colleges, shall be elected by the General Synod, or by those organizations upon nomination by the General Synod" (Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 7, Section 4 [2021 edition, p. 73]).

The boards of trustees of RCA seminaries are agents of the General Synod. While the boards are granted general independence in the administration of the seminaries, the General Synod retains "original authority over all matters pertaining to doctrine and denominational polity as they relate to the theological seminaries of the Reformed Church" (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 7 [2021 edition, p. 70]).

Consistent with its ability to create or adopt a seminary, the Commission on Church Order believes that the General Synod can take action, at its discretion, to alter its relationship with one of its seminaries.

B. What is membership versus directorship, and how would the WTS relationship be altered?

WTS is proposing to restructure itself on a directorship basis rather than membership basis. The WTS board believes this will help it better adapt and be more responsive to the changing landscape of theological education so that it can continue to form women and men for faithful Christian ministry for generations to come. Practically, if approved, the General Synod would release its stake as the sole member of the WTS corporation, and WTS would instead be solely governed by its self-perpetuating Board of Trustees (subject to a few limitations noted in this document).

These are distinctions with specific legal considerations subject to the provisions and protections of the Michigan Nonprofit Corporation Act. While the commission cannot offer a legal opinion, the role of a corporation's member generally is not to micromanage the board in its governance, but to approve or disapprove a number of fundamental corporate changes such as amending the organizational documents, transferring all or substantially all of the corporation's assets, merging with another entity, or dissolving the corporation (and specifically in the case of the General Synod and RCA seminaries: authority over doctrine and polity). As a directorship, such decisions are made exclusively by the board. It may be helpful to think about it this way: on a membership basis, the General Synod exercises some "control" over WTS; on a directorship basis, it would not exercise such "control" except, specific to this request, through the influence of one-eighth to one-quarter of the board that is designated by the General Synod.

The immediate implication of releasing the General Synod's membership is that WTS would effectively become an independent institution and thus would no longer be "an RCA seminary." Such a significant change carries a number of theological, legal, and financial implications. One notable change with respect to church order is that WTS would no longer be granted automatic status as "an agent of the General Synod" (see Q&A D).

C. What does it mean to be "officially related" to the General Synod or to the RCA?

Although WTS would no longer be "an RCA seminary" by virtue of the General Synod being the sole member of the corporation, WTS wants to remain officially related to the RCA in a manner similar to the colleges.[1] In fact, its first organizational purpose would be to "maintain and operate a theological seminary (the 'Seminary') *officially related* to the Reformed Church in America" (Restated Articles, Article II, emphasis added).

There are two requirements in the *BCO* for an institution of higher learning to be "officially related" to the RCA:[2]

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[1] While each is an institution of higher learning, the seminaries are not like the colleges in a number of notable ways: the seminaries are specifically named as agents of the General Synod; the seminaries are charged with supervision over candidates for ministry and have the responsibility of issuing Certificates of Fitness for Ministry; the seminaries may nominate faculty members to be General Synod Professors; the seminaries receive funding from the assessment for theological education; and the General Synod retains original authority over doctrine and polity as related to the seminaries, whereas the colleges are essentially autonomous.

[2] In *Constitutional Theology*, Allan Janssen comments, "Not only does the General Synod cause corporations to be formed … but it must also approve the constitution and amendments to its subsidiary bodies. In this way, such bodies maintain their organic connection to the assembly and consequently remain connected to the order of the church. … The colleges are granted a special place in the order. They have become autonomous bodies that maintain their 'official'

1. "The constitution or enabling document of every agency, board, and institution officially related to the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, with its amendments, shall be approved by the General Synod" (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 7, Section 3 [2021 edition, p. 73]).

   As originally proposed in TE 21-4, the amendment provisions requiring General Synod approval were removed from WTS' articles and bylaws. As revised, the provisions were added back in part but not in whole. As newly proposed, General Synod approval would be limited to future amendments affecting the provision for board members or the reversion of assets. The Board would reserve the right to make any and all other amendments without General Synod approval (e.g., amending the organization's purpose).

2. "The governing boards of all institutions of higher learning in the United States which are officially related to the Reformed Church in America shall at all times include at least three members who are designated by the General Synod" (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 7, Section 5 [2021 edition, p. 74]).

   As revised, the WTS bylaws provide for 3 of the 12–24 trustees to be designated by the General Synod: "As a condition to their election, three of the trustees must be approved by the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America" (Restated Bylaws, Article V, Sec. 4). At the commission's suggestion, WTS has included a clause preventing the dilution of any General Synod–designated trustees beyond one-eighth of the representation: "no amendment to Article V, Sec. 3 will be effective which increases the authorized number of trustees and no amendment to the second sentence of Article V, Sec. 4 will be effective unless each of those amendments are approved by the General Synod if it is still in existence" (Restated Bylaws, Article XIII, Sec. 1). The commission notes that the Board "may remove a trustee with or without cause" in the amended bylaws (Restated Bylaws, Article V, Sec. 6), while currently the General Synod may do so.

It is possible for a non-RCA seminary to be officially related as long as the two conditions above are met, and an officially related status has significant implications for the candidate for ministry process.

D. Would WTS still be considered an agent of the General Synod?

An agent is a person or group that has been empowered to act on behalf of an assembly. The *BCO* presently specifies that the General Synod Council (cf. Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6b [2021 edition, p. 110]) and the board of trustees of *an RCA seminary* or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (cf. Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11, Section 3 [2021 edition, p. 47] and Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 3a [2021 edition, p. 50]) are agents of the General Synod.

If WTS is approved to become an independent but officially related seminary, the commission believes it would no longer automatically qualify as an agent of the General Synod. However, it can be inferred that the General Synod may take some kind of action to designate WTS as an agent—it depends on the meaning of a single reference in the *BCO* to "the General Synod *or its designated agent*" (Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 6

connection with the church without being directly responsible to the synod. The General Synod plays no role in their governance except to reserve for itself three positions on the governing boards of each institution" (second edition, p. 235).

[2021 edition, pp. 36-37]). The commission is inclined toward a permissive interpretation, although it remains unclear what the criteria would be for the General Synod to make such a designation and what the frequency or criteria would be for renewal of the designation. There are implications for candidates for ministry and for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry (see Q&A E).

E. Could WTS still grant Certificates of Fitness for Ministry?

This question is not considered in a vacuum; a number of factors are relevant to this element of the request but beyond the scope of this particular action. If the WTS Board of Trustees is no longer an agent of the General Synod, it would not be authorized to grant the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. That would be a significant change for currently enrolled students who are candidates for ministry in the RCA; presumably, they would need to transfer to the MFCA to continue that process. Should that become necessary, the commission is aware that WTS and the MFCA have had some conversation about a transitional plan to accommodate currently enrolled students.

However, there are broader questions and concerns being considered by various assemblies and agencies in this regard. For instance, the commission is aware that the Pastoral Formation Oversight Board (PFOB) is separately considering a proposal that would significantly change the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process, and it may be well received amidst the broader denominational restructuring at hand.

In the meantime, here are two good questions to ask:

1. Does it make sense to ask an independent but *officially related* seminary to grant the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry? Presumably, yes is a reasonable answer.
2. Do the faculty and board of WTS still want to grant Certificates of Fitness for Ministry? The commission does not intend to speak for the seminary, but currently understands that the seminary is willing to do so for some immediate transitional years while other proposals are worked out.

Since the GSC has agreed to bring Western's revised bylaws changes to the 2022 General Synod, the commission recommended that the GSC consider including as part of its report a recommendation for the General Synod to designate WTS as an agent, which the GSC has agreed to do (see RF 22-2).

This would, on the one hand, ensure essentially no disruption for students who are currently enrolled as candidates for ministry as they work toward their Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. On the other hand, in light of a seminary's core function to provide theological education to candidates for ministry, it is important to consider the degree of authority that the General Synod should have over the seminary's doctrine. The General Synod would not have direct authority over the doctrine of an independent but officially related seminary—certainly not in the way it exercises original authority over an RCA seminary. However, the General Synod would retain direct influence in the partnership and indirect authority over doctrine through a regular re-evaluation of this designation and the ability to remove such a designation at its discretion.

F. What happens to WTS' General Synod Professors?

To be eligible for the office of General Synod Professor, an RCA minister of Word and sacrament must exercise "a substantial and continuing role, under the authority of one of the seminaries or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency board, *both* in preparing

RCA candidates for ordination *and* in the process of recommending the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry" (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 8, Section 3 [2021 edition, p. 74]). If WTS is no longer an agent authorized to grant the certificate, any of its General Synod professors would be at risk for not meeting the second half of that requirement, unless they also exercise "a substantial and continuing role" in doing so with the MFCA.

If the request is approved *and* WTS is designated as an agent, then the commission does not believe there is any immediate impact on current General Synod Professors. A future *BCO* amendment may be required to give the board of trustees of an officially related seminary the ability to nominate a candidate to be General Synod Professor, if that ability is desired (see *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 8, Section 3 [2021 edition, p. 74]).

G. Other Considerations

Property and assets. A thorough title search should be completed to ensure that all deeds are and would continue to be accurate. At the commission's suggestion, WTS is honoring its history and relationship with the RCA by keeping the General Synod in the "Dedication of Assets" reversion clause (Restated Articles, Article X). An observation: that's a worst-case scenario, and it is not a limitation on the board's right to "distribute the corporation's property in such manner as will best promote its objectives and purposes" (Restated Articles, Article IIc) without General Synod oversight.

Tuition reduction for RCA students. The WTS report introducing TE 21-4 promises a significant tuition discount for RCA-affiliated students. While such a discount is not suitable content for WTS' organizational documents, the commission wonders how this would be implemented (presumably by the WTS finance department) and recommends that WTS document this plan in conjunction with the GSC's report on TE 21-5.

Things to Ponder. What is the true impact? While on the one hand this would be a substantial reorganization, the commission wondered in practice how different it would actually be, or is intended to be. In addition to what has been discussed here, there are other parallel and peripheral considerations that don't directly interact with the issues presented specifically by this request.

Unintended consequences. Review the *BCO*, the GS bylaws and special rules of order, and agency bylaws for any needed amendments if TE 21-4/TE 21-5 are approved.

- *Corresponding Delegates to General Synod.* "The presidents of the seminaries and the moderator or another member of the respective boards of trustees for the seminaries and for the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency shall be corresponding delegates" (*BCO*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 9, Section 9 [2021 edition, p. 124]). This may already be sufficiently flexible language, or a possible amendment: "...presidents of seminaries officially related to the Reformed Church in America and…" would be consistent with the current language for the colleges.
- *Commission on Theology Membership.* "The membership shall include two persons from among the Reformed Church seminary faculties" (*BCO*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 9a [2021 edition, p. 119]). Possible amendment: "... among the faculties of officially related seminaries"?[3]

[3] Note a broader example in the membership of the Commission on Christian Discipleship and Education: "one shall be a member from the faculty of an RCA-affiliated institution" (*BCO*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 12a [2021 edition, p. 121]).

- *Agency Bylaws.* The commission has not reviewed agency or other bylaws for potential effects (e.g., PFOB or MFCA).

Rationale and Description of Revisions by WTS

The following is the information and rationale for approval of these bylaws and articles of incorporation changes sent by WTS to the GSC's March 2022 meeting.

According to the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), we are in the middle of a significant sea of change in theological education. ATS is projecting that sometime in this decade, the total number of racial/ethnic minority students enrolled in ATS schools will exceed that of white students.

Western Theological Seminary is experiencing some aspects of this change as well. Seven out of fourteen admitted in-residence students for fall 2022 are students of color, including five African American students; eight out of fourteen admitted distance-learning students for fall 2022 are students of color, including five Latino students from the Los Angeles area.

Altogether, theological education is in the midst of a demographic transition that will continue to accelerate through the end of the decade. According to ATS, 25 years ago, the most common student in ATS schools would have been a white male student from a mainline tradition, studying in-residence in the MDiv program, attending a seminary that belongs to the same denomination as their parents, funded by the denomination, and preparing for ministry in that same denomination.

By the end of this decade, the most common student in theological education will be a racial/ethnic minority student from an evangelical/protestant tradition, equally likely to be male or female, equally likely to enroll in an MA program as an MDiv program, studying part-time as a commuter/distance-learning student, attending a seminary that does not belong to the same denomination as their parents, or altogether non-denominational, not funded by a denomination, and not pursuing ministry in a denomination. Geographical proximity will become increasingly significant in the seminary selection process.

Responding to these trends is the foundational motivation for Western's request to the General Synod. We seek to place the seminary in a position that will allow us to respond with agility and creativity to meet the changing demands for theological education so that Western can be increasingly sustainable for the future. We live in a time of increasing apathy and unfamiliarity toward denominations, and by extension, denominational seminaries. The perception of denominational seminaries is that they primarily employ faculty who are ordained in that denomination and are focused primarily on training students for that denomination (for example, any of the Southern Baptist seminaries, Covenant Theological Seminaries [Presbyterian Church of America], Trinity School of Ministry [Anglican Church of North America], and Calvin Theological Seminary [Christian Reformed Church]). Moving to an "officially related" status will allow Western to better recruit and foster relationships with a broader prospective student pool, including students from other denominations and church networks.

The seminary's request was referred to the General Synod Council (GSC) in consultation with the Commission on Church Order (CCO) for further consideration. In January, the CCO made their advisory response available. Their response focused on four areas:

1. Instead of being "affiliated" with the RCA, the provision given by the *BCO* is for Western to become an "officially related" institution of the RCA.

2. The *BCO* outlines two criteria for an institution to become an "officially related" institution:
    a. The institution's organizing documents must be approved by the General Synod. This requirement would be satisfied when the General Synod approves our request.
    b. The institution's governing board must include three General Synod–appointed trustees at all times.
3. The CCO recommends that a reversion clause of the seminary's assets be included so that if the seminary ever ceases operation, the assets would revert to the RCA.
4. Any amendments regarding the three General Synod–appointed trustees, and the reversion of asset clause, would require approval by the General Synod.

Western Theological Seminary's Board of Trustees reviewed the response of the CCO and agreed to adopt all of the further changes as recommended.

Recommendations

At its stated meeting on March 22–23, 2022, the GSC voted to bring the following recommendations to General Synod 2022 on behalf of Western Theological Seminary, in accordance with TE 21-5.

RF 22-1
To approve the following amendments to the Bylaws and the Articles of Incorporation of Western Theological Seminary (additions are underlined, deletions are struck; articles and/or sections to which no changes are being proposed are omitted here):

RESTATED BYLAWS
OF
~~THE~~ WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY ~~OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA~~

Article I
Name

Sec. 1 **The name of this corporation is ~~The~~ Western Theological Seminary ~~of the Reformed Church in America~~ (the "Corporation").**

Sec. 2 **The Corporation will operate under ~~the assumed name Western Theological Seminary and such others~~such assumed names as may be approved by the Board of Trustees of the Corporation (the "Board").**

Article II
Membership~~Member~~

Sec. 1 **The Corporation has no members and is organized on a directorship basis.**

~~**Sec. 1** The General Synod of the Reformed Church in America (the "General Synod"), or its successor by any merger or consolidation, will be the sole member of the Corporation. The General Synod, acting in accordance with applicable law, may exercise all rights granted to members of nonprofit corporations by the laws of the state of Michigan.~~

~~**Sec. 2** The date, time, place within or without the state of Michigan and purpose of the annual or any special meeting of the General Synod intending to take any action required or permitted to be taken by the General Synod pursuant to the Articles of Incorporation of this Corporation (the "Articles") or these Bylaws will be determined by the General Synod unless otherwise provided by the Michigan Nonprofit Corporation Act.~~

Article V
Trustees

Sec. 1 **The ~~General Synod entrusts to the~~ Board ~~all~~has authority and power necessary for the proper oversight and direction of the Corporation and its seminary (the "Seminary"), as well as the control of the Corporation's finances, securities, and property.**

Sec. 2 **All members of the Board must be confessing Christians who acknowledge a commitment to the authority of the Bible over all matters of faith and practice, the sovereignty of God, and the Lordship of Jesus Christ over all of life. The members also must be interested in and willing to contribute their wealth, wisdom, work and witness.**

Sec. 3 **The Board must consist of a minimum of twelve and a maximum of twenty-four members who are to be elected for a term of three years beginning the first day of July following their election by the ~~General Synod~~Board and continuing until the end of June when their successors have been elected. Members may serve three consecutive full terms but must be off the Board for two years before becoming eligible again for re-election to the Board.**

Sec. 4 **All trustees must be recommended by the Board Governance and Church Relations Committee and elected by the ~~General Synod~~Board at its**

annual meeting or at any special meeting. ~~The membership of the Board must at all times include one member from each of the regional synods of~~As a condition to their election, three of the trustees must be approved by the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America (the "General Synod").

Sec. 5 The president, one member of the faculty and the student council president of the Seminary will be an *ex-officio* member, without vote, of the Board.

~~Sec. 6 One member of the faculty of the Seminary who is tenured or who holds the office of General Synod Professor of Theology of the Seminary must be elected by the faculty to serve as an *ex-officio* member, without vote, of the Board.~~

~~Sec. 7 The student council president of the Seminary is to serve as *ex-officio* member, without vote, of the Board.~~

~~Sec. 8 The general secretary of the Reformed Church in America, or a representative appointed by the general secretary, is to be an *ex-officio* member, without vote, of the Board.~~

Sec. ~~9~~ 6 A trustee may resign by written notice to the Corporation's secretary. The death or resignation of a trustee will create a vacancy. Vacancies must be filled for the remaining portion of the term by the Executive Committee~~, subject to approval by General Synod, at any regular or special meeting of the General Synod. The General Synod~~ The Board may remove a trustee with or without cause.

Sec. ~~10~~7 The Board assumes the responsibility for providing the Corporation with such property and buildings, information resources, equipment, and supplies as are necessary for the effective accomplishment of the Corporation's mission.

Article VII
Officers

Sec. 6 The president of the Seminary must be elected by ~~a majority of~~ the Board ~~by secret ballot~~.

Article VIII
Duties of Officers

Sec. 5 **The duties of the president of the Seminary includes the position description as adopted by the Board and the provisions of the contract at the time of employment. The Board must conduct an annual performance review of the president.**

Article IX
Committees

Sec. 1 **The Board has established the following standing committees:**

Executive, Student and Community Life, Academic, ~~Advancement~~Development, Finance and ~~Audit, and Continuing Education~~Board of Governance and Church Relations. The Board may establish such ad hoc committees as it deems necessary to carry out the business of the Seminary.

Article XII
Dedication of Assets

Sec. 1 **The Corporation's funds and property must be used exclusively for the Corporation's purposes set forth in the Articles. No part of the income or assets of the Corporation may inure to the benefit of any individual or trustee.**

Sec. 2 **The Corporation must hold and administer all of the Corporation's assets and accumulated income to effectuate the Corporation's tax-exempt purposes. No part of the income or assets of this Corporation will inure to the private benefit of any individual or trustee. If the Corporation's purposes fail or if the Corporation ceases to be approved as a tax-exempt organization under the Internal Revenue Code, and any such defect is not cured by appropriate amendment, or if the Corporation voluntarily dissolves, then all of the Corporation's assets and accumulated income must be distributed ~~to the General Synod. The Corporation must be dissolved after all of the Corporation's property has been so distributed~~as provided in the Articles.**

Article XIII
Amendment of the Bylaws

Sec. 1 **These Bylaws may be amended by a majority vote of the Board at any regular meeting after ten days' notice to the trustees ~~and the approval of the~~of the Board; provided, however, no amendment to Article V, Sec. 3 will be effective which increases the authorized number of trustees and no amendment to the second sentence of Article V, Sec. 4 will be effective unless each of those amendments are approved by the General Synod if it is still in existence.**

Article XIV
Adoption of the Bylaws

Sec. 1 **These Bylaws, when adopted by the Board ~~and the General Synod~~, will supersede all previous Bylaws controlling the affairs of the Corporation.**

RESTATED ARTICLES OF INCORPORATION

ARTICLE I
Name

The name of the corporation is ~~The~~ Western Theological Seminary ~~of the Reformed Church in America~~.

ARTICLE II
Purposes

The purpose or purposes of this corporation are:

(a) To maintain and operate a theological seminary (the "Seminary") officially related to the Reformed Church in America for the purpose of providing courses of study in theology, religion, church history, and other subjects suitable for the training of men and women for the Gospel ministry, and for the teaching of religion according to the Holy Scriptures and secondarily the doctrines and standards of ~~The Reformed Church in America, as based on the Holy Scriptures~~the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort and the Belhar Confession as historic and faithful witness to the word of God in Scripture.

(b) To acquire by purchase, gift, or otherwise, property of every description, real and personal, for the use and benefit of the Seminary, and to exchange, sell, or dispose of such property.

(c) To do each and everything necessary, suitable, or proper for the accomplishment of the above purposes or which at any time appear convenient for or conducive to the accomplishment of such purposes and which a nonprofit corporation organized under the provisions of the Michigan Nonprofit Corporation Act may exercise. The corporation may deal with and distribute the corporation's property in such manner as will best promote its objectives and purposes, without limitation except such, if any, as may be contained in instruments under which such property is conveyed to the corporation.

Notwithstanding any other provision of these Articles, the corporation shall not carry on any activity or have any purpose that is not permitted for (i) an organization exempt from federal income taxation under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code (the "Code") and other related legislation and regulations as they now exist or may hereafter be amended or (ii) an organization contributions to which are deductible under Section 170(c)(2) of the Code and related legislation and regulations as they now exist or may hereafter be amended. No substantial part of the corporation's direct or indirect activities shall consist of carrying on propaganda or otherwise attempting to influence legislation. The corporation shall not participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distributing of statements), any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office.

ARTICLE III
Form of Organization and Financing

The corporation is formed on a nonstock directorship basis.

The general plan under which the corporation is to be financed is as follows:

(a) in part by support of the Reformed Church in America;

(~~a~~b) ~~B~~by income derived from endowment funds previously acquired by the corporation and/or by the trustees of the corporation, by gift, bequest, or devise and by such other endowment

funds as may be acquired in the future by gift, bequest, devise, or otherwise.;

~~(b) By contributions and appropriations from the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America (the "General Synod"), from the particular synods, classes and churches of The Reformed Church in America, and from individuals interested in promoting the advancement of The Reformed Church in America and/or religious and social education and welfare.~~

(c) by contributions from those interested in promoting the advancement of religious and social education and welfare; and

(d) by tuition payments.

~~The corporation is formed on a membership basis.~~

ARTICLE IV
Registered Office and Resident Agent

The street address (which is the mailing address) of the corporation's registered office is 101 East 13th Street, Holland, Michigan 49423.

The name of the resident agent at the registered office is Dr. ~~Timothy L. Brown~~Felix Theonugraha.

ARTICLE VI
~~Member~~

~~The sole member of the corporation is the General Synod.~~

~~ARTICLE VII~~
~~Seminary~~

~~The Seminary shall be under the control and support of the General Synod, subject to the remaining provisions of the Articles.~~

~~ARTICLE VIII~~
Degrees

Upon the recommendation of the faculty of the Seminary, the trustees of the corporation are authorized to grant the degrees of Bachelor of Divinity

or Master of Divinity (M.Div.), whichever is by custom and usage recognized as the terminal award for the first professional degree program, and the degrees Master of Theology (Th.M.), Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) and Master of Arts (M.A.), as well as certificate programs.

ARTICLE ~~IX~~VII
Trustees

The affairs of the corporation will be conducted by a board of trustees. The board of trustees has the power to provide for the organization of the board, the conduct of the affairs of the board, the performance of the function of the corporation, and in general to have all of the powers legally vesting in such boards by virtue of the law of the State of Michigan. Without limiting the above, the board is to hold in trust such property, either real, personal or mixed, as may be granted, conveyed, given, or in any other manner acquired by the corporation and to hold, invest, sell, transfer, or dispose of the such property for the purposes of the corporation.

The number, qualifications, classifications, terms of office, and manner of election or removal of the trustees of the corporation are as prescribed in the corporation's bylaws.~~Any bylaw for those purposes may be made or altered only by the General Synod.~~

ARTICLE ~~X~~VIII
Limitation of Trustee's and Volunteer Officer's Liability

A trustee or volunteer officer shall not be personally liable to the corporation for money damages for any action taken or any failure to take any action as a trustee or volunteer officer, except liability for any of the following:

(~~1~~a) the amount of a financial benefit received by a trustee or volunteer officer to which he or she is not entitled;

(~~2~~b) intentional infliction of harm on the corporation or its member;

(~~3~~c) a violation of Section 551 of the Michigan Nonprofit Corporation Act;

(~~4~~d) an intentional criminal act; or

(~~5~~c) a liability imposed under Section 497(a) of the Michigan Nonprofit Corporation Act.

Provisions of this article added by amendment shall apply only to acts or omissions and to breaches of duty occurring after the date the amended article was adopted.

If the Michigan Nonprofit Corporation Act is amended to further eliminate or limit the liability of a trustee or volunteer officer, then a trustee or volunteer officer (in addition to the circumstances in which a trustee or officer is not personally liable as set forth in the preceding paragraph) shall, to the fullest extent permitted by the Michigan Nonprofit Corporation Act as so amended, not be liable to the corporation. No amendment to or alteration, modification or repeal of this Article shall increase the liability or alleged liability of any trustee or volunteer officer of the corporation for or concerning any act or omission of such trustee or officer occurring before such amendment, alteration, modification or repeal.

The above limitation of liability will not apply to the extent it is inconsistent with the status of the corporation as an organization described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Code.

ARTICLE ~~XI~~IX
Assumption of Liability for Acts of Volunteers

The corporation shall assume all liability to any person other than the corporation for all acts or omissions of a volunteer trustee incurred in the good faith performance of the volunteer trustee's duties as such. The corporation shall assume the liability for all acts or omissions of a volunteer trustee, volunteer officer or other volunteer, if all of the following conditions are met:

(~~1~~a) the volunteer was acting or reasonably believed he or she was acting within the scope of his or her authority;

(~~2~~b) the volunteer was acting in good faith;

(~~3~~c) the volunteer's conduct did not amount to gross negligence or willful and wanton misconduct;

(~~4~~d) the volunteer's conduct was not an intentional tort; and

(5c) the volunteer's conduct was not a tort arising out of the ownership, maintenance, or use of a motor vehicle for which tort liability may be imposed as provided by Section 3135 of the Michigan Insurance Code of 1956.

No amendment to or alteration, modification or repeal of this article shall reduce the scope of the corporation's assumption of liability under this article for or concerning any volunteer's acts or omissions that occur before such amendment, alteration, modification or repeal. Provisions of this article added by amendment shall apply only to acts or omissions and to breaches of duty occurring after the date the amended article was adopted.

The above assumption of liability will not apply to the extent it is inconsistent with the status of the corporation as an organization described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Code.

ARTICLE ~~XII~~X
Dedication of Assets

The corporation shall hold and administer all its assets and accumulated income to effectuate its tax-exempt purposes. No part of the income or assets of this corporation shall inure to the private benefit of any individual or trustee. If the corporation's purposes fail or if the corporation ceases to be approved as a tax-exempt organization under the Internal Revenue Code, and any such defect is not cured by appropriate amendment, or if the corporation voluntarily dissolves, then all of the corporation's assets and accumulated income shall be distributed to the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America (the "General Synod") or if the General Synod is no longer in existence then to such other organizations or units of government as the trustees (or in default of designation by the trustees, the Circuit Court for the County of Ottawa) shall designate as best accomplishing the purposes for which the corporation was formed, provided that (i) each organization receiving such assets is qualified as tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code or the corresponding provisions of any subsequent federal tax laws and (ii) each distribution to a unit of government is made for a public purpose to the United States federal government or to a state or local government. The corporation shall be dissolved after all its property has been so distributed.

ARTICLE ~~XIII~~XI
Amendments

The ~~Synod~~board of trustees may amend or repeal any provision contained in these Articles and add additional articles in the manner prescribed by statute; provided, however, no amendment to Article X eliminating any distribution to the General Synod will be effective unless the amendment is approved by the General Synod. (ADOPTED)

A motion was made and supported to cease debate.

VOTED: To not cease debate.

A motion was made and supported to cease debate.

VOTED: To cease debate.

VOTED: To adopt RF 21-1.

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance was to vote in favor of RF 22-1.

The restated (amended) versions of WTS's bylaws and articles of incorporation are presented at the end of this report.

RF 22-2
To designate Western Theological Seminary as an agent of the General Synod for the purpose of granting Certificates of Fitness for Ministry; and further,

To re-evaluate this designation for recommendation to be renewed by the General Synod in five years.

A motion was made and supported to amend RF 22-2 as follows (additions are underlined):

To designate Western Theological Seminary as an agent of the General Synod for the purpose of granting Certificates of Fitness for Ministry and for the purpose of having General Synod Professors; and further,

To re-evaluate this designation for recommendation to be renewed by the General Synod in five years.

VOTED: To amend RF 22-2.

RF 22-2 as amended was before the house.

VOTED: To adopt RF 22-2 as amended.

The final version of RF 22-2 as amended and adopted reads as follows:

RF 22-2
To designate Western Theological Seminary as an agent of the General Synod for the purpose of granting Certificates of Fitness for Ministry and for the purpose of having General Synod Professors; and further,

To re-evaluate this designation for recommendation to be renewed by the General Synod in five years. (ADOPTED)

Restated WTS Bylaws and Articles of Incorporation – Final Versions

Following are Western's revised bylaws and restated articles of incorporation as they read, with changes incorporated, as a result of the adoption of RF 22-1.

RESTATED BYLAWS
OF
WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Article I
Name

Sec. 1 The name of this corporation is Western Theological Seminary (the "**Corporation**").

Sec. 2 The Corporation will operate under such assumed names as may be approved by the Board of Trustees of the Corporation (the "**Board**").

Article II
Membership

Sec. 1 The Corporation has no members and is organized on a directorship basis.

Article III
Purposes

Sec. 1 The purposes of this Corporation are as stated in the Articles.

Article IV
Powers

Sec. 1 The Corporation may exercise any power that is consistent with the purposes described in the Articles and that a nonprofit corporation organized under the provisions of the Michigan Nonprofit Corporation Act may exercise. The Corporation may deal with and distribute the Corporation's property in any manner as will best promote the Corporation's objectives and purposes, without limitation except as may be contained, if any, in instruments under which the property is conveyed to the Corporation.

Sec. 2 Notwithstanding any other provision of the Articles or these Bylaws, the Corporation must not carry on any activity or have any purpose that is not permitted for (a) an organization exempt from federal income taxation under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and other related legislation

and regulations as they now exist or may in the future be amended or (b) an organization contributions to which are deductible under Section 170(c)(2) of the Internal Revenue Code and related legislation and regulations as they now exist or may in the future be amended. No substantial part of the Corporation's direct or indirect activities is to consist of carrying on propaganda or otherwise attempting to influence legislation. The Corporation must not participate in or intervene in (including the publishing or distributing of statements), any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office.

Article V
Trustees

Sec. 1 The Board has authority and power necessary for the proper oversight and direction of the Corporation and its seminary (the "**Seminary**"), as well as the control of the Corporation's finances, securities, and property.

Sec. 2 All members of the Board must be confessing Christians who acknowledge a commitment to the authority of the Bible over all matters of faith and practice, the sovereignty of God, and the Lordship of Jesus Christ over all of life. The members also must be interested in and willing to contribute their wealth, wisdom, work and witness.

Sec. 3 The Board must consist of a minimum of twelve and a maximum of twenty-four members who are to be elected for a term of three years beginning the first day of July following their election by the Board and continuing until the end of June when their successors have been elected. Members may serve three consecutive full terms but must be off the Board for two years before becoming eligible again for re-election to the Board.

Sec. 4 All trustees must be recommended by the Board Governance and Church Relations Committee and elected by the Board at its annual meeting or at any special meeting. As a condition to their election, three of the trustees must be approved by the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America (the "**General Synod**").

Sec. 5 The president, one member of the faculty and the student council president of the Seminary will be an *ex-officio* member, without vote, of the Board.

Sec. 6 A trustee may resign by written notice to the Corporation's secretary. The death or resignation of a trustee will create a vacancy. Vacancies must be filled for the remaining portion of the term by the Executive Committee. The Board may remove a trustee with or without cause.

Sec. 7 The Board assumes the responsibility for providing the Corporation with such property and buildings, information resources, equipment, and supplies as are necessary for the effective accomplishment of the Corporation's mission.

Article VI
Meetings of the Board

Sec. 1 The Board must meet at least three times per year, with the annual meeting to be in the spring. Notice of each meeting must be given thirty days prior to the date of the meeting.

Sec. 2 A special meeting of the Board may be called by the chairperson or vice-chairperson of the Board. The chairperson or vice-chairperson is obliged to call such a meeting if so requested in writing by any five trustees. If the chairperson or vice-chairperson fails to call the meeting within ten days of such request, the secretary must issue the call to meeting based on the trustees' written request. Notice of special meetings, stating the nature of the business to be considered, must be given to all trustees not less than ten days prior to each such meeting. No other business is to be considered at such special meetings except by two-thirds vote of those present at the meeting.

Sec. 3 Notice of the annual or any special meeting stating the time and place of the meeting must be given to each trustee by one of the following methods:

a. by mailing a written notice to such address as the trustee designates from time to time or, in the absence of designation, to the last known address of the trustee;
b. by personally delivering a written notice to the trustee;
c. by orally notifying the trustee, either personally or by telephone; or
d. by electronic transmission to the trustee in a manner authorized by the trustee entitled to the notice;

except that, if the transmitted notice is returned as undeliverable, a different permitted method of notification must be used.

Sec. 4 A majority of all voting trustees of the Board constitutes a quorum. If there is less than a quorum present, the meeting will be adjourned. Motions may be passed by a majority of those present. Each trustee present in person at a Board meeting is entitled to one vote.

Sec. 5 The Trustees must receive the agenda at least ten days prior to the meeting of the Board.

Sec. 6 Every meeting of the Board must be opened and closed with prayer.

Sec. 7 The Board may meet in executive session for a portion of any business meeting at which time only voting trustees and the president of the Seminary are to be present. The Board may also ask to meet without the president during executive session.

Sec. 8 A trustee's attendance at or participation in a meeting waives notice to the trustee of the meeting, unless the trustee at the beginning of the meeting, or when the trustee arrives, objects to the meeting or the transacting of business at the meeting and after objecting does not vote for or assent to any action taken at the meeting. A trustee may waive any right to notice before or at the meeting.

Sec. 9 Trustees' meetings must generally follow accepted rules of parliamentary procedure. The presiding official has authority over matters of procedure and may adopt any other form of procedure suited to the business being conducted.

Sec. 10 Unless otherwise provided by the Articles or these Bylaws, any action permitted to be taken under authorization voted at a meeting of the Board or a

committee of the Board may be taken without a meeting if, before or after the action, all members of the Board then in office or of the committee consent to the action in writing or by electronic transmission. The written consent must be filed with the minutes of the proceedings of the Board or committee. The consent has the same effect as a vote of the Board or committee for all purposes.

Sec. 11 A trustee or a member of a committee may participate in a meeting by means of a conference telephone or similar communications equipment by means of which all persons participating in the meeting can hear each other. Such participation in a meeting constitutes presence in person at the meeting.

Sec. 12 A trustee who is present at a trustees' meeting, or at a meeting of a committee of which the trustee is a member, at which action on a corporate matter is taken is presumed to have concurred in that action taken unless a dissent is entered in the minutes of the meeting or unless the trustee files a written dissent to such action with the person acting as the secretary of the meeting before or promptly after its adjournment. A trustee who is absent from a meeting of the Board or of a committee of which the trustee is a member at which any such action is taken is presumed to have concurred in the action unless the trustee files a written dissent with the secretary of the meeting within a reasonable time after obtaining knowledge of the action.

Article VII
Officers

Sec. 1 The elected officers of the Board must consist of a chairperson, a vice-chairperson, a secretary, and a treasurer, all of whom must be members of the Board.

Sec. 2 The president of the Seminary must serve as the chief executive officer of the Corporation.

Sec. 3 The Executive Committee must present a slate of officers for Board approval at its annual meeting.

Sec. 4 The term of each office begins July 1 and will be for one year or until successors are elected and properly qualified. A vacancy in any office must be filled at the next regular or special meeting of the Board.

Sec. 5 In the event of the death or disability of both the chairperson and the vice-chairperson, the Executive Committee must appoint a member of the Board to serve as chairperson until the next annual meeting of the Board.

Sec. 6 The president of the Seminary must be elected by the Board.

Article VIII
Duties of Officers

Sec. 1 The chairperson must call and preside at all regular and special meetings of the Board, will be an *ex-officio* member of all committees of the Board, and is authorized to perform such other duties and exercise such other powers as usually pertain to the office. The chairperson is entitled to vote on all matters coming before the Board for decision.

Sec. 2 The vice-chairperson must assist the chairperson in the performance of the duties of the office of chairperson, and in the absence of the chairperson, is to perform all the duties and exercise all powers of that office.

Sec. 3 The secretary must keep a true and accurate record of all proceedings of the Board, a separate minute book for all actions taken in executive session, and perform such other duties as usually pertain to the office.

Sec. 4 The treasurer or his/her agent will be the fiscal officer of the Corporation and is responsible for the proper custody of all corporate funds and securities. The treasurer is responsible for making certain that proper books of account setting forth all corporate receipts, disbursements, and assets are kept and is responsible for making certain that all corporate funds are deposited in such banks and other depositories as the Board designates. The treasurer must also perform such other duties as may be directed by the Board.

Sec. 5 The duties of the president of the Seminary includes the position description as adopted by the Board and the provisions of the contract at the time of employment. The Board must conduct an annual performance review of the president.

Article IX
Committees

Sec. 1 The Board has established the following standing committees:

Executive, Student and Community Life, Academic, Development, Finance and Board of Governance and Church Relations. The Board may establish such ad hoc committees as it deems necessary to carry out the business of the Seminary.

Sec. 2 The Executive Committee is to consist of the officers of the Board and the chairs of the other standing committees. The Board may designate one or more individuals who are not trustees to receive notice of, attend, and be heard at a committee meeting, but such individuals cannot vote. The Executive Committee is empowered to conduct all the business of the Board between its stated meetings. The Executive Committee has no power to:

a. amend the Articles of Incorporation or these Bylaws;
b. change the mission of the Corporation;
c. adopt an agreement of merger or conversion;
d. recommend to the member the sale, lease, or exchange of all or substantially all of the Corporation's property and assets;
e. fill vacancies in the Board;
f. fix compensation of the trustees for serving on the board or committee; or
g. terminate memberships.

All Executive Committee actions are to be reviewed and are subject to ratification by the Board at its next meeting. The Executive Committee is responsible for the annual performance review of the president of the Seminary with recommendation to the full Board regarding compensation. When unexpected vacancies on the Executive Committee occur, the vacancy is to

be filled by election by the remaining members of the Executive Committee. The elected member is to serve until the next annual meeting of the Board.

Sec. 3 The Executive Committee must review the vitality, effectiveness and appropriateness of the Board's functioning and make recommendations for change; continuously develop a list of potential Board members; gather information regarding their qualifications and preparedness to serve if nominated; prepare nominations of Board members for consideration by the Board; arrange and oversee the orientation and training of members of the Board; arrange for the full involvement of members of the Board in the activities of the Board; give leadership in encouraging members to evaluate their own performance; and provide appropriate recognition for the service of members of the Board.

Sec. 4 All other standing committees must consist of trustees. All ad hoc committees established by the Board are to consist of such persons as are selected by the Board and may or may not consist of individuals who are trustees or officers. All other standing committees and ad hoc committees serve solely to assist in the conduct of the Corporation's affairs and cannot exercise any of the Board's powers or authority. The resolution that establishes the committee must state the purpose and functions of the committee, the terms and qualifications of the committee members, and the ways in which the members of the committee are selected and removed.

Article X
Indemnification

Sec. 1 The Corporation shall indemnify the Corporation's trustees and officers against expenses (including but not limited to attorneys' fees), judgments, fines, and amounts paid in settlement actually and reasonably incurred by them in connection with any actions or suits brought or threatened against them, including actions by or in the right of the Corporation, by reason of the fact that such person was serving as a trustee or officer, employee, non-trustee volunteer, or agent of the Corporation, to the fullest extent permitted by both the Michigan Nonprofit Corporation Act and Chapter 42 of the Internal Revenue Code. The Corporation may indemnify persons who are not trustees or officers to the extent authorized by resolution of the Board or by contractual agreement authorized by the Board. A change in the Michigan Nonprofit Corporation Act, the Articles, or these Bylaws that reduces the scope of indemnification does not apply to any action or omission that occurs before the change.

Sec. 2 The Corporation may purchase and maintain insurance on behalf of any person who is or was a trustee, officer, employee, non-trustee volunteer, or agent of this Corporation or is or was serving at the Corporation's request in any other enterprise against any liability incurred in such capacity.

Article XI
General Provisions

Sec. 1 All Corporation checks or demands for money and notes must be signed by such persons as the Board designates.

Sec. 2 The Corporation's fiscal year is as fixed by the Board.

Article XII
Dedication of Assets

Sec. 1 The Corporation's funds and property must be used exclusively for the Corporation's purposes set forth in the Articles. No part of the income or assets of the Corporation may inure to the benefit of any individual or trustee.

Sec. 2 The Corporation must hold and administer all of the Corporation's assets and accumulated income to effectuate the Corporation's tax-exempt purposes. No part of the income or assets of this Corporation will inure to the private benefit of any individual or trustee. If the Corporation's purposes fail or if the Corporation ceases to be approved as a tax-exempt organization under the Internal Revenue Code, and any such defect is not cured by appropriate amendment, or if the Corporation voluntarily dissolves, then all of the Corporation's assets and accumulated income must be distributed as provided in the Articles.

Article XIII
Amendment of the Bylaws

Sec. 1 These Bylaws may be amended by a majority vote of the Board at any regular meeting after ten days' notice to the trustees of the Board; provided, however, no amendment to Article V, Sec. 3 will be effective which increases the authorized number of trustees and no amendment to the second sentence of Article V, Sec. 4 will be effective unless each of those amendments are approved by the General Synod if it is still in existence.

Article XIV
Adoption of the Bylaws

Sec. 1 These Bylaws, when adopted by the Board, will supersede all previous Bylaws controlling the affairs of the Corporation.

RESTATED ARTICLES OF INCORPORATION

ARTICLE I
Name

The name of the corporation is Western Theological Seminary.

ARTICLE II
Purposes

The purpose or purposes of this corporation are:

(a) To maintain and operate a theological seminary (the "**Seminary**") officially related to the Reformed Church in America for the purpose of providing courses of study in theology, religion, church history, and other subjects suitable for the training of men and women for the Gospel ministry, and for the teaching of religion according to the Holy Scriptures and secondarily the doctrines and standards of the Belgic

Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort and the Belhar Confession as historic and faithful witness to the word of God in Scripture.

(b) To acquire by purchase, gift, or otherwise, property of every description, real and personal, for the use and benefit of the Seminary, and to exchange, sell, or dispose of such property.

(c) To do each and everything necessary, suitable, or proper for the accomplishment of the above purposes or which at any time appear convenient for or conducive to the accomplishment of such purposes and which a nonprofit corporation organized under the provisions of the Michigan Nonprofit Corporation Act may exercise. The corporation may deal with and distribute the corporation's property in such manner as will best promote its objectives and purposes, without limitation except such, if any, as may be contained in instruments under which such property is conveyed to the corporation.

Notwithstanding any other provision of these Articles, the corporation shall not carry on any activity or have any purpose that is not permitted for (i) an organization exempt from federal income taxation under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code (the "**Code**") and other related legislation and regulations as they now exist or may hereafter be amended or (ii) an organization contributions to which are deductible under Section 170(c)(2) of the Code and related legislation and regulations as they now exist or may hereafter be amended. No substantial part of the corporation's direct or indirect activities shall consist of carrying on propaganda or otherwise attempting to influence legislation. The corporation shall not participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distributing of statements), any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office.

ARTICLE III
Form of Organization and Financing

The corporation is formed on a nonstock directorship basis.

The general plan under which the corporation is to be financed is as follows:

(a) in part by support of the Reformed Church in America;

(b) by income derived from endowment funds previously acquired by the corporation and/or by the trustees of the corporation, by gift, bequest, or devise and by such other endowment funds as may be acquired in the future by gift, bequest, devise, or otherwise;

(c) by contributions from those interested in promoting the advancement of religious and social education and welfare; and

(d) by tuition payments.

ARTICLE IV
Registered Office and Resident Agent

The street address (which is the mailing address) of the corporation's registered office is 101 East 13th Street, Holland, Michigan 49423.

The name of the resident agent at the registered office is Dr. Felix Theonugraha.

ARTICLE V
Duration

The term of the corporate existence is perpetual.

ARTICLE VI
Degrees

Upon the recommendation of the faculty of the Seminary, the trustees of the corporation are authorized to grant the degrees of Bachelor of Divinity or Master of Divinity (M.Div.), whichever is by custom and usage recognized as the terminal award for the first professional degree program, and the degrees Master of Theology (Th.M.), Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) and Master of Arts (M.A.), as well as certificate programs.

ARTICLE VII
Trustees

The affairs of the corporation will be conducted by a board of trustees. The board of trustees has the power to provide for the organization of the board, the conduct of the affairs of the board, the performance of the function of the corporation, and in general to have all of the powers legally vesting in such boards by virtue of the law of the State of Michigan. Without limiting the above, the board is to hold in trust such property, either real, personal or mixed, as may be granted, conveyed, given, or in any other manner acquired by the corporation and to hold, invest, sell, transfer, or dispose of the such property for the purposes of the corporation.

The number, qualifications, classifications, terms of office, and manner of election or removal of the trustees of the corporation are as prescribed in the corporation's bylaws.

ARTICLE VIII
Limitation of Trustee's and Volunteer Officer's Liability

A trustee or volunteer officer shall not be personally liable to the corporation for money damages for any action taken or any failure to take any action as a trustee or volunteer officer, except liability for any of the following:

(a) the amount of a financial benefit received by a trustee or volunteer officer to which he or she is not entitled;

(b) intentional infliction of harm on the corporation or its member;

(c) a violation of Section 551 of the Michigan Nonprofit Corporation Act;

(d) an intentional criminal act; or

(e) a liability imposed under Section 497(a) of the Michigan Nonprofit Corporation Act.

Provisions of this article added by amendment shall apply only to acts or omissions and to breaches of duty occurring after the date the amended article was adopted.

If the Michigan Nonprofit Corporation Act is amended to further eliminate or limit the liability of a trustee or volunteer officer, then a trustee or volunteer officer (in

addition to the circumstances in which a trustee or officer is not personally liable as set forth in the preceding paragraph) shall, to the fullest extent permitted by the Michigan Nonprofit Corporation Act as so amended, not be liable to the corporation. No amendment to or alteration, modification or repeal of this Article shall increase the liability or alleged liability of any trustee or volunteer officer of the corporation for or concerning any act or omission of such trustee or officer occurring before such amendment, alteration, modification or repeal.

The above limitation of liability will not apply to the extent it is inconsistent with the status of the corporation as an organization described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Code.

ARTICLE IX
Assumption of Liability for Acts of Volunteers

The corporation shall assume all liability to any person other than the corporation for all acts or omissions of a volunteer trustee incurred in the good faith performance of the volunteer trustee's duties as such. The corporation shall assume the liability for all acts or omissions of a volunteer trustee, volunteer officer or other volunteer, if all of the following conditions are met:

(a) the volunteer was acting or reasonably believed he or she was acting within the scope of his or her authority;

(b) the volunteer was acting in good faith;

(c) the volunteer's conduct did not amount to gross negligence or willful and wanton misconduct;

(d) the volunteer's conduct was not an intentional tort; and

(e) the volunteer's conduct was not a tort arising out of the ownership, maintenance, or use of a motor vehicle for which tort liability may be imposed as provided by Section 3135 of the Michigan Insurance Code of 1956.

No amendment to or alteration, modification or repeal of this article shall reduce the scope of the corporation's assumption of liability under this article for or concerning any volunteer's acts or omissions that occur before such amendment, alteration, modification or repeal. Provisions of this article added by amendment shall apply only to acts or omissions and to breaches of duty occurring after the date the amended article was adopted.

The above assumption of liability will not apply to the extent it is inconsistent with the status of the corporation as an organization described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Code.

ARTICLE X
Dedication of Assets

The corporation shall hold and administer all its assets and accumulated income to effectuate its tax-exempt purposes. No part of the income or assets of this corporation shall inure to the private benefit of any individual or trustee. If the corporation's purposes fail or if the corporation ceases to be approved as a tax-exempt organization under the Internal Revenue Code, and any such defect is not cured by appropriate amendment, or if

the corporation voluntarily dissolves, then all of the corporation's assets and accumulated income shall be distributed to the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America (the "**General Synod**") or if the General Synod is no longer in existence then to such other organizations or units of government as the trustees (or in default of designation by the trustees, the Circuit Court for the County of Ottawa) shall designate as best accomplishing the purposes for which the corporation was formed, provided that (i) each organization receiving such assets is qualified as tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code or the corresponding provisions of any subsequent federal tax laws and (ii) each distribution to a unit of government is made for a public purpose to the United States federal government or to a state or local government. The corporation shall be dissolved after all its property has been so distributed.

ARTICLE XI
Amendments

The board of trustees may amend or repeal any provision contained in these Articles and add additional articles in the manner prescribed by statute; provided, however, no amendment to Article X eliminating any distribution to the General Synod will be effective unless the amendment is approved by the General Synod.

Overtures

Ensure Prayers Are Explicitly Christian

Overture 1

The Classis of Rocky Mountains respectfully overtures the 2022 General Synod to instruct the Commission on Christian Action that any item on which the commission feels led to offer a prayer for the use and/or benefit of the Reformed Church in America (RCA), said prayer shall be explicitly Christian in nature, i.e., to make mention of the person and/or work of the Lord Jesus as it relates to the issue the commission is concerned with, and shall be offered in the name of Jesus.

Reasons:
First, in the aftermath of the recent military action taking place in Ukraine, the following prayer was made available to the RCA through the Faithward website (www.faithward.org/prayers-for-gods-mercy-in-ukraine):

> *Amid the increasing tensions on the Russian and Ukrainian border, the church lifts these prayers to our merciful God.*
>
> God of Peace, who desires your children to live in harmony, we humbly ask that you—by your Holy Spirit—restrain those who would make war. Give them a new desire to live in accord with all people.
>
> In your mercy, hear our prayer.
>
> Great God of Comfort, who desires all people to live without strife, we humbly pray that your Holy Spirit will bring peace and comfort to those in Ukraine who live under the fearful threat of invasion. Give them hope and confidence in your divine sovereignty.
>
> In your mercy, hear our prayer.
>
> God of Wisdom, who holds the hearts and minds of all in your hands, we humbly pray that you will put thoughts of peace in the minds of world leaders and words of peace in their mouths that a peaceful solution might be found to these escalating tensions on the Russian–Ukrainian border. Gift world leaders with wisdom and desires for peace and justice. May cool heads from among all involved prevail.
>
> In your mercy, hear our prayer.
>
> God who welcomed children while walking on this earth, we humbly pray that you will protect all children if conflict occurs. Surround them and their caretakers with a shield of protection. Guard them from all harm, that they may survive whatever may befall and that they will know your safety and live in innocence.
>
> In your mercy, hear our prayer.
>
> Great God, who created your church to be your body on this earth. We humbly pray that you make your church in Ukraine strong, be it in war or in peace. Give

your grace to the faithful disciples in the nations so that they may continue to be faithful witnesses to you by their faithful actions during these troubling times.

In your mercy, hear our prayer.

While the intent to offer a prayer in the face of the situation in Ukraine is good, the prayer offered to the RCA is very generic in nature, such that all mentions of God, except for the references to the Holy Spirit in the first and second petitions, are vague and could be taken by a person who holds to virtually any faith system to mean the god that they worship, rather than the Triune God of Father, Son, and Spirit that is worshiped by the membership of the RCA. Additionally, there is no mention at all of the person and/or work of Jesus, who is the distinctive and unique revelation of God that sets Christianity apart from every other belief system. Jesus is in fact the one who commands his followers to pray in his name, per John 14:13-14.

Second, by its creeds and confessions (the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, and the Belhar Confession), each of which is explicitly Christian in both nature and wording, the RCA stands firmly in the Reformed tradition. As we seek to witness the good news of the Lord Jesus to the world, living out both the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-39) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), both the words we speak to each other within the RCA, such as the words of this prayer for Ukraine, and the words that we speak to the world, through actions of the Commission on Christian Action, should continually point people to the singular hope that comes through faith in Jesus.

In response to Overture 1 the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

ONB 22-1
To deny Overture 1. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. While we understand the cultural concerns presented by the classis, it appears to the advisory committee that the prayer in question does address the Triune God revealed in Scripture.
2. As this is an isolated incident, it does not warrant action of the full General Synod.
3. The advisory committee suggests that the Classis of Rocky Mountains direct its concerns to the Commission on Christian Action.

Change Restructuring Team Reporting Date

Overture 2

The Great Lakes City Classis overtures the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America to adopt and implement the following Overture:

To charge the appointed RCA Restructuring Team to move up their timeline and submit a definitive report in time to be presented to the 2023 Annual Meeting.

Reasons:
1. The RCA is hemorrhaging congregations at an alarming rate. It is clear that many of those leaving are frustrated with the prospect of a prolonged period of uncertainty. Until a clear path forward is communicated to the body, this trend will continue.

2. Under our polity, decisions made at the General Synod level, particularly those involving changes to the *Book of Church Order* (*BCO*), move at a very deliberate pace. Congregations and the classes that serve them must respond to our challenges in real time. There is a needful urgency at this level. Since we cannot change the pace of General Synod, it behooves our teams and commissions to do their work expediently.
3. Those who are contemplating leaving the RCA can easily list reasons why they might choose to do so, or are hearing justifications from those who already have. The debates of this are distracting, and the current state of erosion is painful. We should embrace a sense of responsibility to provide reasons to stay with all due urgency, which must include mapping out a clear path forward.

In response to Overture 2 the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

ONB 22-2
To deny Overture 2. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. While we understand the frustration of uncertainty and the urgency of this issue, we also recognize the complexity of the work and the time needed to fulfill the mandate given to the Restructuring Team in a God-honoring and positive way.
2. Since the membership of the Restructuring Team was finalized at the end of March 2022 and the reports will be due in March 2023 for the 2023 General Synod, it would not be realistic to require the team to complete this important work in a 12-month period.
3. There is an expectation that the Restructuring Team will be giving reports and requesting feedback, and this shortened time frame does not allow appropriate time for this process.
4. We strongly encourage the Restructuring Team to give updates after each meeting, to help congregations to see a path forward and have a snapshot of the future God has planned for the RCA.

The following motion was made and supported:

ONB 22-2a
To make a heartfelt request that the RCA Restructuring Team add to their existing timeline submitting a foundational report in time to be presented to the 2023 Annual Meeting for the purpose of lessening the sense of uncertainty and to build upon the vision going forward. (ADOPTED)

Add Posting Date to GSC Minutes and Adopt Additional Definition Around New Business

Overture 3

The Reverend Classis of New Brunswick respectfully overtures the 2022 General Synod to instruct the General Synod Council (GSC) to make sure that GSC minutes posted to the RCA website include a clearly visible posting date in the minutes and on the website;

and further, that the General Synod allow as new business any matter related to an item in GSC minutes that were posted less than forty-five (45) days from the cut-off

date for business to be introduced by task forces, commissions, classes, or regional synods for the General Synod workbook.

Reasons:
1. Posting dates for the GSC minutes are not easily found by users of the RCA website.
2. It is not realistic to expect any assembly, commission, or agency of the church to meet, deliberate, decide, compose, approve, and submit for inclusion in the General Synod workbook, as part of the normal course of business, any recommendation regarding business and/or actions published in the GSC minutes in a time frame of less than forty-five (45) days.

In response to Overture 3 the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

ONB 22-3
To deny Overture 3. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. The first part of the overture has already been addressed by action of the GSC, as reported in the General Synod Council Serving as the Executive Committee of the General Synod on pages 37-38 (in the section titled "Change to Publication Schedule of GSC Minutes").
2. For the second part, there is an adequate mechanism in place for dealing with this in the *Book of Church Order* (*BCO*); the General Synod votes on a case-by-case basis whether or not to accept an item of new business that is presented (*BCO*, Chapter 3, Part II, Article 2, Section 8 [2021 edition, p. 130]).

General Synod to Approve Time and Place of General Synod Meetings

Overture 4

The Reverend Classis of New Brunswick respectfully overtures the 2022 General Synod to instruct the Commission on Church Order to formulate and propose an amendment to *BCO* Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 4, Section 1 that would make it clear that the Synod shall approve the time and place of the next stated session of General Synod except in such cases where circumstances require the Committee on Emergencies to do so.

Reason:
The report of the Commission on Church Order to the 2021 General Synod, in proposing the amendment allowing for the Committee on Emergencies to act on a time and place for a stated session of the General Synod as required, noted: "At least in recent years, the practice has been that the GSC includes the time and place of the next session of the General Synod in its report, and no official action is taken by the assembly." Since this is an action affecting the entire assembly and the whole of the church, and since stated sessions have the power to propose amendments to the Constitution of the church and make declarative actions regarding them, it seems appropriate that, in ordinary business, the entire synod should vote on the time and place of the next stated meeting.

In response to Overture 4 the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

ONB 22-4
To deny Overture 4. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. General Synod 2021 voted to empower the executive committee to make these decisions through its adoption of CO 21-4 (*MGS 2021*, p. 240); that amendment was overwhelmingly approved by the classes and does not need to be revisited (see the report of the classis votes on proposed amendments to the *Book of Church Order* on p. 32 in the Report of the General Synod Council Serving as the Executive Committee of the General Synod).
2. Due to the fact that venue contracts for an event as large as General Synod need to be signed over a year in advance, the decision of the 2021 General Synod was practical and necessary.

Determine Equitable Assessment/Covenant Shares Formula for Dual-Affiliated Congregations

Overture 5

The Reverend Classis of New Brunswick respectfully overtures the 2022 General Synod to instruct the Commission on Church Order, meeting with representatives of classes with dual-affiliated consistories, to develop a plan that accounts for an equitable payment of assessments/covenant shares without placing an undue burden on either classes or the denomination, for report to the 2023 General Synod.

Reasons:
1. The Commission on Church Order has issued an advisory interpretation on assessments for affiliated consistories which was shared with all stated clerks and which we expect is part of the commission's report to this General Synod.
2. Some dual-affiliated consistories have a formula for dealing with assessments. All dual-affiliated consistories have gone through agreed-upon processes with their classes, some taking several years, to deal with this issue in decent and proper order as they understood it at the time.
3. As the denomination enters into a plan for covenant shares instead of assessments—an income-based division of the costs of denominational ministry rather than a per-capita-based division—many of these formulae are again up in the air, and both consistories and classes are concerned and uncertain. While the Commission on Church Order's advisory interpretation was good polity, it might be considered less than pastoral.
4. The consistories who are trying to continue to participate in the full life of the RCA, who, at the time they chose dual-affiliation, felt a genuine threat to their ministries from some people in the denomination who directly told these consistories and congregations that they were not wanted, need some gesture of support. The RCA has recently been very intentional about generous separation with those who have chosen to leave the denomination, and those who are desperately trying to stay could interpret this ruling as punitive.
5. Had the 2017 General Synod approved the recommendation of the Commission on Church Order at that time, there would have been language and frameworks for dual-affiliated consistories in time for all of the assemblies in question to follow an agreed-upon protocol. Instead, all of this has been delayed by several years, while consistories that felt threatened had to make choices.

In response to Overture 5 the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

ONB 22-5
To instruct the Commission on Church Order, meeting electronically with representatives of classes with dual-affiliated consistories, to develop a plan that accounts for an equitable payment of assessments/covenant shares without placing an undue burden on either classes or the denomination, for report to the 2023 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Reason:
After talking with representatives from both the Commission on Church Order and the Classis of New Brunswick, this committee affirms that both parties are willing and open to this discussion, and some of this process is already underway.

Encourage Engagement in Cross-Cultural Mission

Overture 6

The Regional Synod of the Great Lakes overtures the General Synod to strongly encourage all churches within the RCA to engage at least 10 percent of their active membership in either a local or global cross-cultural mission by 2024.

Reasons:
1. "The Church exists by mission, just as a fire exists by burning." –Emil Brunner
2. The pivot from crisis and conflict to mission is essential.
3. Seeing the gospel within another cultural context sharpens and enlivens our understanding of the gospel.
4. Cross-pollination of ministry ideas, energy, and understandings promotes learning, faith sharing, and gospel witness.
5. Cross-cultural fellowship is rich because we discover that what we have in common in Christ is far greater than our cultural differences.
6. Our youth are attracted to a noble cause.
7. Our general secretary, our director of Global Mission, and the Regional Synod of the Heartland have all been following the Holy Spirit's leading, and an amazing work has already begun.

In response to Overture 6 the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

ONB 22-6
To strongly encourage all churches within the RCA to find fresh ways to engage at least 10 percent of their active membership in either a local or global cross-cultural mission by 2024; and further,

To direct the general secretary to promote this throughout the denomination. (ADOPTED)

Reason:
This committee supports the reasons provided by the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes.

PROPOSALS FROM THE GENERAL SYNOD PRESIDENT

In response to Proposal 1 from the report of the president (see p. 14), the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended the following:

> **ONB 22-7**
> **To direct the Commission on Christian Action to explore the Alliance for Hope International as a possible partner to equip congregations and members of the Reformed Church in America to support the intervention and prevention of violence, for report to General Synod 2023. (ADOPTED)**

Reasons:
1. It is important to find tangible ways to address and prevent violence.
2. This is an established organization with a proven track record. Through Transformed & Transforming, the RCA's 15-year goal adopted by the General Synod in 2013, the RCA has committed to "working with all the partners that God provides" (*MGS 2013*, R-9, pp. 70-71).

In response to Proposal 2 from the report of the president (see p. 20), the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended the following:

> **ONB 22-8**
> **To urge all classes and congregations that support RCA Global Mission through Partnership-in-Mission shares to maintain those partnerships, and, for congregations that have transferred or are transferring out of the RCA, to consider staying engaged with their RCA mission partners even when they are no longer formally connected to the RCA to sustain this kingdom witness. (ADOPTED)**

Reasons:
1. RCA Global Mission is doing kingdom ministry that reaches beyond the RCA.
2. General Synod 2021 affirmed the importance of Global Mission.
3. We added "classes" because the classis has direct access and communication with congregations during the process of transferring out of the denomination.

NEW BUSINESS

In response to the item of new business regarding a resolution to be brought to the World Council of Churches (WCC) calling for the suspension of the Russian Orthodox Church from WCC membership (see pp. 11-12), the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

> 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.

A motion was made and supported from the floor to amend ONB 22-9 as follows (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

> To instruct the general secretary to convene a meeting with other appropriate RCA ecumenical officers or representatives and at 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; and further,

To instruct the general secretary, the chief ecumenical officer of the Reformed Church in America, to support any move that the World Council of Churches may make to enter into a process to suspend the Russian Orthodox Church at the WCC Central Committee Meeting on June 15-18 in Geneva, Switzerland.

A motion was made and supported to further amend ONB 22-9 as follows (additions are double underlined; deletions are double stricken):

To ~~instruct~~urge the general secretary, the chief ecumenical officer of the Reformed Church in America, to support any move that the World Council of Churches may make to enter into a process to suspend the Russian Orthodox Church at the WCC Central Committee Meeting on June 15-18 in Geneva, Switzerland.

VOTED: To reject the further amendment to ONB 22-9.

The initial amendment to ONB 22-9 was before the house.

VOTED: To adopt the amendment to ONB 22-9.

A motion was made and supported from the floor to amend ONB 22-9 as follows (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

"…To instruct the Commission on Theology ~~and~~in consultation with 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…"

VOTED: To adopt the amendment to ONB 22-9.

ONB 22-9 as twice amended was before the house. It reads as follows:

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 in consultation with 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; and further,

To instruct the general secretary, the chief ecumenical officer of the Reformed Church in America, to support any move that the World Council of Churches may make to enter into a process to suspend the Russian Orthodox Church at the WCC Central Committee Meeting on June 15-18 in Geneva, Switzerland. (ADOPTED)

In response to the item of new business regarding shareholder resolutions for investments in gas and oil companies (see pp. 12-13), the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

ONB 22-10
To deny the second item new business. (ADOPTED)

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.

In response to the item of new business regarding the "Open letter to State Lawmakers from America's Pro-life Organization" (see p. 13), the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

ONB 22-11
To deny the third item of new business. (ADOPTED)

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.

A motion was made and supported from the floor to amend the motion as follows (additions are underlined):

> To deny the third item of new business; and further,
>
> To recommend that the Commission on Christian Action in collaboration with the Commissions for Women and Theology to revisit the CCA statement from 1990 regarding social determinants that affect a woman's reproductive rights.

The president ruled the motion out of order.

A motion was made and supported to cease debate.

VOTED: To cease debate.

VOTED: To adopt ONB 22-11.

Report of the General Synod Council on Transformed & Transforming

POLICY WORDING

The RCA will engage, equip, and encourage congregations and missional communities in the work of cultivating transformation that results in faithful and passionate disciples of Jesus.

The RCA will identify potential leaders and encourage and equip potential and existing leaders for missional, congregational and pastoral leadership. These leaders will reflect the full diversity of the RCA, such as gender, age, race, ability, and cultural backgrounds, with a special emphasis on youth.

The RCA will engage, equip, and encourage congregations and missional communities to participate in Christ's kingdom mission, both locally and globally.

GENERAL SECRETARY'S INTERPRETATION

Discipleship

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Jesus's command to make disciples is the church's mandate to help all people grow and deepen their faith as they live it out in everyday life. Transformed disciples become more like Christ as they read and reflect on God's Word, pray and listen to God, spend time in community with other Christ-followers and engage in Christ's mission. The RCA's commitment is to help in providing accessible environments, processes, resources, and relationships that can be used by local congregations to foster, in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, more fully devoted followers who willingly and boldly live and love like Jesus.

The discipleship pathways uniquely created by congregations will foster transformation in both hearts and minds, exhibited in changed actions in the lives of equipped and empowered disciples. These growing disciples will make contributions as leaders, teachers, and people of influence within their congregations. Transformation will be manifest in our relationships with one another, our increasing love for each other, our sacrifice for the cause of Christ, our willingness to influence our world for the gospel, and how we advocate for justice with compassion in communities where we live and serve.

Leadership

"Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith" (Hebrews 13:7).

Women and men who are open to being used by God help guide the church as they actively pursue God's purpose for congregations and ministries. Leaders willingly and passionately live out their calling and giftedness to accomplish a missional vision that brings a gospel of grace and hope to a lost and broken world.

The RCA commitment is to help develop leaders, based on a foundation of discipleship, who:

- know how to lead themselves (their leadership is focused on their inward journey)
- know how to lead others (they are equipped to lead and influence in a God-ordained direction, increasing their leadership gift)
- know how to reproduce new leaders (they view leadership development as a key component of their call to be a leader)

This commitment to leadership development requires environments and accessible opportunities for growth and learning that will help lead RCA congregations forward in mission.

The RCA vision for leadership sees the leadership potential in all followers of Jesus Christ. It helps to raise up servant leaders who develop a courage and competence to lead in the church and the world in a multiplicity of environments and with an openness to equipping and empowering all people to be influencers for Christ's kingdom. This leadership vision has a special focus on empowering people who may not have leadership positions, privilege, power, or even access to them, but who have been called and gifted by God to serve boldly. It is a vision that especially is committed to the next generation and developing leaders for the church of the future.

Mission

"May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations" (Psalm 67:1-2).

Mission becomes a way of life when we reach out to people with the gospel, meeting needs in neighborhoods, cities, and throughout the world. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we boldly give witness to the hope within us and willingly serve others by becoming the hands and feet of Christ in every corner of the world. The RCA commitment is to respond with God's love to meet spiritual and individual needs around the globe. It is envisioning the people of the RCA as a movement of faithful followers who live and love like Jesus as they radically follow Christ in mission together.

Individuals and churches experience transformation as they open themselves to be used by God and reach out in giving and receiving, learning and sharing, and extending the kingdom of God through missional engagement. It means bringing the good news of God's grace in Jesus Christ to those who have never heard the message, mobilizing RCA congregations to connect with global partners for greater kingdom impact, helping resource volunteers for expanding involvement in mission efforts, and extending compassion, mercy, and justice in places of discrimination, poverty, famine, disaster, and injustice. In a world of brokenness and need, we offer help, hope, and tangible expressions of God's love.

OVERVIEW

Transformed & Transforming is part of the RCA's 15-year strategic initiative to equip RCA congregations in discipleship, leadership, mission, and next generation engagement. The chief operating officer is responsible for the oversight of this team. The following ministry areas are included in this report: Discipleship, Leadership Development, Next Generation Engagement, Disability Concerns, Women's Transformation and Leadership, Local Missional Engagement and Strategic Ministry Initiatives, and Interreligious Relations. In 2021, the Transformed & Transforming team fulfilled its ninth year of service to the RCA.

Shifts

This year, General Synod Council (GSC) staff work around Transformed & Transforming experienced multiple shifts that continued to shape and re-shape its identity within the RCA. On top of the challenges and impact of Covid-19 and the impact of decisions made at General Synod 2021, the way that staff have been structured around Transformed & Transforming was reviewed as part of the general secretary's plan to reorganize the GSC denominational staff. This resulted in three key shifts:

- Rev. Dr. Jill Ver Steeg was transferred to a new leadership role, chief advancement officer, at the end of summer 2021, and Rev. Sung Kim was appointed as the new chief operating officer (COO) and leader for equipping, including oversight of Transformed & Transforming.
- The Office of Advocacy and Race Relations was formed, moving the advocacy work out of Transformed & Transforming and into a new, dedicated department. Women's Transformation and Leadership (particularly the equity-based hospitality work), Disability Concerns, and Advocacy were moved into this new department. The idea was that the Office of Advocacy and Race Relations would focus more heavily on advocacy work, while the Transformed & Transforming team would continue to focus more heavily on equipping work.
- Short-Term Mission (led by Stephanie Soderstrom) was moved to Global Mission, as a means of better integrating mission experiences and best practices.

As this report covers calendar year 2021, it will include information for Disability Concerns as well as Women's Transformation and Leadership, particularly in their work focused on congregational equipping. Short-Term Mission is included in the Global Mission report in this reporting cycle.

In the spring of 2021, Jill Ver Steeg and Eliza Cortés Bast conducted listening sessions with available regional synods to discern the observed and expressed needs of the ministers in their region. Many regional synod executives hosted space either via email or facilitated Zoom sessions for these two GSC staff members to hear the needs of ministers and local leaders. Heard in those conversations was the need for additional sabbath and mental health resources for ministers, the need for training on adaptive leadership and innovation processes, the pain of mid-pandemic challenges, the desire for advocacy and anti-racism avenues, the fear of churches not being able to sustain and remain open beyond the pandemic, and the need for resources for ongoing next generation work. Jill and Eliza are grateful for the concerns, stories, and celebrations that many church, classis, and regional leaders shared with them. In spite of their concerns for the future of the RCA, local leaders were both vulnerable and hopeful.

To that end, Jill committed to the following explorations: promoting a common space for advocacy work to live and flourish and developing even more nimble and responsive ways for the Transformed & Transforming team to provide quality services for both the present and future RCA. Within those explorations lived the general secretary's commitment to more integrated equipping models within the staff structure, with an emphasis on providing increased opportunities for deeper discipleship that leads to flourishing ministry and churches.

In the summer of 2021, Peter Watts was named the director of Advocacy and Race Relations, with the work of Women's Transformation and Leadership and Disability Concerns under its purview. (Reporting around his work falls under the ends policy titled Multiracial and Multicultural Future Freed from Racism.) In September 2021, Sung

Kim transitioned from coordinator of Leadership Development to the role of COO for the GSC staff, which includes oversight of Transformed & Transforming work. He has been working with general secretary Eddy Alemán, Peter Watts, and Randy Weener, director of Church Multiplication, to craft a new structure for the work of Transformed & Transforming in the future.

Goals for 2022

As part of the ongoing Transformed & Transforming goal mandated by General Synod, as well as general secretary Eddy Alemán's commitment to a restructured staff, Sung Kim will initiate a new integrated vision for equipping in 2022 and beyond. This new structure will honor both the spirit and goals of Transformed & Transforming, while also embracing the Spirit's movement toward a new global future for the RCA. Sung will work closely with Church Multiplication and Global Mission staff to house a new center for global leadership and ministry. This center will offer training for discipleship, leadership, mission, and next generation engagement, as well as holistic discipleship work for church planting locally and around the world.

SPECIFIC MINISTRY REPORTS

The rest of this report contains more detailed reporting on individual ministry areas housed under Transformed & Transforming for the 2021 calendar year.

Disability Concerns

The vision of RCA Disability Concerns is to welcome and engage the gifts of all people in Christ's ministry, becoming fully welcoming, inclusive churches where everybody belongs and everybody serves. This is a bold and compelling vision that aligns with Scripture: God's reign as a unifying embrace of the love and grace of Jesus Christ that reaches all people—every race, tribe, people, and language, every type of disability and special need. Raising awareness and making our churches accessible to people with disabilities establishes a needed foundation, but our own attitudes about disability require even greater transformation. Ministries to and for people with disabilities are grounded in compassion, but such ministries are called then to mature into ministries with and by people with disabilities, recognizing everyone has gifts to serve the purposes of God's kingdom mission. True belonging and the transformation that God seeks will be realized only when everybody belongs and everybody serves, regardless of ability.

A covenant with CRC Disability Concerns between the governing boards of the RCA and the Christian Reformed Church (CRC)—in place since 2009—has multiplied effectiveness and continues to deepen ministry impact in both denominations and beyond, welcoming all the partners that God provides. The Disability Concerns partnership models how the RCA and CRC can serve collaboratively and in mutually interdependent ways to do more together than they could accomplish independently, while also leveraging fiscal and programmatic efficiencies.

In December 2021, Mark Stephenson retired from his role as director of CRC Disability Concerns after 16 years. He was instrumental in helping to forge the CRC-RCA Disability Concerns working agreement in 2009 that remains in place. A testimony to the value of the Disability Concerns partnership was the invitation extended by CRC executives for RCA Disability Concerns coordinator Terry DeYoung to be the lone non-CRC member on the committee to select Stephenson's successor, Lindsay Wieland Capel. A licensed master social worker with a background in mental health, Capel has several years of experience

as a disability advocate in the CRC and as a longtime member of the RCA-CRC Disability Concerns guiding coalition/advisory team. Following Stephenson's long tenure, her orientation into this key staff role and the RCA-CRC partnership is expected to continue through much of 2022. DeYoung is honored to play a key role in this onboarding, just as Stephenson did after DeYoung was hired in 2009.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the massive change underway in the RCA related to Vision 2020 have taken a toll on the work of Disability Concerns staff and the volunteer network it supports. The 100 or so disability advocates serving congregations and classes have struggled to provide basic support to their constituents during this time, much less make advances in removing barriers to participation or becoming places of welcome and belonging. Much of the work of advocates has been placed on hold, moved to a back burner, or simply neglected as churches find their way to resuming in-person gatherings or evaluating whether to remain in the RCA at all. In many respects, disability advocates have felt like collateral damage of priorities beyond their control or capacity to manage.

Progress in 2021

> At the local grocery store today a young man who was deaf waited on the customer ahead of me. There was a pad and paper to write a question for him if he was not able to read your lips. I watched the exchange. When it was my turn, I was so touched to think of him in this role of cashier. He responded to me in words, "Thank you," and then said the same using sign language. He had a big smile.
>
> As I walked out, I looked back at the busy store with its lines of people and this young man fully part of the flow. It made me think of the intent of the new Disability Concerns resource (*Everybody Belongs, Serving Together*) for:
>
> - more incorporation and belonging
> - being part of the body more fully
> - ideas and encouragement for giving people time to adapt, to train, to risk and welcome…
>
> The book groups you have hosted have been such good experiences. Thank you to you and others to spur on everybody belonging and serving together.
>
> —Jane Brown, RCA regional disability advocate, Central Iowa Classis

- Staff leaders of RCA and CRC Disability Concerns continued to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on church and society in general, and people with disabilities in particular—many of whom are in higher risk categories than the population in general due to pre-existing conditions. Most events and gatherings were done virtually again in 2021, with attention given to providing accommodations for a wide range of impairments and speaking into timely issues impacting people with disabilities, who make up 20 percent of the North American population.
- The RCA-CRC Disability Concerns guiding coalition/advisory team vision adopted the following vision, called a "horizon storyline," for the next five years and beyond:

  > By ongoing discovery, training, and support, Disability Concerns will deepen its impact throughout the CRC and RCA, cultivating a thriving network of resilient, passionate leaders who advance the vision of "everybody belongs, everybody serves"—giving priority to

advocates 30 and younger to lead us into a future marked by equity-based hospitality, discipleship, and servanthood.

The summer launch of this vision began with a Year 1 milestone that focuses efforts on mobilizing 25 new leaders younger than 30 by summer 2022—mentored and supported by seasoned advocates—who engage in disability advocacy efforts in their context and are invited to share their influence in a network of existing advocates where everybody belongs and everybody serves.

- In collaboration with the RCA's Next Generation Engagement staff, RCA-CRC Disability Concerns embarked on the Disability Advocacy Journey, an eight-month virtual experience for young people in their 20s to study the disability rights movement in North America and apply their own advocacy skills in community-based initiatives. Young people under 30—sometimes referred to as the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) Generation in the United States—understand inclusion to be a birthright. Those born since the ADA's adoption in 1990 expect public spaces and institutions to be accessible in every way, yet that is not the case in many churches. Through events like the eight-month Disability Advocacy Journey and the annual two-day Disability Concerns Leadership Training in August, this theme was highlighted in multiple events with a goal of engaging the next generation of church leaders and advocates.
- After two reprintings of the second edition of the *Inclusion Handbook*, a primary resource for churches published in 2013, an updated and expanded third edition was completed in June 2021 and retitled *Everybody Belongs, Serving Together*. Two partners joined RCA and CRC Disability Concerns in this venture: Christian Horizons, a large faith-based provider of services for people with disabilities in Canada, and Elim Christian Services, a faith-based provider located in the Chicago suburbs with deep ties to the RCA and CRC. The practical resource is in multiple formats: printed handbook, ebook, audiobook, and online resource (hosted on the RCA's Faithward.org). Spanish, Korean, and French translations will be available in 2022.
- Disability Concerns also seeks to normalize mental health conversations throughout the RCA. One way this work is prioritized is through a network of RCA regional mental health consultants—established as a pilot in early 2020, spanning four regional synods (Albany, Heartland, Mid-Atlantics, and New York). These consultants are RCA members who have significant experience, training, and connections in a variety of mental health specialties. On a quarterly basis, they advise on ministry initiatives related to mental health and the church. The rising incidence of mental health challenges during the pandemic has elevated the importance of this work.
- RCA-CRC Disability Concerns hosted several book groups online for disability advocates but open to anyone. The groups met weekly for three to four weeks and included these books: *Finding Jesus in the Storm* by John Swinton; *No Cure for Being Human* by Kate Bowler; and *Everybody Belongs, Serving Together*.
- Late in 2020, Disability Concerns coordinator Terry DeYoung was invited by executive leadership from the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC)—a key ecumenical partner of the RCA—to serve in a yearlong virtual discernment process, "COVID-19 and Beyond: What Does God Require of Us." Meeting by Zoom every one to two months, "COVID-19 and Beyond" brought together numerous church leaders from around the world to shape the WCRC's response to the global pandemic and what this means for the WCRC's work in the future. A small number of people with disabilities were among the marginalized people groups that contributed to

these conversations throughout 2021. Early in 2022, DeYoung was invited to serve as guest editor of an upcoming issue of *Reformed World*, the WCRC's theological journal, that will focus on the theme of disability.

Goals for 2022

- In seeking to become a church where everybody belongs and everybody serves, disability advocates and RCA staff are working to overcome ableist practices that discriminate personally and systemically. With sensitivity, courage, and consistency, we are challenging ableist practices in the CRC and RCA. The issue of ableism—attitudes, actions, and circumstances that devalue people because they are disabled or perceived as having a disability—continues as an area of focus within Disability Concerns, other ministry initiatives, and other GSC staff groups.
- RCA-CRC Disability Concerns is creating an online training module to equip new and existing disability advocates, working with CRC partners, and using tools that include the *Everybody Belongs, Serving Together* resource.
- In its goal to mobilize 25 new leaders younger than 30 by summer 2022, the Disability Advocacy Journey has been a primary focus, but that eight-month virtual cohort is supplemented by a significantly shorter approach called the Equipping Pathway to Engage Young Adults in Disability Advocacy. In cohorts of four to five, a seasoned disability advocate guides young people through three one-hour sessions to learn the basics of advocacy. At the conclusion, participants are invited to engage in advocacy efforts through the Disability Concerns network.
- RCA Disability Concerns is pleased to now serve alongside various racial/ethnic councils in the new Advocacy and Race Relations office established by general secretary Eddy Alemán in 2021.

Women's Transformation and Leadership

Women's Transformation and Leadership has been established as part of Transformed & Transforming to help the RCA pursue a vision for the full inclusion of women's gifts, influence, and leadership in all areas of the church and beyond. Rev. Liz Testa leads the Women's Transformation and Leadership team. Lorraine Parker serves as part-time administrative partner. A cross-sector group of RCA leaders serves as the guiding coalition, helping to champion the mission, create and lead new processes, provide critical insights, and contribute as regional facilitators, teachers, and organizers. Lesley Mazzotta, part-time education and facilitation specialist, completed her tenure on February 15, 2022. Women's Transformation and Leadership is grateful for Lesley's more than seven years of faithful service, during which she helped develop and grow this ministry using her considerable gifts of creativity, compassion, and wisdom.

Midway through the 15-year Transformed & Transforming ministry plan, it is exciting to see how God is bringing the increase to our faithful labor as many diverse women, laity and clergy, from within the RCA and beyond are being encouraged, equipped, and empowered for Spirit-led, missional ministry inside and outside the church, alongside their brothers, and how a culture shift toward healthier equity in leadership is starting to emerge.

Women's Transformation and Leadership's mission has been informed and enriched by working alongside the office for Advocacy and Race Relations and the Equity-Based Hospitality ministry collective. Together, we bravely, intentionally work toward the vision of an intergenerational, multicultural, multiracial future freed from racism, sexism, and

ableism, where systems of oppression can be dismantled and transformed, where people with disabilities can belong and serve, and where the gifts and influence of women of all ages, stages, and cultural backgrounds are fully included in the life of the church and beyond.

Progress in 2021

Virtual Gatherings: As pandemic concerns curtailed and continue to curtail in-person events, Women's Transformation and Leadership has continued to create sacred spaces that foster community and combat isolation. Over 450 women from across the RCA and beyond have been encouraged and equipped by:

- Monday evening Lament with Hope small group, created by certified spiritual director Lesley Mazzotta
- Thursday evening She Is Called small group with Rev. Liz Testa and Pastor Pam Otten
- *Sacred Pulse* book study with Rev. April Fiet
- Rekindle: Stir it up! virtual mini-retreat with Rev. Donna Owusu Ansah
- Rekindle: Sisterships in Mission Advent gathering with Dr. Ramya Raman and Dr. Anu Rose, co-hosted with RCA Global Mission and the Vellore Christian Medical College Foundation
- Annual Women's Stories Day with Rev. Anna Jackson, Gnade Fellow, co-hosted with New Brunswick Theological Seminary's (NBTS) Reformed Church Center
- Dismantling Racism prayer movement and the General Synod prayer gatherings on the third Friday of each month

She Is Called Vida con propósito / Purposeful Living ten-session learning journey, the RCA's first-ever Spanish-native study guide, written by pastors Karla Camacho and Sonia Asbei Loera Castro, has been launched on the RCA Store (store.rca.org). Designed for women who are new to leadership and to Reformed theology, this process is welcoming and empowering and is a great preparation for the one year She Is Called Leadership Collaborative. These resources are available in both Spanish and English.

The **Building God's Church Together (BGCT) Bible study**, helping leaders and communities explore God's plan for women and men to serve freely and fully, has been expanded and newly launched on Faithward Learn as an online course complete with companion videos, Dr. Rob Dixon's model for flourishing mixed-gender partnerships, pre- and post-surveys, and a facilitated discussion group option.

She Is Called Women of the Bible (WOTB) study series, a Building God's Church Together resource, has been created as a companion to the BGCT study that helps congregations embrace women and men serving together in healthier, vibrant ways. As of February 17, 2022, WOTB Volume 1 has had over 221,650 site visits and 257,795 page views on Faithward.org. Especially exciting is that the main age demographic is 18–44-year-olds and that 35.5 percent of the readership is men. This resource is available in English and Spanish print editions, digitally on Faithward, and as an online course complete with companion videos and pre- and post-surveys. Editors Rev. April Fiet and Dr. Travis West, artist Crystal Wright, and a diverse group of writers have just finished Volume 2 of this series that takes biblical women's stories deeper, creating a study that is meant for everyone to engage in and meeting an articulated need for fresh, accessible studies for all, coming from a Reformed perspective with relevant practical application.

Lavish Hope, Stories of Resilience and Overcoming Podcast, hosted by Rev. Liz Testa, is

now in Season 3, with over 4,280 listens as of February 17, 2022. This podcast is part of our focus on going "deep and wide": deeper within our RCA circles and wider to a broader audience of churched and unchurched people, many of them in the 18–35 age bracket. Each episode's guests share their compelling story and offer tips and tools to help listeners embrace lavish hope and build resiliency as Christ-followers in today's world.

Women's Transformation and Leadership's partnership with New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS) to create **She Is Called cohorts for NBTS's fully online two-year certificate program** in Church Leadership and Theological Studies is now in its second year. More than ten women are in the program or have moved up to the master's program. All are exploring their callings to become preaching elders or commissioned pastors, go further in their seminary studies, or simply become better equipped ministry leaders.

Goals for 2022

- Deepen and expand our pathways and processes (listed above) to continue equipping leaders for ministry, mission, and multiplying of new disciples.
- Coach and catalyze women to embrace their gifts and live into their God-given callings through networks centered in mutual encouragement, support, and sustainability.
- Engage in-person events focusing on spiritual self-care, discipleship, and leadership development (given it is safe to do so). These include an Eastertide Sabbath Rest Retreat at Warwick Conference Center in New York, a She Is Called Holy Land Global Mission Experience, a Women's Sankofa Journey through Upstate New York, and an Equity-Based Hospitality trip to the Caribbean Christian Centre for the Deaf in Jamaica.
- Educate the body of Christ on equity-based hospitality and the importance of gender equity for the flourishing of all people.
- Equip faith communities to create healthy environments where mixed-gender ministry partnerships can thrive and everyone's gifts, women and men, of all backgrounds and abilities, can be used freely and fully.

Discipleship

The Transformed & Transforming Discipleship guiding coalition defines a disciple as somebody who looks like Jesus (character) and who does the things that Jesus does (competency). This simple definition engages the two "greats" of Scripture—the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. In short, the focus and goal of the Discipleship leadership team and the Discipleship guiding coalition is to help RCA churches to define a discipleship pathway that develops and deploys disciples who look and live like Jesus.

The Discipleship guiding coalition, led by Rev. Jeff Allen, Rev. Pat Dirkse, and Ruth Langkamp in 2021, is a collaborative team of discipleship practitioners from across the denomination. The coalition includes practitioners who are male, female, pastors, lay leaders, from the east and west, of various ethnic backgrounds, and from various mission contexts ranging from urban to suburban, church plants, smaller churches, larger churches, and mission outposts. This coalition of 12 "in the field" practitioners exists to connect leaders in conversation that often point to the provision content, coaching, and the sharing of proven pathways that help teams move forward in community processes for adaptive change in their context.

Progress in 2021

The following services were provided for churches and leaders:

- Eight Discipleship "lightning lessons": these quick, short lessons took place once per month, and between five and ten people participated in each lesson.
- Eight Discipleship webinars, each attended by 15–30 participants.
- Pilot coaching processes: Rev. Jeff Allen met with six leaders for six sessions that took place over the course of six weeks.
- Six leaders participated in a nine-month "Discipleship Begins with You" online coaching process that began in November 2020.

Goals for 2022

The work of discipleship will be reimagined in the work of the center for global leadership and ministry.

Leadership Development

Who: The work of the Leadership Development initiative is guided by a coalition of pastors, regional executives, classis leaders, business entrepreneurs, and marketplace leaders representing different areas of specialized expertise in leadership development. The guiding coalition was led by staff member Sung Kim in 2021. He served part time in that role from November 2018 to September 2021, with support from leadership specialist Eduardo Rodriguez, who served in that role from 2019 to 2021.

What: The work of Leadership Development is to catalyze the multiplication of more and better leaders in ways that are smarter and faster than traditional methods of training both emerging and established leaders. The goal is to develop leaders who demonstrate God-honoring character, emotionally healthy chemistry with others, and uniquely skilled competence where their "deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet" (Frederick Buechner).

Why: Because great and godly leaders transform the world. They lead teams, departments, and organizations that are more faithful and fruitful in every way. They are "humble, hungry, and smart" (Patrick Lencioni). At the same time, they understand that to lead others, they must first lead themselves.

How: Leadership Development aims to accomplish this goal by (1) centralizing the most effective, research-based tools and resources and (2) decentralizing training and coaching at every level of the denomination, region, classis, and church in the Reformed Church in America.

Progress in 2021

Online training was offered for hybrid ministry, digital ministry, and a post-COVID landscape.

Several leadership cohorts took place in 2021:

- A nine-month cohort for solo pastors from eight churches in Florida, Iowa, Michigan, and New Jersey.

- A nine-month cohort for senior pastors from six congregations in New York, Michigan, Iowa, and California.
- A six-month cohort for church leaders centered around "Flourishing through Change and Disruption."

As Sung's role began to be re-envisioned in summer 2021, plans for other offerings in fall 2021 were put on hold.

Goals for 2022

Leadership Development's short-term goals are still being determined in light of Sung Kim's change in role as well as the upcoming creation of the center for global leadership and ministry that will bring Transformed & Transforming and church planting into one collaborative and synergistic team.

Next Generation Engagement

The purpose of Next Generation Engagement is to empower young adults, ministry teams, and congregations to create a culture of intergenerational ministry. That is, all people of all ages serving in leadership positions at the church, classis, and denominational levels. The goal of intergenerational ministry is to reframe the mental model of young people in the church. This ministry initiative seeks to empower young leaders and congregations to serve one another into future ministry endeavors. Anna Radcliffe is the coordinator of Next Generation Engagement. Her team includes Ruth Langkamp, Next Generation Engagement specialist; Erika Fleming, administrative assistant; Becky Getz, communication coach; and Shelley Henning, KidMin facilitator (children's ministry).

Progress in 2021

- In mid-2021, in partnership with Disability Advocacy, Next Generation Engagement launched the Disability Advocacy Journey, targeted at elevating the passion of young leaders and equipping them into advocacy roles right where they are. Presently, ten young people have been selected to develop grant-funded projects toward advocacy work that will help their communities better love and serve those with disabilities.
- In early 2022, Generation Spark launched with ten participating congregations. Generation Spark is funded out of the generosity of the Lilly Endowment Inc. and seeks to partner youth with mentors in their congregations.
- In early 2023, Next Generation Engagement will launch its first online course for children's ministry leaders. The course has been developed by Shelley Henning as a way to better serve and prepare children's ministry leaders for the shifting reality of congregations post-pandemic as well as shifting generational dynamics.
- In December 2021, Next Generation Engagement launched a podcast called *Re:Forming*, with the goal of generating a younger audience in connection with the denomination. The podcast focuses on popular next generation topics including climate change, advocacy work, spiritual formation, and more. In addition, Next Generation Engagement continues to build awareness of generational shifts and development through its online newsletter. This resource is currently distributed to over 600 readers.
- Beginning in the summer of 2021, Next Generation Engagement began a partnership with five young leaders, elevating their voices on Faithward.org as regular content contributors on issues pertaining to finances, environment,

spiritual formation, and more. In addition, Next Generation Engagement regularly produces resources targeted at expanding theological and generational equipping. Prior to U.S. Thanksgiving, Next Generation Engagement worked with numerous partners to produce the Thanksgiving Toolkit to create awareness and holistic Thanksgiving Day practices that honor Native and Indigenous leaders. It was the highest-performing Next Generation Engagement–created resource to date.
- Next Generation Engagement continues to partner with TenX10, a collaborative partnership fostered by the Fuller Youth Institute, as a way to determine the best resourcing for youth ministry leaders, volunteers, and high school students as they look to make faith matter more.

Goals for 2022

- Over the next five years, Next Generation Engagement will work to establish a joint denominational leadership team with the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) to fulfill the work of the Generation Spark grant. This includes partnering with 100 congregations over the next five years, elevating young leaders into key denominational, regional, classical, and congregational roles, and providing ongoing leadership development training for young and emerging leaders.
- Next Generation Engagement will establish a binational network of at least 1,000 leaders under 35 who are invested and championing the vitality of the RCA through generous support by giving financially, starting new churches, fostering vocational ministry, and more.
- Next Generation Engagement will raise up leaders who are diverse, thriving, and competent. This work will be accomplished through a network of collaboration between youth group development, camp ministry, college, and seminary education.
- Next Generation Engagement will mobilize youth pastors, leaders, volunteers, and children's workers through resourcing and connection on an online learning platform. This platform will offer new disciples strategies, leadership development guides, and other necessary resources by demand.

Local Missional Engagement and Strategic Ministry Initiatives

Local Missional Engagement

Local Missional Engagement helps churches discern what God is doing in their church and in their communities and helps explore ways to bring those things together. Local Missional Engagement focuses on five pillars for its work for coaching and equipping:

- Faith sharing: the work of evangelism in corporate and individual settings.
- Christian community development: best Christian practices for community renewal, including asset-based community development and robust community partnerships.
- Good neighboring: practicing the art of neighboring as both congregation and individual, in the church and home community.
- Advocacy: the work of biblically centered justice, giving time, talent, and treasure to spaces that are working to dismantle unjust systems.
- Missional imagination: reigniting the idea of possibility and hopefulness for the church's engagement with their community and neighbors, inspiring courageous action and out-of-the-box thinking for kingdom impact.

As part of Transformed & Transforming, Local Missional Engagement exists to help churches have dedicated pathways to be agents of change and renewal in their communities. Through 2021, it was led by Eliza Cortés Bast, who also stewarded the Strategic Ministry Initiatives. Local Missional Engagement also houses two part-time staff people: Rev. Laura Osborne, coordinator for interreligious relations, and Eduardo Rodriguez, specialist for Leadership and Local Missional Engagement. Eduardo finished his work with the RCA in 2021, after serving both Church Multiplication and Transformed & Transforming. Eduardo also served as the staff liaison for the Commission on Christian Action. The Local Missional Engagement team is grateful for the incredible talent, passion, and experience Eduardo brought to the local mission work.

Strategic Ministry Initiatives

Strategic Ministry Initiatives encompasses the collaborative and innovative work for equipping in the RCA. Throughout 2021, it has included the stewarding of the Lilly Endowment's Flourishing Churches grant, titled the Renovations Project, which is currently convening its first full "phygital" (physical + digital) cohort.

It also includes the development of Faithward.org as a digital equipping space, including development and implementation of the online learning platform and podcasts. The Faithward work has been a collaboration between members of the GSC Communication and Production Services (CAPS) team and the Transformed & Transforming team. We in Strategic Ministry Initiatives would be remiss in not naming the efforts of Grace Ruiter, Becky Getz, and Erik Fikkert from CAPS for their amazing work and collaboration on crafting and curating spaces for digital discipleship to happen. Thanks also goes to Barb Ellis of Transformed & Transforming and Matt Seybert and Eric Sowers of IT for their incredible contributions to the building and updating of Faithward Learn. This truly has been a sterling example of interdepartmental cooperation that highlights the best of what staff departments can do for the local church when they work together.

Progress in 2021

- Food for Faith was developed as an online blog for Faithward.org that uses the intersection of food, hospitality, and faith as a means for increasing the community-building and faith-sharing opportunities for individuals and churches.
- Webinars, Facebook Live events, and live events covered topics ranging from defining evangelism to new strategic uses for traditional church spaces. Two roundtable sessions were hosted in conjunction with Vibrant Congregations, a joint ministry of the RCA and CRCNA, and one with Rooted Good.
- Practitioners, theologians, and ministers speaking on topics of justice, innovation, leadership, missiology, and spiritual practices recorded online content for Renovations. This information is available on Faithward Learn.
- Updated resources and individual consultations continued for churches who were looking to develop new practices in Local Mission, particularly in a mid-pandemic reality. This included updates to the prayer walking guide, the use of demographic analysis reports from MissionInsite, and individual coaching calls with pastors and consistories.
- Faithward experienced explosive growth: it had over 1 million page views by the end of 2021, with 740 registered users on Faithward Learn (the online learning platform), and over 6,000 downloads of Faithward-initiated podcasts. Strategic Ministry Initiatives is grateful for the voices and leadership of Liz Testa (Women's Transformation and Leadership) for *Lavish Hope*, Terry DeYoung

(Disability Concerns) for *Faith and Mental Health*, Peter Watts (Advocacy and Race Relations, African American Black Council) for *The Black Church Still Speaks*, and the leadership of Anna Radcliffe (Next Generation Engagement) in the production of the podcast work.

Goals for 2022

Local Missional Engagement, as part of the Transformed & Transforming equipping team, will have its structure re-configured as part of the center for global leadership and ministry. As the restructuring is being finalized, Local Missional Engagement anticipates still providing services geared toward re-imagining the future of ministry space and the diversifying of building purposes for greater community impact, evangelism and faith sharing resources, and aligning internal church ministries with their outreach programs and processes.

In addition, Strategic Ministry Initiatives commits to:

- Launching two Renovations cohorts through the online learning platform; these cohorts will inspire churches to innovate around a treasured tradition.
- Providing digital access for additional content from ministry and outreach experts as we expand the Faithward Learn offerings.
- Developing the digital discipleship capacity of the RCA in conjunction with the Faithward team and CAPS.
- Innovating new ways and expressions of ministry, particularly those geared toward those far from God.
- Continued partnership with agencies who serve the local church and her desire to be the hands and feet of Jesus wherever she is established.

Interreligious Relations

This year brought great challenges and also deep connection. The work of interreligious relations in the RCA is done through many people. In conjunction with the Commission on Christian Unity's interreligious subcommittee, the Rev. Laura Osborne works to connect churches and individuals to their neighbor of another faith. This takes shape in many ways: through partnerships, rich history of interfaith work, and new initiatives.

Progress in 2021

- **Scriptural Reasoning and Interfaith Photovoice**: These are tools to help people engage with their neighbor of another faith. In partnership with the Al Amana Centre and Rose Castle Foundation, there have been a few trainings around scriptural reasoning. We have been able to train campus pastors from around the world in scriptural reasoning. Interfaith Photovoice is another amazing tool for groups to use to get to know their neighbors.
- **Interreligious Subcommittee**: The interreligious subcommittee of the Commission on Christian Unity (six people) works in different parts of the U.S. and the world to help share their faith and to connect with their neighbors of another faith through chaplaincy, counseling, teaching, preaching, bridge building, and so much more. This team met with the interfaith subcommittee of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) and will continue to do so two to three times a year, as our values and mission are quite similar.
- **Global Partnerships**: The coordinator for interreligious relations shares a lot of the load with RCA Global Mission. There is a great connection with the Al

Amana Centre in Oman, and there are a few intercultural trips planned for 2022, though these trips may get shifted because of the COVID-19 pandemic. We partner with the Al Amana Centre through scriptural reasoning and share a few interns that work on similar projects. There has also been much collaboration with the refugee ministries coordinator on an online workshop to help RCA members reach displaced people in their neighborhood during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **RFPUSA**: We have formed a new partnership with Religions for Peace - USA, an organization that helps with awareness of other faiths and also justice issues related to other faiths. RFPUSA has monthly gatherings to get people involved in this work.
- **National Council of Churches**: The RCA has a spot on the Interreligious Convening Table of the National Council of Churches. This table coordinates dialogues with other faiths to raise awareness.
- **Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign**: This campaign works to stop bias against our Muslim neighbors. The RCA has been a longstanding member with this campaign and has a seat on the steering committee. We are working with two interns (shared with the CRC and the Al Amana Centre) to bring two Faith over Fear trainings to Grand Rapids and Northwest Iowa. The dates for the trainings in Grand Rapids and Northwest Iowa have been set; there are also virtual options for these trainings.
- **Journey Into Friendships**: This collaborative network with the CRCNA was started almost four years ago. Journey into Friendships invites people in to walk together with others who work with displaced people groups and those who need a place to start. Our focus has been on immigrants and migrants, refugees, international students, and Muslim–Christian relations. There are monthly network meetings on different topics and a larger consultation in the summer. The focus for 2022 is in the Heartland area.
- **Learning Communities**: Three learning communities have been happening around loving our neighbor of another faith. One community is focused on campus pastors and interfaith work, one on Journey into Friendships, and another is specifically for Michigan campus pastors who work with international students.

Goals for 2022

- Develop and expand content for Local Missional Engagement, a joint website with the CRCNA, and the Journey Into Friendships website.
- Continue partnership with RCA Global Mission in work with displaced people, seeking new ways to reach that group and add more people and churches to it.
- Offer monthly opportunities for RCA churches and ministries to learn about and connect with resources near and far.
- Help more churches reach their neighbor of another faith for Christ.
- Continue the work of loving our neighbor of another faith by connecting with colleges and universities.
- Arrange the two planned Faith over Fear trainings.
- Make arrangements for two planned intercultural trips through the Al Amana Centre.

RETIRED MINISTERS OF WORD AND SACRAMENT

During 2021, 46 ministers of Word and sacrament retired from active service. Those who retired are being recognized by the General Synod through its endorsement of appreciation for their years of faithful and dedicated ministry in the church.

L 22-1
To adopt the following resolution:

These individuals have loved Christ and fed his sheep. They have devoted themselves to spreading the Word and equipping the saints for the work of ministry.

Their contribution to a needy world is rich beyond measure; their record is on high.

The Reformed Church in America, with admiration, deep affection, and overflowing thanks to God, celebrates their lifelong service.

Jay Braband
Portland, Oregon

Todd Buurstra
Keyport, New Jersey

Juan Carmona
Raleigh, North Carolina

Richard Chavarria
Lakewood, California

Chung-Huei Cho
San Jose, California

Stephanie Croom
Jacksonville, North Carolina

Timothy Custer
Holland, Michigan

Matthew Floding
Durham, North Carolina

Robert Fretz
Toms River, New Jersey

Kent Fry
Zeeland, Michigan

Peggy Funderburke
West Sand Lake, New York

William Grob
Long Beach Township, New Jersey

Daniel Haggar
Rock Rapids, Iowa

Paul Hansen
Nampa, Idaho

Sarah Henseler
Austin, Texas

Robert Hoffman
Berne, New York

Steven Hoogerwerf
Holland, Michigan

Renée House
Kingston, New York

Thomas Jasperse
Fremont, Michigan

Kama Jongerius
Holland, Michigan

George Kaden
Ocean Grove, New Jersey

David Landegent
Salem, Oregon

Reynold (Ray) Larson
Great Falls, Montana

Shi-Yang Lin
Pasadena, California

Keith Lohman
Kalamazoo, Michigan

Scott Lokers
Holland, Michigan

Diane Maodush-Pitzer
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Neil Margetson
New York, New York

Steven Miller
South Plainfield, New Jersey

Jeffrey Munroe
Holland, Michigan

Jon Norton
Schenectady, New York

John Nyitray
Holland, Michigan

William Peake
Buffalo Center, Iowa

Richard Scheenstra
Kalamazoo, Michigan

Philip Schuiling
Aurora, Colorado

Tom Schwanda
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Dianna Smith
New Paltz, New York

Clayton Smith
Portage, Michigan

Wayne Sneller
Sully, Iowa

Dennis TeBeest
Haddam, Connecticut

Dewey Thompson
Zeeland, Michigan

David Tsai
Richmond, British Columbia

Michael VandenBerg
Kalamazoo, Michigan

Carl Van Voorst
Watertown, South Dakota

S. Mark Veldt
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Michael Weber
North Olmstead, Ohio
(ADOPTED)

NECROLOGY

Name	Date of Birth	Date of Death	Age
Brent Backofen	November 20, 1948	January 7, 2021	72
Harlan Nyhof	October 24, 1933	January 11, 2021	87
Benjamin Hsu	December 21, 1933	January 12, 2021	87
Vance Elzinga	November 23, 1958	January 15, 2021	62
Benjamin Le Fevre	May 31, 1933	February 3, 2021	87
Calvin Malefyt	June 16, 1925	February 3, 2021	95
Richard Vander Voet	November 22, 1933	February 16, 2021	87
John Busman	September 13, 1931	March 11, 2021	89
Michael Romano	May 5, 1927	March 27, 2021	93
Winston Clarke	February 10, 1932	April 6, 2021	89
Joseph Cookson	May 7, 1926	May 2, 2021	94
Donald Waterhouse	December 22, 1944	May 9, 2021	76
Eltje Brunemeyer	February 14, 1940	May 12, 2021	81
Robert Engel	August 12, 1934	May 12, 2021	86
Paul Meyerink	February 4, 1927	June 21, 2021	94
John Elliott	April 20, 1941	June 30, 2021	80
Dick Doeden	July 12, 1938	July 15, 2021	83
Stuart Blauw	January 10, 1930	July 22, 2021	91
Harold Korver	October 21, 1930	July 27, 2021	90
Sylvio Scorza	March 21, 1923	August 1, 2021	98
Janine Dekker	September 26, 1963	August 7, 2021	57
Dean Ulmer	February 16, 1950	August 7, 2021	71
Vernon Dethmers	August 16, 1927	August 9, 2021	93
Robert Jones	June 28, 1926	August 13, 2021	95
Arlan Menninga	July 4, 1936	August 13, 2021	85
Song Kuk Kim	November 25, 1941	August 29, 2021	79
Peter Theune	August 8, 1943	October 10, 2021	78
John Tien	June 2, 1930	October 12, 2021	91
Arnold Punt	July 2, 1926	October 31, 2021	95
Forrest Harms	July 20, 1942	November 5, 2021	79
Charles Ausherman	April 30, 1932	November 10, 2021	89
Russell Johnson	June 19, 1926	December 6, 2021	95
Kenneth VanderBroek	October 16, 1924	December 6, 2021	97
David Ter Beest	July 18, 1927	December 23, 2021	94

Report of the General Synod Council on Church Multiplication

POLICY WORDING

The RCA will foster a sustainable movement of church multiplication through starting new congregations and equipping church planters both locally and globally.

GENERAL SECRETARY'S INTERPRETATION

New churches—micro churches, fresh expressions, missional communities—reach new people in new ways with the good news of Jesus Christ. The commitment of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) is to start new churches that further the gospel, reaching the spiritually disconnected, bringing them into fellowship, and introducing them to the God of grace who transforms lives and eternities.

An environment for church multiplication is created through an intentional system and process. It begins with prayer and empowering through the Holy Spirit. It grows as new leaders are called and developed and as they emerge. It is built on a solid foundation of assessment and evaluation of church planters and church planting locations, then strengthened through training and equipping. It is life-giving in the ongoing ministry of church planters and new churches in providing coaching relationships and networks of planters for learning, support, and accountability. It expands as new churches reproduce and as healthy, parenting churches catch a vision to partner and multiply in the starting of additional new churches.

The benchmarks for new churches are to see a newly planted church become:

- Self-sustaining in being able to support the cost of ministry for that congregation.
- Self-governing in being able to produce and provide spiritual leadership capable of being discerning, giving direction and conducting discipline.
- Self-propagating in being able to reproduce new followers of Jesus Christ, new ministries, and additional new church starts.

A sustainable church multiplication system is developed in partnership with the assemblies within the RCA. The General Synod Council (GSC), regional synods, classes, and consistories work cooperatively and collaboratively to start new churches and to provide a resourced system that is capable of raising new church planters and launching new congregations.

CHURCH MULTIPLICATION

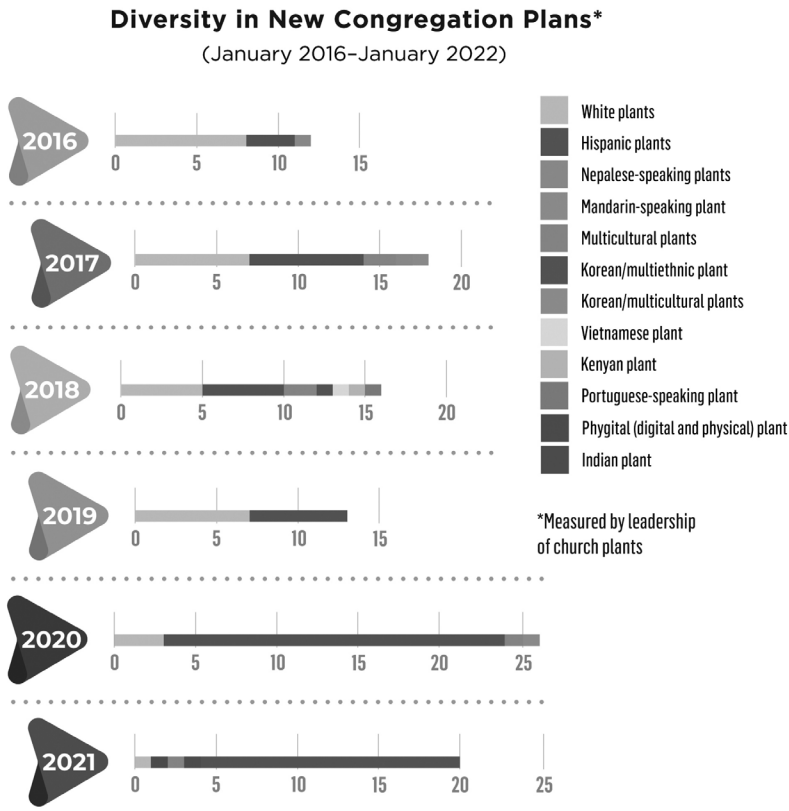
Planting new churches is the most effective way to make new disciples and fulfill the Great Commission. This continues to be true since it was started in the first century apostolic expansion of the church. Therefore, the Church Multiplication team is devoted to planting 1,000 new churches by 2038 with the desired outcome of making 100,000 new disciples of Jesus Christ.

To accomplish this goal we work with classis and regional synod teams and, more recently, international partners, equipping them to start new churches. Strategic partnerships are being formed to increase the capacity to plant an average of 50 churches per year, or one every week.

The Church Multiplication staff team consists of Andres Serrano and Rodrigo Cano, part-time church multiplication catalysts; Tricia Bouma, operations manager; Dawn Muller, administrative assistant; and Randy Weener, director of Church Multiplication.

Progress in 2021

- Stimulating new plants:
  - Locally Grown is a cohort to identify and train the next generation of church planters from within two- to five-year-old church plants. Eight planters are currently going through the process.
  - At least 25 potential Fresh Expressions (micro church) planters and parents will participate in the national Fresh Expression Conference, ReMission, this spring to catalyze multiple fresh expressions of church.
  - Over 400 RCA leaders and members have participated in a Fresh Expressions opportunity since 2019 (Vision Day, book study, online cohort, etc.)
  - 20 North American new congregation plans (NCPs) were approved from January to December 2021.
- Church Multiplication launched a pilot Business Coaching program with the goal of helping church plants launch self-supporting businesses. Coaching takes place online.
- An RCA Women Planters online group meets monthly for prayer, encouragement, and sharing resources. The RCA currently has more than 20 women planters.
- Expanding communication:
  - Weekly communications are sent in English and Spanish to planters.
  - Monthly News and Resources communications from the denomination are distributed to sending churches, classis multiplication teams and stated clerks, and other planting catalysts.
  - There is a Church Multiplication presence on all RCA communication campaigns to cast compelling vision for evangelism and church plants, sharing our stories in broader circles.
- We are celebrating the expanding diversity of recent church plants. See the chart on the next page.
  - Church Multiplication has added three people of color to its grant and new congregation plant review team, and Church Multiplication has a diverse staff.
  - Church Multiplication is partnering with the RCA's African American Black Council with a goal of starting five new church plants in 2022. In this effort, we are utilizing Fresh Expressions of Church as a partner. Strategic funding is given to create a plant pipeline that contextually fits the historic Black church.
  - Church Multiplication partnered with Multiplication Network Ministries (MNM) to provide planter training in North and South America. MNM has resources in multiple languages.
  - A generation 2+ task force is being formed with bridge-building ethnic planters.



- Equipping local leadership:
  - o Church Multiplication helped the Illinois Classis Church Multiplication Team develop vision, resources, and strategy.
  - o The Regional Synod of the Great Lakes has identified six multiplication catalysts working across five classes. Church Multiplication staff is coaching these leaders.
  - o Church Multiplication is helping Central Plains Classis refine its planting systems.
- International planting efforts:
  - o Through partner Jibit Asha in Nepal, 34 new churches have been planted and 72 apprentices are being trained. RCA Church Multiplication provided training equipment. Two additional churches were planted in Nepal in 2021. One planter baptized 22 new believers at one time!
  - o Partnerships in Europe led to the launch of seven church plants, with an additional two in development, in the Netherlands, Germany, Romania, and Hungary.
    - o Church Multiplication is partnering with Classis de las Naciones and RCA Global Mission to equip, empower, and eventually send the Iglesia Reformada Dominicana (IRD). For more information, see www.rca.org/denomination-from-dominican-republic-joins-rca-classis.

Goals for 2022

- Plant or foster 50 new churches in 2022.
- Work with RCA Global Mission to define relationships with international plants.
- Train a team of leaders in the northeast U.S. to foster and facilitate plants in the three regional synods in the east.
- Develop strategic, sustainable streams of income for planting, including coaching planters to start new businesses or work co-vocationally.
- Help first generation ethnic plants transition to generations 2+.
- Guide at least two classes per year to develop vision, resources, and systems for planting.
- Advance Fresh Expressions of the Church.
    - o Host at least 25 participants at the annual Fresh Expressions conference to foster imagination and inspiration.
    - o Help the African American Black Council plant five new churches in 2022.
    - o Increase disciple-making focus to the third and fourth generation of disciples.

Report of the General Synod Council on Global Mission

POLICY WORDING

The RCA will connect and engage people to what God is doing in the world, through mission partners that cross boundaries in word and deed with the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ and enabled by the Holy Spirit.

GENERAL SECRETARY'S INTERPRETATION

Mission becomes a way of life when we reach out to people with the gospel, meeting needs in neighborhoods, countries, continents, and throughout the world. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we boldly give witness to the hope within us and willingly serve others by becoming the hands and feet of Christ in every corner of the world. The Reformed Church in America (RCA) commitment is to respond with God's love to meet spiritual and material needs around the globe. We are excited to engage mission through our churches by equipping mission leaders to maximize the impact their mission investment can make around the world. We are eager to move into a future where RCA Global Mission is part of a mission movement—a movement that comes from within our congregations, and is built on the passions of our members, and a future where we make connections through our history and expertise, where we connect individuals and churches with faithful partners, and where we help coordinate, inspire, and support the RCA in mission.

Individuals and churches experience transformation as they open themselves to be used by God and reach out in giving and receiving, learning and sharing, and extending the kingdom of God through missional engagement. It means bringing the good news of God's grace in Jesus Christ to those who have never heard the message, mobilizing the RCA congregations to connect with global partners for greater kingdom impact, helping resource volunteers for expanding involvement in mission efforts, and extending compassion, mercy, and justice in places of discrimination, poverty, famine, disaster, and injustice. In a world of brokenness and need, we offer help, hope, and tangible expressions of God's love.

GLOBAL MISSION

Over the past 379 years, RCA Global Mission has impacted millions of people around the world with the love of God. Truly, God has blessed our work. Today, the way we engage in mission is changing, and the role of the denominational mission organization is changing, too. We are excited to engage mission through our churches by equipping mission leaders to maximize the impact their mission investment can make around the world.

We are eager to move into a future where RCA Global Mission is part of a mission movement—a movement that comes from within our congregations and is built on the passions of our members, and a future where we make connections through our history and expertise; where we connect individuals and churches with faithful partners, and where we help coordinate, inspire, and support you in mission.

Progress in 2021

While many short-term mission trips were not possible during 2021, we celebrate the many churches and individuals that were able to serve in mission. The Next Generation Missional Engagement Fund Scholarship supported nine teams and six individuals in the 2021 calendar year. The scholarship awarded a total of $27,940 to assist 199 young people

in their mission service. In partnership with World Renew - Disaster Response Services, the fourth edition of the SENT Devotions focusing on Disaster Response was released in March. The Cultivate program was on hold during 2021, but it is sending new volunteers into the field beginning in the summer of 2022. As international travel restrictions continue to ease, Short-Term Mission is working with missionaries and partners to coordinate targeted vision and mission trips to support their work. We look forward to the opportunity to assist churches and individuals in serving God through mission around the world.

Amazing stories of God's grace and goodness continue to prevail in Europe and the Middle East despite a challenging season for missionaries and partners. Over the past year, we have seen growth in so many ways. The American Mission Hospital in Bahrain continues to grow and reach more people than ever before. A new hospital is under construction and is expected to be dedicated in early 2023. Church plants throughout Europe have not just survived the pandemic and the shutdowns but have actually grown. On the humanitarian front, RCA congregations and donors helped RCA partners to evacuate thousands of people from Afghanistan who were at risk of harm and death.

Our missionaries and partners in Asia and the Pacific region were able to continue proclaiming the good news of God's forgiveness and demonstrate God's love through their respective ministry contexts with ongoing and generous financial and spiritual support from RCA churches and individuals. Even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, our missionaries were able to effectively manage various responsibilities of their ministries, including but not limited to: planting new churches, supporting local pastors and their churches, educating and equipping next generation leaders, reaching out to the children and youth, serving the needs of isolated people groups, and translating the Bible into many languages by adopting new technologies and methods to reach those who had difficulty accessing God's Word due to COVID-19. For the kids and their families seriously impacted by COVID-19, for the seminary students who need Wi-Fi access to join online classes, for the village people who suffer from food shortage, and for the indigenous church leaders, the RCA's immediate assistance has been a huge source of comfort and relief as well as a very tangible expression of discipleship and demonstration of God's love and care.

This past year, our partner, the Evangelical Church of the Republic of Niger (EERN), inaugurated and opened the first phase of the Polyclinique "Dutsin Ceto" in Dogon Doutchi, Niger, on March 20, 2021. The name "Dutsin Ceto" means "Rock of Salvation" in the Hausa language. The small private hospital is built on the edge of the town of Dogon Doutchi (pronounced: DOEGN DUE-CHEE), which means "tall rock" or "mountain." After four years of planning, work, and building, this clinic is the fulfillment of RCA missionaries Dr. Susan and Jeremy Beebout's work with the development office of EERN to provide quality healthcare to the extremely underserved and impoverished population in the rural interior of the country. Opening with three Nigerien doctors, a team of nurses, laboratory facilities, and other capabilities, the Polyclinique "Dutsin Ceto" has doubled the number of doctors in a regional department with a population of 1 million. The aim of EERN's medical ministry is also to provide responsible outreach and witness to its Muslim neighbors. EERN's healthcare model has proven to be sustainable: Clinique Olivia, the first clinic launched in 2012 in the capital city, Niamey, has an excellent reputation for providing quality medical care beyond what the public clinics provide. Now, via the in-patient and out-patient services of these two clinics, EERN medical ministry serves approximately 25,000 patients per year.

Throughout 2021, the RCA remained engaged in endeavors to reach unreached and under-reached people groups in Africa and build the capacity of our partners for ministry. These church planting and holistic mission endeavors include healthcare, hospice, and

compassionate care; equipping pastors, church, and servant leaders, Christian Muslim Relations programs; water, agricultural, and community development; animal husbandry; and orphan care programs. After more than five years of our strategic partnership with Setshabelo Family and Child Services in Botshabelo, South Africa, which provides loving families for children, we celebrate these 2016–2021 metrics: 284 in-country adoptions, 768 foster placements, 233 family reunifications of children, 358 Temporary Place of Safety Placements, and 18,308 Family Preservation Program participants, and over 60 churches mobilized to advocate for the needs of orphaned and vulnerable children.

Goals for 2022

Global Mission's current goals are derived from our commitment to strongly reflect and mobilize the passions and gifts of RCA congregations to serve. These goals include:

- Increase mutually beneficial collaboration between RCA Global Mission and all RCA congregations, including those that may want to move on from the RCA.
- Keep RCA mission support in RCA churches as well as from churches that are moving on.
- Raise an additional 33 Partnership-in-Mission (PIM) shares for our missionaries who are currently fundraising.
- Communicate our field stories to our constituents, creating relevance for North American congregations and offering opportunities to serve with RCA Global Mission.

Global Mission

Working together to share God's love with the world

RCA Global Mission exists to strengthen and grow the global church by supporting ministries of compassion, developing leaders, and sharing the good news. Our goal is to provide engagement opportunities for RCA churches to partner with global churches in ways that are collaborative and mutually meaningful that help us all to live and love like Jesus.

Partnership-in-Mission Shares

The mission personnel and staff of RCA Global Mission would like to express appreciation to the churches and individuals of the Reformed Church in America who so generously support our mission programs. The RCA mission program is supported almost entirely from contributions and Partnership-in-Mission (PIM) shares. Without you, there would be no RCA Global Mission.

The Reformed Church in America has over 80 active partnerships in 45 countries around the world. There are 43 mission personnel and 49 partner personnel (who are employed by the partner but supported through RCA PIM shares). These mission personnel were supported by 384 churches and 267 individual donors through PIM shares. There are over 120 active projects, including disaster response and projects of compassion. These projects were supported by gifts from 310 churches and 1,383 individual donors.

Global Mission proposes that the value of a full Partnership-in-Mission share be maintained at $6,900 in 2023. We are also asking that every RCA congregation that does not currently support an RCA missionary with a PIM share consider taking on a full or partial share of support.

GM 22-1
To maintain the value of a Partnership-in-Mission (PIM) share at $6,900 for 2023. (ADOPTED)

A motion was made and supported from the floor as follows:

> For General Synod to instruct the leadership of Global Mission and Church Multiplication to communicate to all RCA classes/ congregations in 2022 an update and explanation regarding current RCA initiatives in "International Church Planting," speaking to the historic RCA global mission value of work with indigenous and local church partners rather than establishing RCA congregations outside of North America.

The president agreed to a request from the floor that the motion be revised as follows, and there was no objection (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken).

> For General Synod to instruct the leadership of Global Mission and Church Multiplication to communicate to all RCA classes/ congregations in 2022 an update and explanation regarding current RCA initiatives in "International Church Planting"~~, speaking to the historic RCA global mission value of work with indigenous and local church partners rather than establishing RCA congregations outside of North America~~.

VOTED: To adopt the motion as revised.

The motion as amended and adopted reads as follows:

GM 22-2
For General Synod to instruct the leadership of Global Mission and Church Multiplication to communicate to all RCA classes/ congregations in 2022 an update and explanation regarding current RCA initiatives in "International Church Planting." (ADOPTED)

New Mission Assignments

Angel Lopez will serve as a border and immigration advocate. In this role, Angel will help RCA congregations embrace and understand immigrants who are encamped and crossing the southern border and provide a Christian witness and faith-based advocacy resources to build deeply impacting relationships throughout their sojourner process.

Deaths

Emery Blanksma passed away on May 31, 2021. Emery and his wife, Sharon, served in Kenya for ten years where they ran a health clinic and managed a mission station and school in the West Pokot region. Emery loved his time in Kenya and often told many stories of his adventures.

Paul Meyerink passed away on June 21, 2021. Paul, along with his wife, Dorothy, served in Chiapas, Mexico, for over 38 years beginning in 1955. They were among the missionaries who pioneered the Tzeltal Bible School, where they served in Bible translation and teaching.

Report of the General Synod Council on Multicultural and Multiracial Future Freed from Racism

POLICY WORDING

The RCA will be a fellowship of congregations committed to a multicultural and multiracial future freed from racism, engaging all of God's people in mission and ministry and resisting the sin of racism.

GENERAL SECRETARY'S INTERPRETATION

"There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

By journeying into the future with a commitment to unity, reconciliation, and justice, we build Christ's church on a firm and diverse foundation that extends God's grace to the world. Through forgiveness, deep relationships, active service, and love for each other, the church is able to live out the message of God's love. The Reformed Church in America (RCA) commitment is to name racism as a sin and to work against its prevalence and pervasiveness both within our relationships and our denominational system, as well as in the wider domestic and global communities. Our efforts at eradicating racism call for us to change not only our systems but also our hearts for each other and for the life matters that concern each other. It requires transformation of both institution and of our person. It impacts what we embrace, what we include, what we see, and how we respond and resource. A multicultural and multiracial future freed from racism must first be envisioned, then articulated, and finally actively engaged in as the preference and commitment of all.

MULTICULTURAL AND MULTIRACIAL FUTURE FREED FROM RACISM

The RCA's work toward a multicultural and multiracial future freed from racism takes a number of different forms as described here.

The Office of Advocacy and Race Relations

The office of Advocacy and Race Relations was launched in July 2021. It has been the goal of this office in its first year to create a framework and rubric in which we go about our work within the denomination when we look at policies and practices. These policies and practices can be something as simple as: who do we partner with in mission? Or it could be: what processes are we using when we are hiring and training new staff at the denominational level? In order to move into the vision that general secretary Eddy Alemán has around Revelation 7:9, we have to start with where we are and make sure we have common language and understanding when it comes to race, disability, and women in ministry and leadership.

This office has been committed to working with other departments such as Women's Transformation and Leadership and the equity-based hospitality team to work out some of these details around developing a framework and rubric that can be a universal tool for every assembly, as well as staff of the RCA. We are now in the beginning stages of this development; we are gathering once a month to look at the foundational work that the equity-based hospitality team has already started, seeking to build from there.

Progress in 2021

Stadia Assessment Center: The Stadia Church Planting organization invited Peter Watts to join a team of other leaders from around the country to ensure that their church planting assessment center was equitable when it came to who was approved for church planting using their tools. This yearlong process was completed and new hopeful outcomes have emerged. Jeff Bennett, vice president of U.S. church planting and part of the Stadia assessment evaluation team, reported:

> In an effort to share our journey publicly, we will include an expression of lament and repentance during our Stadia gathering at Exponential in March. This is the largest gathering of Stadia's constituency and we believe the best place, as an organization, to acknowledge and lament the hurt and disservice caused to planters of color and women by our former discovery and assessment systems and processes.
>
> We would have not been able to realize these important changes without the contributions of this team. Please know we are very grateful for your commitment and contributions. We would very much like your continued help as the new process is created, implemented, and refined.

Old First Reformed Church: On October 4, 2021, the Office of Advocacy and Race Relations received an inquiry from a member of Old First Church in Brooklyn, New York, asking for racial justice resources. Once we connected, we found out that this church in New York discovered that its stained glass windows told an old story about the benefits that this congregation has enjoyed because of slavery. Once that discovery was made, the church went into digging up that history to learn more and to figure out how they could right those wrongs. A small group of Old First Reformed members formed an antiracism reading group last June, starting with *Me and White Supremacy* by Layla Saad. After they finished the book, they decided to form a Remembrance and Racial Justice working group to start looking into the church's history and understand how they can do better as a church when it comes to issues of racial justice. So far, they have done some research and uncovered some information about their history, and they are trying to figure out how to share what they've learned with the rest of the congregation. They have also continued to read other books (such as *Jesus and the Disinherited* by Howard Thurman, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* by James Cone, and *How to Fight Racism* by Jemar Tisby), and they have brainstormed some goals for the church. In January 2022, the antiracism group at Old First continued their research and shared some of it with the congregation for the first time in a special service. They presented some of the information they've gathered about the families that donated the stained glass windows and the people they enslaved. The service included prayers of lament and remembrance as well as the Belhar Confession and hymns that center racial justice.

Beyond Words: Launched during the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday weekend, this yearlong group's goal was to work with white pastors and leaders as well as congregants to focus on racial justice and what it means to be a freedom fighter alongside African American and Black congregations. We spent time reading *My Grandmother's Hands* by Resmaa Menakem, learning about how racialized trauma happens in the body and how it can be healed. We have tried for decades to rid ourselves of this evil sin by thinking our way out of it and doing workshops. These efforts are led by Rev. Leah Ennis; at least eight pastors and leaders from across the U.S. participate. We are in year two of this group and are doing a six-month session on "How to be an Anti-Racist." The reflection below is from one of our cohort members, Rev. Sara Gregory.

As I was reading and processing the book *My Grandmother's Hands*, I was again made aware of how much white models of understanding focus on intellectual concepts. This is maybe even especially true in the Reformed Church tradition. As Menakem kept encouraging us to recognize how much of our trauma lives in our bodies and is generationally passed down through visceral experiences, I realized how far the church has to go in discipling people into a framework that takes our bodies into account.

Particularly in the conversations I am in right now, many white people want to further abstract conversations about race and racial trauma to a critique of an intellectual or philosophical framework about Critical Race Theory. Refusing to see the humanity, or the personal trauma by abstracting the conversation is yet another way that white bodies continue to try to gain control and dominate the conversations around this topic. And the church has become the leading voice in many of these conversations. We need to develop an embodied form of discipleship that will help give people frameworks for faithful responses to our own trauma and the trauma of others that moves people out of their heads alone and back into the lived experiences of bodies. I appreciated the reflection and grounding practices that Menakem uses throughout these chapters to give people tools to engage personal and corporate history through embodied practice. I wonder if there are ways that leaning back into some more contemplative practices with new intentionality could help Christians live into a more embodied practice of their faith, which could then give them tools to have conversations about racism and racial trauma that would move beyond their heads and into their bodies and souls in a different way.

Since my ministry context puts me mostly in a position to disciple white people in these conversations, I spent a lot of time thinking about the ways that what Menakem calls "moral injury" to white people from carrying the shame of their ancestors' abuse and mistreatment of people of color has led to inaction and fear of repentance. Helping white people move beyond their perceived fragility, the shame that comes with addressing their complicity, and helping them have tools to empathize and love people of color in the midst of their trauma is part of what I feel called to do in this season. Naming the shame and the fear that comes with these conversations feels like one of the most helpful ways to bring down barriers to these conversations, but I think after that, there needs to be more embodied practices. Long term, it is not helpful to keep having conversations in our heads, or even conversations about systemic change if white people cannot deal with the shame and move beyond the perceived fragility that keeps them from engaging these conversations humbly.

I think the hardest part of that process in my current context is keeping the conversation safe enough for people to stay engaged. White people need to overcome their fragility, but until they have the tools to name the fragility and face shame in a healthier way, their perceived fragility is a real barrier to conversations. It feels like a dance right now to keep people comfortable enough to stay in the conversations while making them uncomfortable enough to move them towards change.

Equity-Based Hospitality

Flowing out of the work done in 2019 with Dr. Reesheda Washington, Transformed & Transforming initiative leaders formed a team to develop a framework for equity-based hospitality, including definitions and values that link to the rich resources of the

four ministry initiatives that focus on drawing in those historically, intentionally, and traditionally at the margins: Disability Concerns, Next Generation Engagement, Women's Transformation and Leadership, and Race Relations.

This framework is discipleship-based, rooted in growing in the character and competency of Jesus. Equity-based hospitality is defined as one in which the biblical practice of welcoming both friends and strangers is embraced in generous, kind, respectful, flexible, barrier-free ways that takes people's needs into account so they can find space to truly belong, experience the freedom to live into their God-given gifts and callings, and contribute to the body of Christ in unique, strengthening ways. It embraces the mutual hospitality of guest and host, can be readily adapted to different contexts, and enfolds the biblical understanding of hospitality as a sacred duty to treat strangers and friends alike, welcoming one another into our homes, communal spaces, and lives.

Progress in 2021

Over the past year, the equity-based hospitality ministry has evolved into a staff collective led by Liz Testa, along with Terry DeYoung, Erika Fleming, Ruth Langkamp, Lesley Mazzotta, Anna Radcliffe, Eduardo Rodriguez, Stephanie Soderstrom, and Peter Watts. Lesley and Eduardo have subsequently wrapped up their work on the RCA staff, but in 2021, they were part of this team. This team wrestles with systemic barriers for the flourishing of all members of the body and provides resources to RCA leaders and communities as they seek to embrace equitable practices of welcoming and belonging.

This collective offers broad resources created with an equity lens such as the article on Faithward on how to choose a children's Bible that is inclusive and grounded in Reformed Theology (www.faithward.org/how-to-choose-a-childrens-bible-that-will-form-faith-for-life). It also offers resources tailored to each of the four ministry initiatives as on-ramps for those new to the work as well as invitations to the "From Outreach to Embracing" network (which started as a virtual learning journey from January to March 2021) for deeper transformation and missional engagement.

Goals for 2022

Currently, the collective is building out the equity-based hospitality values to be a robust Bible study for individual and communal study. These values were shared in last year's monitoring report and are available on Faithward.org: www.faithward.org/how-to-practice-biblical-equity-based-hospitality. The group is also working with Peter Watts to create a diversity playbook and framework.

Dismantling Racism

Dismantling racism is central to one of the RCA's doctrinal standards, the Belhar Confession (www.rca.org/about/theology/creeds-and-confessions/the-belhar-confession). We believe racism is sinful. And we are actively working to uncover and dismantle racism in ourselves and the systems we're part of.

In response to the pressing racial/ethnic justice concerns that emerged in the spring of 2020, there has been a Spirit-led movement within the RCA to intentionally work toward dismantling racism. The seeds for this movement were first planted in 2020, took root in 2021, and continue to grow and flourish in 2022. This work has been stewarded by various staff including Lorraine Parker, Eduardo Rodriguez, Liz Testa, and Peter Watts.

Dismantling Racism Prayer Gatherings

Jesus said: "I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

In June 2020, through the virtual platform created by Women's Transformation and Leadership at the beginning of the pandemic, the Rev. Dr. Denise Kingdom Grier introduced a like-minded, diverse group of RCA leaders to the 1 Cor. 13 Project as a way to engage the challenging work of "learning and unlearning" and the deep heart transformation needed in the wake of surging racial injustice against African Americans and Black people. This discipleship-based process leads to true repentance through a process of "rehearsing, re-minding and re-membering," using 1 Corinthians 12 and 13 as the foundation.

From this process, Dismantling Racism Prayer Gatherings were born, initiated by Rev. Nancy Boote and Rev. Liz Testa, and soon joined by Dr. Micheal Edwards and other committed leaders, including Rev. Dr. Rick DeBruyne, Deacon Cynthia Peters, Elder Lorraine Parker, Rev. Jewel Willis Thomas, Rev. Dr. Joanne Van Sant, Dr. Mark Veldt, Pastor Peter Watts, and Dr. Gordon Wiersma. This team shapes the prayer movement that continues to grow and thrive today. Over the past year (March 2021 to February 2022), 440 people have attended these gatherings, with an average of 20 people per gathering. Some gatherings have been attended by more than 40 people.

Progress in 2021

Dismantling Racism Prayer Gatherings: Launched in October 2020, prayer gatherings are held every other week on Tuesdays from 1:30-2:30 p.m. Eastern. These virtual prayer gatherings are interactive times of praying and sharing hopes and challenges of engaging this important work, personally and communally; sacred times of lament, confession, and hope, grounded in vulnerability, humility, unity, and trust. The first year (October 2020 to September 2021) followed the Holy Spirit's leading, focusing on breaking down internal and external systems of oppression of all kinds, centering Black lives in this season particularly, and living into Jesus's call to love one another.

Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Solidarity: In April 2021, when anti-Asian hate crimes rose dramatically in the public eye, a group of staff, commissions, and the Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries (CPAAM) members gathered for two listening sessions. From this, the Commissions on Christian Action (CCA) and Race and Ethnicity (CORE), the Commission for Women (CfW), and CPAAM issued a statement in solidarity with the AAPI community, denouncing the hatred and violence (www.rca.org/commissions-call-the-rca-to-stand-with-the-aapi-community). This statement is accompanied by a curated list of resources and videos for leaders and communities to engage.

Goals for 2022

Dismantling Racism Prayer Gatherings: Now in year two (September 2021 to present), the prayer movement is going deeper. Each month engages a two-fold rhythm around a particular "dismantling" theme (e.g., colorism, Native American history, Advent longing and hope, Black history, and race and gender). The first gathering hosts diverse voices to educate and focus the intercession. The second gathering, two weeks later, is a space for reflection and prayer in small groups. This deepens relationships and offers catalytic, prayer-centered encouragement and accountability.

The goal is to continue deepening and catalyzing transformation, leading toward advocacy and action. Spurred on by the 2021 General Synod's embracing of Revelation 7:9 and the motions and exhortation brought forth from the African American Black Council (AABC) and CORE, this prayer movement is energized to courageously embrace the promise that, with God, it is not impossible for the Reformed Church in America to experience deep heart transformation leading to true, authentic repentance, emerging ready to seek a "more excellent way" forward. All with an open heart and mind are welcomed to these gatherings; alongside RCA members, several other denominational siblings have also joined, thanks be to God.

AAPI Solidarity: To continue working together with CPAAM and other members of the AAPI community to equip and empower RCA members and congregations to stand against anti-Asian hate, uncover unconscious bias, and encourage members of the AAPI community to share their stories and have voice and agency.

The Dismantling Racism prayer movement planned to have this topic be the dismantling theme for May, which is AAPI Heritage Month.

Report of Words of Hope

Words of Hope believes that all people in all places should have access to God's Word. With Words of Hope, people are connected daily to the truths of Scripture so that they can grow in faith and share it worldwide.

Words of Hope works to share the good news in all ways possible in order to provide access to Scripture in heart languages, remote locations, and a variety of media types. Where poverty, geography, or persecution hinder the spread of the gospel, Words of Hope partners with indigenous Christian leaders to equip them to more effectively minister in their own language and context, among their own people.

Words of Hope's regions of ministry include Albania, Bhutan, India, Indonesia, Iran, Nepal, Niger, North America, South Sudan, Turkey, and Uganda. Each ministry field requires its own unique media outreach approach. Depending on the variety of resources and challenges in a given region, an assortment of radio programs, text messages, social media, print materials, and satellite television are all used to proclaim the gospel.

Some notable highlights from Words of Hope's ministry in the past year include the development of a distance learning course in Farsi with Western Theological Seminary, the distribution of evangelistic SD cards in the country of Niger in partnership with Global Eye Mission, and the opportunity to minister to Afghan refugees sheltering in the country of Albania.

For many years, Christian audio programming has been available inside the country of Iran. More recently, our discipleship efforts there have expanded to include online worship services and in-person training conferences. Iranian converts are nurtured in their faith to the point where they can lead secret house churches inside Iran and disciple more new converts themselves.

Now, Words of Hope is working together with Western Theological Seminary to develop a more advanced distance learning course in the Farsi language that will better equip Iranian believers interested in ministry and evangelism. A theology course taught by Western's Dr. Han-luen Kantzer Komline will soon be available in Farsi alongside a translation of the book *Practicing Christian Doctrine* by Beth Felker Jones. We anticipate distance learning for Farsi speakers will begin in July 2022.

In the country of Niger, Words of Hope has begun copying radio programs onto micro SD cards for distribution to rural parts of the country that cannot be reached by a radio signal. The SD cards contain an amazing 250 audio programs—each 15 minutes long. The cards can be inserted into cell phones to play audio anywhere in the country, no matter how remote the location. The programs start by introducing the basics of the Christian faith and gradually go deeper as the programs continue.

This last year, Words of Hope partnered with an organization called Global Eye Mission (GEM), which was leading a medical mission trip to the country of Niger. The GEM team came to provide cataract surgeries for patients. Words of Hope's team in Niger got to participate in the post-surgery care and follow up by distributing SD cards to the patients and praying with them.

We are thankful that people are responding to the gospel message in Niger. Our producers have received calls from patients who were given the cards. They are even able to meet with people or direct them to a pastor or church congregation nearby. One patient shared,

“Last night, I spent all my time listening to the messages. I didn’t want to stop!”

An unexpected opportunity for ministry this past year presented itself to Words of Hope’s team in Albania. Last August, the Albanian government agreed to take in thousands of refugees from Afghanistan, locating many of them indefinitely inside a compound near Words of Hope’s offices.

“We were immediately involved,” says Words of Hope’s Albanian director. “We found out what it would take for us to have access to these people.” The Words of Hope team is interacting with the refugees, forming relationships, and engaging in spiritual conversations with them. We are also distributing care packages and shoes among the refugees and assisting them with sourcing authentic Afghan food during this difficult time of transition in their lives.

Words of Hope is deeply grateful for the support of RCA churches that continues to sustain this outreach ministry. In 2021, contributions from RCA congregations totaled $423,878. We celebrate this generosity, knowing that these dollars are allowing people to be introduced to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Thank you for sharing hope worldwide as we work together to proclaim the good news in all ways possible.

Report of the Church Growth Fund

The Reformed Church in America Church Growth Fund, Inc., (CGF) is a non-profit corporation that functions under the supervision of the RCA General Synod. The CGF supports the work of the denomination by making affordable rate loans to current and former Reformed Church in America (RCA) churches and related agencies for the purchase, construction, and improvement of buildings and other properties used in ministries. The CGF loan programs offer unsecured loans up to $200,000 and secured borrowing up to $5,000,000.

As a primary source of funding for loans, the CGF sells interest bearing investments called savings certificates. The CGF offers two types of savings certificates:

1. Term savings certificates, which are available in maturities from one to ten years.
2. Demand savings certificates, which allow the investment and redemption of amounts in the certificate at any time (subject to the limits described in the CGF Offering Circular).

As a way to further support the denomination, the CGF contributes a portion of its earnings annually to the General Synod Council (GSC), which awards the funds as ministry grants for three RCA programs:

1. Church Multiplication provides grant funding to church plants. In the fiscal year ending September 30, 2021 (FY21), the CGF contributed $530,000 for church plant grants.
2. The Next Generation Missional Engagement Fund provides scholarships to middle school age–children through post-college young adults to cover part of the cost of mission trips and internships, disaster response work, vision and study tours, and missional training experiences. Due to reduced travel this past year, funding for Next Generation Missional Engagement scholarships was not needed; therefore, the CGF did not contribute funds to the scholarship fund in FY21.
3. The Flourishing Churches Grant Program provides grants for facility improvements to economically challenged RCA congregations whose ministries are thriving. In FY21, the CGF contributed $250,000 for this program.

More specific information on CGF loans and how to invest in savings certificates is available on the CGF webpage at www.rca.org/cgf. The audited financial statement may be found on the RCA website at www.rca.org/finance.

Assets

In FY21, assets increased by $2.2 million (2.63 percent) to over $85 million. CGF assets at the end of FY21 consisted primarily of loans of $57.2 million and cash and investments of $28.7 million. Loans during FY21 decreased by $2.1 million (3.6 percent) as the CGF funded $6.9 million in new loans to nine RCA congregations and related agencies while receiving $9 million in loan principal payments from existing borrowers.

Despite the pandemic, the overall financial health of CGF church borrowers remains strong. This has resulted in few delinquent loans in the CGF portfolio and has contributed to the CGF continuing its long history of never having experienced a loan principal loss. We continue to have a few church borrowers that are challenged to repay their loans,

and the CGF works in partnership with these affected congregations by restructuring debt repayment terms to ensure viable continuance of their ministries.

Savings Certificates

At the end of FY21, the CGF had savings certificate investments of nearly $35 million, representing a slight increase of $452,794 (1.3 percent) over the previous year end. In FY21, the CGF received $6.2 million in new savings certificate investments plus reinvested interest of $530,454, which was offset by redemptions of $6,302,521. Savings certificate investors continue to recognize the favorable return received on their funds as well as how their investment supports the mission of the CGF. Funds received from investment in savings certificates are used by the CGF primarily to make loans to current and former RCA churches throughout the United States and Canada.

CGF savings certificates are state-regulated securities. Currently, the CGF is authorized to sell savings certificates in 27 states, which are listed on www.rca.org/cgf. Rates of interest paid on savings certificates, along with other information on the CGF and how to invest in savings certificates, can also be found on the website.

Earnings

In FY21, the CGF showed net earnings of $2.58 million before making discretionary contributions to the GSC for church ministry grants, an increase of $375,148 (17 percent) from the previous year. Net earnings after grant contributions were $1.8 million, an increase of $386,148 (27 percent) from the previous year.

The difference in earnings in FY21 compared to FY20 were primarily a result of (a) a decrease in loan interest due to a decrease in average loans outstanding and a decrease in the average loan portfolio yield; (b) a decrease in interest expense due to a lower average cost of funds; (c) an increase in contributions and bequests due to a large estate gift received in FY21; and (d) a decrease in operating expenses due primarily to reduced staff costs and reduced travel due to the pandemic.

Ministry Grants

In 1999, the CGF began contributing a portion of its earnings to the GSC to be used for grants to new church plants. From 1999 through FY21, the CGF has contributed more than $7 million to support RCA Church Multiplication. In that time, 405 church plants have been approved, and the majority of them have received grant funds to help start their ministry.

In 2014, the CGF began contributing annually to provide financial assistance to RCA youth for mission trip experiences. In FY21, travel for youth mission trips was greatly reduced; as a result, there was not a need for funds for this program. Since the inception of the Next Generation Missional Engagement Fund, however, the CGF has been its primary financial supporter, making contributions totaling $450,000. Since the program has been in place, 2,682 young people have benefitted from scholarships awarded.

In 2018, the CGF launched the Flourishing Church Grant Program, which provides grants of up to $50,000 to churches for facility improvements necessary to continue and grow already successful ministries. To date, 33 RCA congregations have been Flourishing Church grant recipients, and the CGF has contributed a total of $1.15 million to this program.

In total, the CGF contributed $780,000 in FY21 to fund RCA ministry grants.

Financial Strength

A measure of financial strength of an entity is its level of net assets, also known as capital or equity. As of September 30, 2021, the CGF had net assets or capital of $50,162,464. This represents the accumulation of earnings and contributions received over its years of operations.

The funds received from savings certificates are used by the CGF primarily to make loans to current and former RCA churches. The ability of the CGF to repay savings certificate investors is related to its level of capital, net earnings, as well as repayment of the loans funded from certificate investment dollars. CGF loans typically are secured by first mortgages on church facilities. The CGF follows strict guidelines in approving loans to make sure congregations can sustain such debt payments. While past performance is no guarantee of future events, the CGF has never experienced a loss of principal on any loan. No CGF savings certificate investor has ever experienced a loss of investment or missed receiving an interest payment.

Financial Highlights

	FY 2021	FY 2020
Total Assets	$85,167,480	$82,981,397
Net Assets (Capital)	$50,162,464	$48,357,704
Savings Certificates Outstanding	$34,878,929	$34,428,846
Number of Churches with Loans	105	112
Dollar Amount of Loans Outstanding	$57,216,216	$59,327,650
Number of Loans Funded in Year	9	10
Dollar Amount of Loans Funded in Year	$6,913,058	$5,205,239
Net Earnings Before Ministry Grants	$2,584,760	$2,209,612
Contributions to GSC for Ministry Grants	$780,000	$791,000

Future CGF Activity

The General Synod held in October 2021 approved changes to the CGF's articles of incorporation and bylaws that would explicitly allow outstanding loans to churches that were formerly organized as RCA churches to remain outstanding, and that would also allow the CGF to make new loans to former RCA churches. Continuation of the lending relationship between the CGF and a former RCA church is not automatic. The CGF has a process in place for borrowers that intend to leave the denomination to follow; as part of that process, the church will be required to complete an Application for Continuance of the CGF loan, which allows the CGF to do a thorough review of the church's situation before granting continuance.

Additional revisions were made to the CGF's articles of incorporation and bylaws to clarify that CGF savings certificates will be available to current or former assemblies, institutions, and agencies (and their corporate affiliates) of the RCA, to current or former members of such assemblies, institutions, and agencies or their governing boards, and to current or former donors to such assemblies, institutions, and agencies (or their corporate affiliates).

The changes mentioned above will benefit (a) churches that are leaving, as they will have

less disruption to ministry and will maintain their favorable loan terms; (b) the CGF, as it will be able to further advance its mission of providing affordable rate loans to former and current RCA churches for the purchase, construction, and improvement of buildings used in ministry; and (c) RCA churches, as it will increase the CGF's ability to contribute funds to the GSC for ministry grants to support growing church planting initiatives, Next Generation Missional Engagement Fund scholarships, and grants to flourishing but financially challenged churches in need of building renovation for ministry.

The CGF is thankful for the support of its investors and borrowers as we continue in ministry together, and pray that the best interests of Christ's kingdom be served in all that we do.

Report of the Board of Benefits Services

The Board of Benefits Services (BOBS) was established by the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) and incorporated and approved by an Act of the Assembly of the State of New York on April 16, 1923.

The General Synod has delegated to BOBS the responsibility to manage and administer the retirement and insurance programs required by the *Book of Church Order* (*BCO*) Formulary No. 5, to manage and administer the BOBS' retiree chaplains and assistance programs, and to ensure the availability of appropriate life insurance benefits, long-term disability benefits, and any other programs or services related to the financial well-being of eligible RCA-ordained ministers and their dependents, and of other eligible employees of agencies, assemblies, and institutions of the RCA.

The board met virtually on November 11, 2021, and in person on March 10, 2022, in Jacksonville, Florida. The volunteer board consists of at least nine but not more than seventeen members, including pastors and professionals from business, finance, investments, and law. Board membership also includes the president and vice president of the General Synod, the moderator of the General Synod Council (GSC), and the general secretary.

Ends and Executive Limitations

BOBS, like the GSC, utilizes the principles of policy governance to conduct its work and to guide its oversight and supervision of its executive director in the fulfillment of the purposes it was established to accomplish by the General Synod. Key to its use of the principles of policy governance is the responsibility to state clearly the reasons BOBS exists. In policy governance, the reasons are stated as "ends."

The board provides direction to and oversight of the executive director's work through the following ends that were adopted at the October 2020 board meeting:

E-1 Manage and administer the retirement programs required by the *BCO* Formulary No. 5.

E-1.1 Participants have a means to wisely set aside funds at a rate commensurate with other church plans.

E-1.2 Participants have a means to convert accumulations into retirement income choices including guaranteed lifetime income options.

E-2 Manage and administer the insurance programs required by the *BCO* Formulary No. 5.

E-2.1 Reasonable health insurance benefits at rates commensurate with other church plans are available to participants and eligible participants through our partnership with Reformed Benefits Association (RBA). Recognizing that the partnership with RBA is a board decision, the executive director is tasked with the following end: "Advocate for the purposes of E-2.1 and monitor and report the effectiveness of current partnership with RBA to the board."

E-2.2 Ensure the availability of appropriate life insurance benefits and long-term disability benefits at rates commensurate with other church plans are available to participants and eligible participants.

E-3 Manage and administer the retiree chaplains and assistance programs.

E-3.1 Active and retired participants and spouses have access to an assistance fund that may be available based on demonstrated need and is limited by available funds.

E-3.2 Employ a network of retired pastors and elders who maintain contact with and provide pastoral care for retired ministers and their spouses or surviving spouses and with lay missionaries who served for ten or more years.

E-4 Provide other programs or services related to the financial well-being of eligible ordained ministers and their dependents, and of other eligible employees of agencies, assemblies, and institutions of the Reformed Church in America.

E-4.1 Participants and eligible participants have access to and are encouraged to use information and educational resources that allow them to make timely financial decisions regarding their retirement and their health, life, and disability-related benefits.

E-4.2 Investigate and, if appropriate, ensure availability of programs or services related to multidimensional wellness and well-being.

Review of Services and Ministries

As stated in the *BCO*, a consistory shall fulfill the provisions of the call form (Formulary No. 5) for all ministers serving the church under call or contract by paying the stipulated contributions to the RCA 403(b) Retirement Program. In addition, consistories must provide benefits including group life insurance, long-term disability insurance, and medical insurance for a minister and his/her immediate family (*BCO*, Appendix, Formulary No. 5). New in 2020, if the minister and his/her family elect medical coverage through a spouse's employer-sponsored group plan, the church will compensate for "any medical premium costs incurred by [the pastor's] immediate family, up to the premium cost of the Reformed Benefits Association plan meeting the minimum standards stipulated for the year compensated" (*BCO*, Appendix, Formulary No. 5). These stipulations apply equally to full-time and part-time ministers.

There are, however, a few exceptions to this general rule. Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 7 of the *BCO* states that "a consistory shall fulfill the provisions of the call form (Appendix, Formulary No. 5) for retirement and insurance for all ministers serving the church under call or contract unless (a) regarding retirement, the minister is covered by the retirement plan sponsored by the Regional Synod of Canada or the retirement plan of the communion where the minister's membership is held, (b) the classis determines that the minister is serving the church part-time, as defined by the Board of Benefits Services, and that circumstances warrant that the consistory be exempt from this requirement, or (c) the minister is serving less than part-time as defined by the Board of Benefits Services" (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 7 [2021 edition, p. 15]).

Retirement Services, Fidelity Investments, and Fund Management

To participate in the 403(b) plan, employers need to complete and submit an adoption agreement to the Board of Benefits Services' office. The adoption agreement is a compliance document that allows a consistory some flexibility in defining the terms of its participation in the RCA 403(b) Retirement Program. The agreement recognizes the RCA 403(b) Retirement Program as the retirement plan of the employer. If an employer submits funds on behalf of its ministers, the board also recognizes this action as evidence that the employer has adopted the agreement. Staff will continue to request adoption agreements from employers as required by the plan. The agreement (images.rca.org/docs/bobs/AdoptionAgreement.pdf) can be downloaded from the employer section of the BOBS webpages (www.rca.org/benefits/employers).

BOBS creates a shell account within the Fidelity system for new participants and then Fidelity invites the new participant to complete their enrollment online through the Fidelity NetBenefits website. Participants are automatically enrolled in the appropriate target date Freedom Fund and have the option to allocate their contributions to other available funds. Participants are directed to the Fidelity website to set up employee contributions, change investment options, provide tax information, and list and update beneficiaries. Seventy-six percent of all participant funds remain invested in the Fidelity Freedom Funds (target-date funds) but only thirty-two percent of participants are contributing employee contributions (this is up four percent from 2018).

All employers are expected to use Fidelity's Simplified Contribution Platform (SCP) or Plan Sponsor WebStation (PSW) to remit their contributions electronically through the Fidelity website instead of manually by check.

Five percent of participants are enrolled in the Fidelity Personalized Planning and Advice (FPPA) program. FPPA is an optional service that provides professional management of a participant's plan account for a small advisory fee based on total assets invested. Participants in this service receive ongoing investment management, retirement, and financial planning support from a team of professionals. The strategy aligns with the participant's personal goals and is monitored and adjusted based on the market or on life changes. This investment service is optional. Enrollment campaigns are held annually to allow a participant to enroll at a discounted price to determine if the program is a good fit for them.

In its fiduciary role, BOBS monitors the performance of the investment options (funds) available under the two retirement programs in collaboration with the Investment Advisory Committee (IAC). BOBS and the IAC are assisted in this task by outside investment consultants from Lockton Advisors, who take an active role in monitoring the investment options and administrative expenses associated with our retirement plans. Lockton verifies that any revenue sharing and fees collected from Fidelity are consistent with fee agreements that are in place.

In order to maintain security and reduce fraud, Fidelity uses a two-factor authentication (TFA) for participants performing certain high-risk transactions (password and user ID requests, rollover requests, etc.) on netbenefits.com.

In late spring or summer 2022, Fidelity Investments will become the primary point of contact for many of the distributions related to the RCA 403(b) Retirement Program, rather than BOBS staff being the primary point of contact. Fidelity redesigned the NetBenefits home page to provide the user with a more meaningful experience. NetBenefits now

has an automatic withdrawal tool that allows participants to compare and select the best withdrawal option for them by modeling difference scenarios. This helps participants determine how much they might receive, how long their money will last, and what might be left upon death.

BOBS owns 22 annuities on behalf of our participants or their beneficiaries. These annuities have been purchased with funds from the non-qualified RCA Retirement Plan and were purchased in the name of BOBS to avoid immediate taxation for the participant. In 2021, we suspended the purchase of annuities in the name of BOBS through 2022. Participants can still purchase an annuity by taking a fully taxable distribution and then purchasing an annuity in their name.

Thos Shipley, retirement plan administrator, and Feifei Liu, benefit actuarial analyst and project coordinator, are in regular contact with any number of participants, beneficiaries, church administrators, and Fidelity to service the needs of our participants from enrollment through retirement.

Fund and Administrative Fee Changes

On February 23, 2022, the Invesco Diversified Dividend Fund Class R6 was closed, and existing and future contributions were transferred and redirected to the Putnam Large Cap Value Fund Class R6, a new investment option for both plans.

The BOBS administrative fees charged to participants on employer contributions decreased from 19 basis points (bps) to 10 bps effective January 1, 2022. A decrease in operating expenses and earnings from the ERISA Insurance Endowment Fund, plus investment earnings and income from other sources, allows for this significant drop. Due to a surplus, BOBS also waived the administrative fee for the fourth quarter of 2021. This represents a cumulative decrease of 75 percent in the past 9 years (administrative fees in 2021 were set at 40 bps). The administrative fees cover the costs for legal and investment consulting, client services, and other expenses needed to maintain the plan.

In the fall of 2021, the board set aside $8.5 million to establish an Operations Endowment Fund. The funds will be invested according to the BOBS Endowment Fund Investment Policy Statement. Spending will not begin until fiscal year 2023 and will gradually increase each year according to our spending policy, which is based on a 20-quarter rolling average. The spending from this endowment will reduce or replace the retirement plan administrative fees.

Housing Allowance Designation

At the November 2021 board meeting, the board approved the following housing allowance designation for eligible participants taking distributions from the RCA retirement plans.

> For calendar year 2022, to designate up to 100% of distributions from either the RCA Retirement Plan or the RCA 403(b) Retirement Program as housing allowance for participants in the plan(s) who are eligible for the housing allowance under relevant provisions of the United States Internal Revenue Code.

Housing allowance letters are emailed and mailed to participants at the end of each calendar year and are available on the BOBS retirement webpage.

New Tiered Approach to Selecting Investment Options

The plans offer a broad array of investment options. This variety enables participants to select options that best suit their individual preference and goals. To assist with their selections, the investment options have been organized into three tiers:

- Tier I – Target Date Funds: an asset mix of stocks, bonds, and other investments that automatically become more conservative as the fund approaches its target retirement date and beyond.
- Tier II – Core Investment Options: allows participants to construct a basic investment portfolio utilizing low-cost funds.
- Tier III – ESG Investment Options: environmental, social, and governance–themed investment options help participants find investments that align with their principles.

This tiered approach allows participants to more easily select those investment options that are appropriate for their individual goals, time horizon, and risk tolerance.

For additional help with determining an investment strategy, participants should work with their personal financial advisor or visit Fidelity NetBenefits at netbenefits.com/atwork or meet one-on-one with a Fidelity planner by calling 800-642-7131.

Additional educational resources about environmental, social, and governance (ESG) investing can be found on the BOBS webpages at www.rca.org/benefits/esg-fund-information.

Social Screening Constraints and Environmental, Social, and Governance Investing

BOBS investments follow the current investment policy statements that require the investment managers to seek to avoid investments in the securities of companies whose principal business involves gambling and for-profit prisons and the production and distribution of tobacco or alcohol, adult entertainment and pornography, and firearms and military weapons.

Our plan currently has four ESG funds: Fidelity International Sustainability Index (FNIDX), PIMCO Total Return ESG Institutional (PTSAX), Pioneer Balanced ESG K (PCBKX), and Parnassus Core Equity Institutional (PRILX), a fossil fuel free–fund.

General Synod 2021 took two actions regarding ESG investing: CA 21-6 (*MGS 2021*, p. 206) and ONB 21-9 (*MGS 2021*, p. 119). The Investment Advisory Committee is planning to call a special committee meeting to discuss these two recommendations. Two BOBS board members with professional experience in retirement plans and investing are members of the Investment Advisory Committee.

Is Your Money Safe?

A number of participants have asked us if their funds in the RCA Retirement Plan that is administered by the Board of Benefits Services are safe. Many people refer to the RCA Retirement Plan as a pension plan. However, the RCA Retirement Plan is not a pension plan; it is a deferred compensation plan with accounts designated for each participant. The dollar amount shown on a participant's statement from Fidelity represents the amount that is actually in that account as of the effective date of the statement.

If a participant is no longer employed by an employer (as defined in the plan document—typically assemblies, institutions, or agencies of the RCA), or, in the case of an ordained minister, if they demit from the office of minister of Word and sacrament or transfer their ordination outside the RCA, then BOBS must initiate distributions to the participant per their original Distribution Election form immediately. This is true regardless of why employment ended or demission occurred, including affiliation with another denomination. In addition, BOBS is a separate entity from the GSC. The assets of BOBS stay with BOBS, and the rights, responsibilities, and fiduciary obligations of BOBS to implement the terms and conditions of the plan remain with BOBS (again, as provided in the plan document).

The plan document also speaks about the funds:

- The funds contributed to participants' accounts are held by BOBS in separate accounts for the benefit of the participants.
- Because the plan is characterized as a deferred compensation plan:
  - The funds are characterized as assets of BOBS until distributed to the participant. The assets are not assets of the General Synod or the GSC.
  - The plan assets are characterized as being part of the general, unpledged, unrestricted assets of the board, subject to claims of the creditors of the employer (the corporations of the RCA, and the assemblies, institutions, or agencies of the RCA, excluding the Regional Synod of Canada and any of its churches, related agencies, and institutions) and the RCA and BOBS.
  - While funds are subject to the claims of the general creditors of each employer and the RCA and BOBS, in many instances, it may be difficult for any creditor of that employer to establish what portion of the participants' accounts could be levied to satisfy a claim that is made.

The plan document also speaks about what it would take to terminate the plan and what would happen to the funds if the plan was terminated.

- It is the intention of the Board of Benefits Services to continue the plan indefinitely.
- The plan can be terminated in its entirety, but only if the Board of Benefits Services acts to do so *and* the General Synod approves the board's actions.
- If the plan would be terminated, the credited amounts in each participant's account would be paid to the participant for whom the account exists.

Finally, each summer, BOBS offers the reallocation program that allows eligible participants to "transfer" their money from the RCA Retirement Plan to the RCA 403(b) Retirement Program. We encourage all who are eligible to participate to enroll in the reallocation program each year. Read more about this further in this report.

RCA 403(b) Retirement Program Plan Document Changes

With the passing of the Secure Act and the CARES Act, sections of the RCA 403(b) Retirement Program plan document were updated and the plan was restated to reflect the changes in laws. These sections primarily related to hardships, loans, and required minimum distributions.

In addition, the board approved the removal of Article VII, Payment of Benefits to Participants, Section 7.1 (b) Employer Contributions, which eliminates the need to have installment payments be made over a period in excess of ten years, as well as the addition of Article XII Amendment and Termination, Section 12.3 Cessation of Participation,

which documents what is allowed when an adopting employer no longer meets the criteria to participate in the plan.

RCA Retirement Plan Compliance Project

In 2020, we discovered that the administration of the RCA Retirement Plan had been inconsistent with the manner in which non-qualified, deferred compensation plans should be administered. These inconsistencies date back to when the plan was originally established in 2001. Staff conducted an internal review of our participant files and worked closely with our retirement attorneys at Connor and Winters and with GSC general counsel Paul Karssen to interpret the plan document. The primary concern was that retired and terminated participants should have begun taking distributions immediately upon their retirement or termination of employment from an RCA employer as required of non-qualified deferred compensation plans.

Individuals in four groups were impacted:

1. Alternate payees (ex-spouses) were allowed to stay in the plan when they should have been required to take a full distribution at the time of the divorce.
2. Spousal beneficiaries should have been required to begin or continue taking distributions or to take a full payout at the time of the death of the participant.
3. Non-spousal beneficiaries should have been required to begin or continue taking distributions or to take a full payout at the time of the death of the participant.
4. Terminated and retired participants should have been required to begin taking distributions or take a full payout upon termination or retirement.

Our communication to impacted participants outlined the concerns and required them to make an election option. As a result, almost 400 participants began taking distributions or took a full payout in January 2022. To ensure compliance in the plan for all employees, we also put a process in place to annually verify the employment status of lay participants.

RCA 403(b) Retirement Contribution Verification Project

The RCA 403(b) Retirement Program holds funds for 1,553 active participants with a market value of more than $288 million as of March 15, 2022. BOBS staff continues to collect the necessary information from RCA employers for the 403(b) contribution verification project. The contribution verification project was initiated in 2012 to audit the participation and payment of the required employer contributions related to the retirement accounts of eligible ministers under call or contract. Many employers were out of compliance with the plan document and the *BCO* and had not contributed the required 11 percent of compensation to eligible RCA ministers' retirement accounts.

Approximately $1.7 million has been collected and added to the retirement accounts of RCA ministers since this project has begun.

The necessary information is requested annually from employers through the Retirement Security Form (RSF), a confidential portion of the Consistorial Report Form (CRF). Each year, there are a significant number of churches that do not complete the RSF, do not respond to the requests for payment, or only provide the basic information requested to perform the review. As a result of not having the needed information, it is impossible for staff to verify that the proper contributions have been made. The plan document states that the responsibility for making contributions lies with the church employer. Staff feel confident that we have made reasonable efforts to collect these contributions on behalf of our participants, but we cannot do this without the cooperation of the churches.

We have targeted a number of employers from whom and employees for whom we know that we are unable to collect retirement payments and wrote off the estimates on the financial statement. We identified the churches that never adopted the plan, churches that have either closed or disbanded, and pastors who have either passed away or transferred their ordination. We have requested the needed information for years and realize that in these situations, we will not be able collect payments for the ministers or their beneficiaries. This plan was discussed with and pre-approved by our auditors in November 2019. As a result, BOBS wrote off $234,000 as part of the audit year ending September 2021. BOBS staff will continue to work on this project in 2022 using similar criteria.

Reallocation Program

The RCA Retirement Plan, a non-qualified plan, holds funds for 467 active participants with a market value of almost $229 million as of March 15, 2022. This plan was closed to new participants and contributions as of December 31, 2004.

Following approval by the 2015 General Synod, the legal plan document of the RCA Retirement Plan was amended to allow the reallocation of participant funds from the RCA Retirement Plan to the RCA 403(b) Retirement Program. BOBS implemented a process in the summer of 2015 for participants to reallocate their retirement savings. This reallocation is a two-step process that requires participants to provide relevant information to confirm their eligibility and determine the dollar amount that can be reallocated. Staff work closely with Fidelity Investments in the process, and the review is completed in strict compliance with the IRS 415(c) rules. Participation in this program is encouraged but optional.

The reallocation program was offered again in the summer of 2021 to participants in connection with the 2020 tax year. One hundred and sixty-six participants were able to reallocate almost $6.5 million.

In 2022, the reallocation program will be offered to participants in connection with the 2021 tax year. Those who are interested in participating should watch for more information in late spring 2022. Eligibility and the amount that can be reallocated each year is determined by BOBS in accordance with the IRS annual contribution limits and IRS regulations. Participants are able to participate in the reallocation program five years after they are no longer earning wages from an RCA employer.

More information about the program is available on the BOBS website at www.rca.org/reallocation or by inquiry at retirement@rca.org.

Insurance Programs

BCO Formulary No. 5 requires that churches "promise to pay the stipulated contributions to the Reformed Church in America retirement plan and provide benefits including group life insurance, long-term disability insurance, and medical insurance" for RCA-ordained ministers of Word and sacrament and their families. BOBS and the Reformed Benefits Association (RBA) provide a number of insurance products so consistories can easily fulfill this promise.

BOBS continues to collaborate with the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) regarding the provision of medical benefits through the RBA. RCA and CRCNA entities are eligible to participate in RBA benefit offerings by agreeing to the Terms of Participation. The terms require that entities enroll all eligible full-time staff in health insurance (unless the employee has coverage through a spouse, parent, or retiree

health insurance plan). The RBA currently offers three medical insurance plans for its members: the premium plan, the consumer plan, and the co-pay plan. Part-time employees working a minimum of 20 hours per week are also eligible to participate. A church may elect group life insurance coverage of either $175,000 or a new $75,000 as a stand-alone benefit. Optional benefit offerings include dental, vision, supplemental life, accident, and critical illness insurance.

All eligible active RCA-ordained ministers of Word and sacrament who are regularly working a minimum of 17.5 hours per week are automatically enrolled in long-term disability (LTD) insurance administered through BOBS. Those who are not enrolled in life insurance through the RBA are automatically enrolled in group life insurance administered through BOBS. BOBS contracts with Lincoln Financial for both life and long-term disability plans that include voluntary plans where the participants can purchase increased coverage for themselves, their spouses, and their children. Premiums for insurance remained the same from 2021 to 2022. Commissioned pastors, while not mandated to have coverage, are eligible to enroll in BOBS life and LTD plans. In providing these benefits for eligible ministers, churches have access to an affordable group plan that allows them to easily fulfill the requirements of Formulary No. 5.

Beginning January 1, 2022, BOBS expanded its coverage to include ministers ordained outside of the RCA who are serving in an RCA church. Due to agreements already established by the denominations involved, this coverage does not include ministers ordained in the CRCNA or Formula of Agreement partner churches.

Churches are billed quarterly for BOBS's group plans. In order to not jeopardize the terms of a group plan, a church must pay the premiums to BOBS directly for their pastor's coverage. Reminders are sent to the church if an invoice is not paid by the due date. If payment is not received, a notice of cancellation is sent to the minister, to the treasurer, and to the classis. The loss of or lack of coverage is a violation of the *BCO* and puts church employers out of compliance with Formulary No. 5.

Ministers without charge can be covered by group life and LTD for 90 days after their last day of work. The most recent church where the minister served is responsible for paying the premiums for this extended period. Upon termination, policies can be converted or ported to an individual plan. All participants are encourage to keep their beneficiary information updated by using the beneficiary designation form: www.rca.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Life-Beneficiary-Form.pdf.

Because of a Request for Proposal (RFP) that BOBS conducted in late 2020, we were provided with a $10,000 grant from Lincoln Financial, our insurance provider, to be used for the enhancement of technology related to the administration of our insurance programs. We are thrilled that our insurance enrollment and invoicing system has been revamped after working with a Salesforce consultant who created efficiencies that have drastically improved our processes. In addition, no premiums were charged to churches for December 2021.

Open enrollment for plan year 2022 was held from November 8 through November 30, 2021. Almost 400 clergy are enrolled in life insurance, and approximately 640 are enrolled in LTD. Because churches and ministers are leaving the denomination, enrollment is down by almost 60 participants compared to the number enrolled in June 2021; however, at this time, not as many clergy have transferred their ordination or demitted as we had anticipated. As long as a minister remains RCA-ordained, BOBS policies allow them to participate in the life and LTD plans, providing their church pays the premiums.

Cineca Anthony, BOBS' life and LTD administrator, works with churches to ensure proper insurance coverage is available and provided to eligible RCA ministers. She also guides pastors and/or their beneficiaries as they navigate the insurance system when claims needs to be filed.

Churches can help BOBS in two ways:

1. Keep BOBS staff aware of current salary information. This information is requested at the time of enrollment and each open enrollment period following. BOBS also requests current salary information in a special campaign each summer. This information is essential so that ministers are enrolled in the proper amount of long-term disability coverage.
2. Make quarterly payments for insurance through electronic fund transfer (EFT) or pay by credit card through the online payment site instead of sending manual checks. Fewer manual checks will help us to improve efficiencies. This can be conveniently done by completing the ACH form that is part of the church's quarterly invoice or by contacting Terri Boven at tboven@rca.org.

Minimum Standards for Insurance

As stated in Formulary No. 5 of the *BCO*, "Such insurance coverages shall meet or exceed the minimum standards stipulated by the Board of Benefits Services" (2021 edition, p. 137). For 2022, the minimum standard of coverage established by BOBS is met by offering coverage that approximates the consumer plan, as offered by the RBA.

- The consumer plan carries a coinsurance of 80 percent, an individual deductible of $2,800, and a family deductible of $5,600.
- The maximum in-network, out-of-pocket cost is $5,000 for an individual and $10,000 for a family.
- Coverage is 80 percent after the deductible has been met and until the out-of-pocket maximum has been reached.
- Once the out-of-pocket maximum has been met, the plan covers 100 percent of eligible medical expenses.

Definition of Part Time

Similar to the requirement that BOBS set the minimum standard for medical insurance, BOBS is also required to establish the definition of "part time." Because each insurance provider has varying eligibility requirements, the definition of part time varies based on the product.

- For life and LTD insurance purchased through BOBS, part time is defined as working a minimum of 17.5 hours but not more than 29 hours per week. Those working 30 hours per week or more are considered full time.
- A definition of part time for the RCA 403(b) Retirement Program is anyone working 1 to 19 hours per week; however, consistories are required to make contributions for all ministers serving the church under call or contract. Those working 30 hours or more are considered full time.
- For medical insurance, part time means anyone working a minimum of 20 but not more than 29 hours per week. Those working 30 hours per week or more are considered full time.

If insurance is purchased through the RBA, its terms of participation require that any

insured member must work a minimum of 20 hours per week to be enrolled in medical, dental, and vision insurance. For further clarification, contact the RBA at 800-701-8992.

These definitions are published in the "Annual Insurance and Retirement Benefits Information" document that is updated and distributed to ministers, churches, classis clerks, and regional synod executives each fall. The electronic version of this document is posted on the RCA website at www.rca.org/airb.

Retiree Chaplains Ministry and Assistance Program

Through the retiree chaplains program, BOBS employs a network of 31 retired pastors and ordained elders who visit, befriend, assist, and maintain contact with over 1,000 retired ministers and their spouses or surviving spouses across the U.S. and Canada, and with lay missionaries who served for ten or more years. This ministry, coordinated by GSC staff member Mornier Rich, has been in existence since the early 1970s and is intended to keep retirees connected to the RCA and to communicate the needs of our retirees back to BOBS. The retiree chaplains maintain an intentional, personal, and pastoral relationship, especially when the retiree lives in a community where there is not an RCA congregation. As retiree chaplains meet with the retirees throughout the year, they are able to identify when there is a financial need and are frequently the first point of contact in distributing the assistance application for new needs.

The *In Touch* newsletter is a compilation of biographical profiles of retirees, coordinated by one of our retiree chaplains, Bob Terwilliger, and is distributed to retirees two to three times per year.

Each spring, the retiree chaplains gather in person to share stories, receive any updates on internal processes, and spend time together in prayer. In 2021, the annual gathering was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To stay connected, BOBS staff leads a quarterly Zoom call, which provides an opportunity for the retiree chaplains to stay connected, encourage each other through the extraordinary demands of the pandemic, and spend time together in prayer. We are planning to meet in person in Holland, Michigan, on April 20–21, 2022, for our annual gathering.

The assistance program provides grants to eligible ministers and their surviving spouses and dependent children. Financial assistance is primarily awarded for needs related to housing and utilities, ongoing medical insurance premiums, funeral grants to surviving spouses, retirement contributions for disabled ministers, and other one-time or emergency needs. Financial assistance is also available for costs related to the higher education for children of deceased ministers and for medical insurance premiums of full-time RCA ministers involved in a new church plant. Matching grants are available for emergency needs of active RCA ministers. Missionaries with ten or more years of service and former employees of the Southern Normal School are also eligible for grants from the assistance program. (The Southern Normal School is a boarding school in Brewton, Alabama, operated by the RCA for 86 years.)

This need for assistance is established through a formal assistance application that documents income and expenses of the applicant. The assistance program provided monthly grants to 35 recipients in 2021 and is providing monthly grants to 41 recipients in 2022. Due to the high costs of food and gasoline, we are evaluating the needs of each recipient with the hope of providing additional financial relief during 2022.

Recipients of assistance are required to submit an updated application annually. Mornier

Rich, coordinator of retiree chaplains and assistance programs, leads the review and grant award process, assisted by Feifei Liu and Kelly Oliveira. Applications are distributed and reviewed throughout the year as new financial needs are presented; grants are awarded when needed.

Each year, grant recipients express their gratitude with notes of thanks to the BOBS staff. The needs of our retirees are real, and the dollars we are able to give make a difference.

- One retiree thanked the board for its prayers, its concern for retirees, and the monthly financial support that helps them to meet their needs.
- A surviving spouse who celebrated her 99th birthday in November 2021 thanked the board for the monthly financial assistance and for its care of widows.
- Another surviving spouse wrote, "Thank you for the grant. My husband served as a pastor in the RCA for over 40 years and loved the denomination, and I continue to feel the care and support from the RCA even after his death."

The assistance program is funded through three sources: endowment earnings, assessments, and contributions.

1. **Endowments**:
   - **ERISA Insurance Endowment Fund Policy**: A board-restricted endowment fund has been established with the reserves from the medical plan that was managed by the Board of Benefits Services. Earnings from this endowment fund the retiree chaplains program and assistance fund.
   - **Ed and Luella Mulder Pastor Assistance Fund**: This fund was established by the Mulders to support the financial needs of retirees and their spouses or of surviving spouses. Only the earnings are being distributed to the assistance fund.
   - **Frank Williams Fund**: This endowment specifies that the interest shall only be used to aid ministers who have special emergency needs. This has traditionally been used to provide assistance to active RCA ministers on a matching-funds basis with the consistory, other RCA employer, or classis of membership.
   - **Stillwell Trust**: The interest can only be used to fund the assistance program. Beginning in 2017, the earnings are being distributed to the assistance fund.
   - **Restricted legacies and assistance funds**: These are board-restricted funds to be used for assistance. In 2017, the Children's Fund (formerly the Orphans' Fund) was rolled into the assistance fund, expanding the coverage to include the provision of higher education grants for dependent children of deceased RCA ministers of Word and sacrament.
   - **Van Brunt Trust**: The distributions from this trust are made each quarter to the assistance fund.
2. **Assessments**: In 2021, assessments designated for the assistance fund were $2.00 per member.
3. **Contributions**: Any donation to BOBS that is not specified for another fund is deposited into the assistance program fund.

We are grateful for the many donors who give to the assistance fund each year and to General Synod, which has annually approved a portion of assessments that is specifically designated to care for retirees.

Well-being and Education

To address the emotional well-being of pastors, BOBS has contracted with Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services to provide free, confidential, short-term Christian counseling services through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The RCA utilization rate has averaged 7.8 percent over the past two years, which is almost 4 percent higher than the average utilization rate of 3 percent. Our contract includes an expanded network of providers so that pastors and their families can seek services in their community. Eligible clergy and their households also have access to a 24-hour phone line to explore their concerns with MSW or PhD counselors. If needed, clergy and members of their household are entitled to up to three face-to-face consultations per problem. In addition, clergy have access to assessments, articles, videos, templates for legal forms, and training via an online tool. More information can be found at www.rca.org/benefits/employee-assistance-program. The EAP is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. To receive services, call 833-244-2490 and identify yourself as a RCA member.

The Ministerial Excellence Fund was created to reduce or eliminate ministers' personal debt and to give them a jump-start toward long-term financial health. Through grants from Lilly Endowment Inc., matching funds from BOBS, and funds from individual donations, BOBS is giving $1.5 million over a three-year period to eliminate clergy debt. The Lilly Endowment Inc. believes that financial burdens carried by pastoral leaders are significant barriers to effective, faithful, and fruitful ministry. Through this process, grant recipients are expected to disclose their financial situation, agree to financial counseling, meet regularly with an accountability partner, and participate in a financial educational program. We hope, through this grant program, that financially struggling clergy will be given the tools to become financially healthy clergy, and the impact will be that both pastors and their congregations thrive. The RCA website has information about the grant program:

- www.rca.org/ministerial-excellence-fund
- www.rca.org/news/ministerial-excellence-fund-offers-debt-relief

The third annual Bless Your Pastor campaign was especially successful. In 2021, BOBS encouraged every church to take a special offering to give to their pastor in October, November, or December. As an extension of the Ministerial Excellence Fund, BOBS provided a matching grant of up to $2,000 to be paid toward student loans or medical bills if the special offering was used to pay down personal debt. We also encouraged ministers to take this opportunity to invest in themselves—to use their own money to match the grant, even if their congregation did not participate. Finally, BOBS offered a $100 Amazon gift card to the pastors of the first 20 churches that participated and collected a special offering for their pastor. The best traction this year came when pastors were invited to contribute their own funds and BOBS matched those contributions. It created a feeling of empowerment and progress as pastors worked toward financial freedom.

We received a Phase III grant of over $800,000 from Lilly Endowment Inc. for continued work on the National Initiative to Address Economic Challenges Facing Pastoral Leaders. In preparation for writing the grant proposal, BOBS interviewed clergy and leaders from across the denomination. It was clear that there is a potential crisis in clergy burnout and that ministers do not have the economic resources to invest in self-care and personal renewal. Beyond bolstering the Ministerial Excellence Fund, the main initiative of this grant was for BOBS to partner with local churches to provide clergy with a two- to three-week paid leave for restoration and renewal. BOBS granted over 100 Clergy Revitalization Grants of up to $3,000 each, where ministers will participate in a revitalization experience coupled with professional counseling or coaching.

Through our partnership with Everence Financial, clergy can participate in a seven-part financial planning process with a team of Everence Certified Financial Planners. They address cash flow, protections, taxes, investing, estate planning, retirement, and charitable giving. This yearlong experience costs $1,500 per pastor. BOBS was able to subsidize half of that cost with the grant from the Lilly Endowment, and half of the remainder is subsidized by funds raised from classes, bringing the final cost to only $375 for ministers. BOBS appreciates the quality of this service and has noticed that new participants are enrolling because of the positive word of mouth from those who have already participated.

BOBS maintains a partnership with LSS Financial Counseling to provide pastors with a free service that focuses on creating a budget, debt consolidation, student loan management, and improving credit scores. This service is not only available to our pastors, but is also available to anyone in their household. Each person who utilizes the service gets up to six sessions with a certified financial counselor. Due to a change in federal policy, a student loan forgiveness program has been extended to clergy and others who work for a nonprofit organization. Because this has significant potential for our clergy, BOBS expanded our contract with LSS Financial to cover all RCA ministers, commissioned pastors, seminary students, GSC staff, and their households. They will be able to consult with a professional from LSS Financial to navigate the student loan forgiveness program. These programs are free for those who participate because BOBS is able to cover the cost for this service through the Economic Challenges Facing Pastoral Leaders (ECFPL) Phase II Lilly Endowment Inc. grant.

A communication strategy is being executed with the goal of making the Board of Benefits Services a trusted, go-to resource for RCA pastors to obtain benefit and financial information specific to clergy in a way that is straightforward and easy to understand. We hope this leads to a relationship where pastors feel that the denomination provides support to them—especially when it comes to the uniqueness of clergy compensation, clergy taxes, and housing allowance. To implement this goal, BOBS will slowly move from outsourcing financial wellness resources to developing more content and opportunities in-house. This will be a mix of written content, videos, online workshops, and in-person events. BOBS will lean on expertise from trusted partners like Fidelity, the Reformed Benefits Association, Everence, LSS Financial, and others as we bring together the experts and make them available to our participants.

BOBS created a process for welcoming and orienting newly ordained ministers of Word and sacrament in 2020 and has built upon it by educating newly ordained ministers on the enrollment process into the RCA 403(b) Retirement Program. Upon receipt of a blue form from a classis clerk indicating that a minister has been ordained, BOBS sends the newly ordained minister a welcome email. Included in the email is an invitation for a Zoom meeting with retirement and financial education coordinator Billy Norden. Most newly ordained ministers accept the invitation and spend time learning about the benefits promised to them in the *Book of Church Order* and the services provided by BOBS. This process now includes an opportunity for the new minister to complete their enrollment with Fidelity and receive support from BOBS staff to help navigate the process. They also receive an easy-to-understand summary of their benefits in a packet sent by the general secretary. This summary and conversation are intended to identify any misunderstandings that the newly ordained minister might have and to help them be grounded in their benefits knowledge early in their ministry. We feel confident that when ministers enter the ministry talking about and understanding their benefits, finances, and retirement plans, they will be better prepared financially for their own retirement and be more equipped to lead their congregations in financial discussions and generosity.

The BOBS website (www.rca.org/benefits) has been enhanced with new resources that help participants understand how to navigate their insurance and retirement plans. Ministers, lay people, and employers can access the website to find forms, plan documents, policies, and educational materials. The most recent website enhancement was the addition of informational videos that present ideas about how to prepare for retirement and an easy-to-understand explanation about the retirement plan functions of BOBS and Fidelity. Classis and regional synod stated clerks have expressed gratitude for the webpage that details how leaving the RCA affects benefits (www.rca.org/leaving). The next phase of website improvements will be an overhaul of the employers page. BOBS is putting together a focus group of church administrators that represents the geographical diversity of the RCA to help us create an employers page that will best meet the needs of our churches.

The Board of Benefits Services newsletter has a blend of critical information about our retirement and insurance plans, regular communication about clergy who have passed away, and financial health articles written specifically for clergy. In November 2021, BOBS changed the frequency and length of our newsletter. Readers receive a monthly newsletter with less content rather than a longer, quarterly newsletter. Recognizing that clergy finance and church finance are interwoven with one another, BOBS continues to provide articles that relate to both personal finance for clergy as well as leadership topics about congregational stewardship and generosity. These articles are featured in BOBS' newsletters, on social media, on the BOBS Financial Health webpage and on Faithward.org. Articles may be viewed at www.rca.org/benefits/financial-health.

Board and Staff Transitions

The Board of Benefits Services expresses its gratitude and appreciation to Dennis Foemmel, Christian Spoor, and Robert Vander Schaaf for their faithful service as retiree chaplains. We welcome Dennis TeBeest as our newest retiree chaplain.

BOBS also thanks Dana Chapman and Joseph Laswell for their service as board members.

Finance and Annual Audit

Please see the report of the Office of Finance on pages 42-53 to review BOBS' finances and annual audit.

Re-domiciling Corporation in Michigan

General Synod 2019 approved the articles of incorporation and the bylaws of The Board of Benefits Services of the Reformed Church in America, Inc., a Michigan nonprofit corporation. As a result, a new corporation was established and vendor contracts, agreements, and assets were transferred effective January 1, 2020. January 1, 2020, also marks the time that BOBS began doing business as a Michigan nonprofit corporation.

Petitions for dissolution of the New York corporation were submitted to New York State in Spring 2021, and we have been assured that they are being processed.

BOBS will maintain office space, staff, and day-to-day operations in The Interchurch Center at 475 Riverside Drive, Suite 1606, New York, New York 10115.

Proposed Amendments to the Bylaws of The Board of Benefits Services

The bylaws of BOBS currently state that the board should consist of at least nine and

not more than seventeen directors. Four of those directors include the president and vice president of the General Synod, the moderator of the General Synod Council (GSC), and the general secretary or his or her designee. The remaining directors (at least five and no more than thirteen) are "directors-at-large." In recent years, the board has found that a smaller board has been a more engaged and productive board. While the number of people serving as directors-at-large has been decreased, representation of the General Synod and the GSC through the president, vice president, moderator, and general secretary has not decreased proportionately. Additionally, in order to effectively do its work, the board's composition must include professionals in investments, insurance, retirement, and law. The board needs two representatives with professional investment or retirement experience to serve on the Investment Advisory Committee, one representative with medical or health care benefit experience to serve on the board of trustees of the Reformed Benefits Association, and one qualified representative to serve on the audit committee. While clergy representation is also important, it would be more helpful to have clergy who are knowledgeable in the work of the board than clergy who are identified for service on the basis of their status as such.

In addition, at its March 10, 2022, meeting, the board of directors of BOBS discussed proposed revisions to Section 3.3 (Number and Term of Directors), Section 5.2 (President), and Article VI (Committees) that would provide greater flexibility for BOBS committees and BOBS' participation on committees, in working groups, or in similar groups that are intended to benefit multiple agencies in the RCA.

At its March 10, 2022, meeting the board of directors of BOBS concluded that its bylaws should be amended. Its bylaws provide that they "may be amended by the General Synod by a majority vote of those present and voting at any regularly constituted meeting, provided that the proposed amendment has been submitted in writing to the Board of Directors of [BOBS] for its consideration at least three calendar months before the meeting of the General Synod in order that the Board may be able to present its views on the matter" (BOBS Bylaws, Section 8.3).

Accordingly, pursuant to Section 8.3 of its bylaws, and having had an opportunity to present its views on the matter during its March 2022 meeting, BOBS makes the following recommendation to the General Synod:

BBS 22-1
To adopt the following amendments to the Bylaws of The Board of Benefits Services of the Reformed Church in America, Inc., a Michigan nonprofit membership corporation (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

Section 3.3 Number and Term of Directors. The board consists of at least eight (8)~~nine (9)~~ and not more than sixteen (16)~~seventeen (17)~~ directors. The composition of the board shall be as follows: one person designated by the General Synod Council from among its moderator or the president or~~and~~ vice president of the General Synod, ~~the moderator of the General Synod Council,~~ the general secretary of the General Synod or his or her designee, one member of the General Synod Council with interest and experience in the work of The Board of Benefits Services designated

by the General Synod Council from among its members, and at least five (5) and no more than thirteen (13) directors-at-large who shall be nominated and elected in the manner set forth in *BCO* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 4 (as it may be amended from time to time). Eligibility for each at-large director, method for election and/or appointment (including the filling of vacancies for any reason), and the term of office shall be as provided for General Synod agencies in the *BCO*. The terms of office on the board of directors of the corporation for the member of the General Synod Council shall be limited to his or her term of service as such member, and of the general secretary of the General Synod shall be limited to his or her term of service as such general secretary. The Commission on Nominations (as defined in the *BCO)* should strive to assure that no more than one third of the at-large director terms expire annually. The at-large directors shall have such experience, qualifications, and professional backgrounds as are necessary or appropriate to ensure that the board of directors is properly equipped to monitor the performance of the Executive Director and effectively represent the various constituencies in the Reformed Church in America that have an interest in the proper and effective functioning of the corporation, and may include one or more ordained ministers, dependents of ordained ministers or employees of institutions or agencies of the Reformed Church in America who are participants in the plans and programs that are managed and administered by the corporation at the date of their nomination. No more than one half of the board of directors shall be ordained ministers or dependents of ordained ministers or employees of institutions or agencies of the Reformed Church in America. The general secretary shall use every opportunity to bring the work of the corporation before the Reformed Church in America.

Section 5.2 President. The President must be a member of the board of directors. The President presides over all board meetings, and performs such other duties as are usually required of that officer or as may be requested by the board. The President or his or her designee shall be a member or ex-officio member of all committees of the board, with such rights, responsibilities and privileges as may be established at the time of formation of the committee.

ARTICLE VI
COMMITTEES
The board may create committees from time to time. ~~All committee chairs must be directors.~~ With or without cause, the board may at any time disband any committee, including any executive committee, or remove any committee member.

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance was to amend BBS 22-1 as follows (additions are underlined twice; deletions are stricken twice).

Section 3.3 Number and Term of Directors. The board consists of at least eight (8)~~nine (9)~~ and not more than sixteen (16)~~seventeen (17)~~ directors. The composition of the board shall be as follows: ~~one person designated by the General Synod Council from among its moderator or the president or~~and vice president of the General Synod, ~~the moderator of the General Synod Council,~~ the general secretary of the General Synod or his or her designee, one member of the General Synod Council with interest and experience in the work of The Board of Benefits Services designated by the General Synod Council from among its members, one person designated by the General Synod Council from among its moderator or the president or vice president of the General Synod, and at least five (5) and no more than thirteen (13) directors-at-large who shall be nominated and elected in the manner set forth in *BCO* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 4 (as it may be amended from time to time)…

VOTED: To adopt the amendment to BBS 22-1.

VOTED: To adopt BBS 22-1 as amended.

The final text of BBS 22-1 as amended and adopted reads as follows:

BBS 22-1
To adopt the following amendments to the Bylaws of The Board of Benefits Services of the Reformed Church in America, Inc., a Michigan nonprofit membership corporation (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

Section 3.3 Number and Term of Directors. **The board consists of at least eight (8)~~nine (9)~~ and not more than sixteen (16)~~seventeen (17)~~ directors. The composition of the board shall be as follows: ~~the president and vice president of the General Synod, the moderator of the General Synod Council,~~ the general secretary of the General Synod or his or her designee, one member of the General Synod Council with interest and experience in the work of The Board of Benefits Services designated by the General Synod Council from among its members, one person designated by the General Synod Council from among its moderator or the president or vice president of the General Synod, and at least five (5) and no more than thirteen (13) directors-at-large**

who shall be nominated and elected in the manner set forth in *BCO* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 4 (as it may be amended from time to time). Eligibility for each at-large director, method for election and/or appointment (including the filling of vacancies for any reason), and the term of office shall be as provided for General Synod agencies in the *BCO*. The terms of office on the board of directors of the corporation for the member of the General Synod Council shall be limited to his or her term of service as such member, and of the general secretary of the General Synod shall be limited to his or her term of service as such general secretary. The Commission on Nominations (as defined in the *BCO)* should strive to assure that no more than one third of the at-large director terms expire annually. The at-large directors shall have such experience, qualifications, and professional backgrounds as are necessary or appropriate to ensure that the board of directors is properly equipped to monitor the performance of the Executive Director and effectively represent the various constituencies in the Reformed Church in America that have an interest in the proper and effective functioning of the corporation, and may include one or more ordained ministers, dependents of ordained ministers or employees of institutions or agencies of the Reformed Church in America who are participants in the plans and programs that are managed and administered by the corporation at the date of their nomination. No more than one half of the board of directors shall be ordained ministers or dependents of ordained ministers or employees of institutions or agencies of the Reformed Church in America. The general secretary shall use every opportunity to bring the work of the corporation before the Reformed Church in America.

***Section 5.2 President*. The President must be a member of the board of directors. The President presides over all board meetings, and performs such other duties as are usually required of that officer or as may be requested by the board. The President or his or her designee shall be a member or ex-officio member of all committees of the board, with such rights, responsibilities and privileges as may be established at the time of formation of the committee.**

ARTICLE VI
COMMITTEES

The board may create committees from time to time. ~~All committee chairs must be directors.~~ With or without cause, the board may at any time disband any committee, including any executive committee, or remove any committee member. (ADOPTED)

Report of the Commission on Christian Action

The *Book of Church Order* states that "the commission shall inform and advise the church concerning current social issues and the scriptural and Christian principles by which critical evaluation may be exercised on those issues and proper action taken" (Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 2b [2021 edition, pp. 113-114]).

The Commission on Christian Action (CCA) takes seriously its role of calling the church to faithful and persistent witness and action in the world and so exhorts the church to "not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith" (Galatians 6:9-10).

Assigned Work from General Synod 2021

The Classis of Rockland-Westchester overtured the 2021 General Synod to increase the RCA's presence in international organizations. In response to this overture, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business brought forth 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"' (*MGS 2021*, ONB 21-6, p. 115). ONB 21-6 was approved by the 2021 General Synod. The reasoning included examples such as seeking membership or representation in UNICEF, the World Bank, and the World Health Organization.

Members of the Commissions on Christian Unity and Christian Action met to determine how we could proceed with this request. Those members thought it would be prudent to speak with the ecumenical officers of our Formula of Agreement partners, along with Rev. Doug Leonard, the World Council of Churches representative to the United Nations. Without exception, the advice we received was that gaining independent RCA representation in any of these bodies was unlikely (if not impossible), and the best course of action for increasing the RCA's voice in organizations such as these is to engage with the World Council of Churches, a body which already has representation in the United Nations and of which the RCA is a member. It was determined there was no possible further action at this time.

The Opioid Crisis in the United States and Canada

In 2021, the estimated number of deaths in the United States directly attributable to opioid overdose rose to 75,673.[4] In Canada, nearly 19 opioid-related deaths occurred *per day* over the first 6 months of 2021.[5] While the church may not be directly responsible for the prevalence of opioid abuse in North America, the CCA believes it is incumbent on all Christians to provide help and access to resources for those struggling with opioids and other addictions. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Center for Faith and Opportunity Initiatives has a resource titled "The Opioid Crisis Practical Toolkit: Helping Faith-Based and Community Leaders Bring Hope and Healing" that provides practical guidelines for congregations to start or advance an action plan to meet the needs

[4] CDC National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed March 1, 2022, https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs_press_releases/2021/20211117.htm.

[5] "Opioid and Stimulant Related Harms in Canada," The Public Health Agency of Canada, accessed March 1, 2022, https://health-infobase.canada.ca/substance-related-harms/opioids-stimulants.

of families and individuals struggling with addiction in their own communities (www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/the-opioid-crisis-practical-toolkit.pdf). In addition, with modern advancements in medicine, such as the anti-overdose treatment Narcan (naloxone), being readily available to consumers, the Commission on Christian Action recommends the following:

CA 22-1
To urge the congregations, classes, and regional synods of the Reformed Church in America to educate themselves on the history and current state of the opioid epidemic in North America and seek to serve their communities by providing resources and keeping at least one dose of emergency treatment options such as Narcan (naloxone) on hand at all times; and further,

To instruct the general secretary to distribute the document "The Opioid Crisis Practical Toolkit: Helping Faith-Based and Community Leaders Bring Hope and Healing" from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to classes and congregations of the Reformed Church in America for their study and use as a guide for logical and practical ways to serve those suffering from addiction in their communities. (ADOPTED)

Hunger and Food Justice

Nearly 1 in 5 people (about 60 million) in the United States[6] and about 1 in 28 (1.3 million) Canadians[7] rely on food pantries to supplement or completely make up their access to adequate food. This is expected to continue increasing due to the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the globally rising costs of grocery items, and shipping delays. Bread for the World notes that since 2008, nearly 175 million people have been displaced around the world due to climate crisis–related food scarcity and malnutrition.[8] In the United States, access to school lunches and adequate nutrition to sustain students during the school day is an increasing problem. While children in the United States are required to be in school, 1.54 million children cannot afford the school lunches they need during that time, totaling an average school lunch debt of $170.13 per child.[9]

As Christ followers, the Commission on Christian Action believes it is imperative that the Reformed Church in America seek to live into the words of Christ in Matthew 25:35a: "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink." To help feed God's children in our regions, the Commission on Christian Action makes the following recommendations:

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6 "Feeding America Estimates at Least 60 Million People Turned to Charitable Food Assistance in 2020," Feeding America, accessed March 2, 2022, https://www.feedingamerica.org/about-us/press-room/60-million-turned-to-charitable-food-2020

7 "Hunger Count 2021," Food Banks Canada/Banques aliementaires Canada, accessed March 3, 2022, https://hungercount.foodbankscanada.ca.

8 "How to End Hunger," Bread for the World, accessed March 1, 2022, https://www.bread.org/climate-change

9 "School Lunch Debt," Education Data, accessed February 28, 2022, https://educationdata.org/school-lunch-debt.

CA 22-2

To include a question on the annual Consistorial Report Form (CRF) regarding whether each congregation offers a food pantry or other hunger program; and further,

To direct GSC staff to use this information to create and maintain a database on the RCA website of hunger and food programs in RCA congregations.

A motion was made and supported from the floor to amend CA 22-2 as follows (additions are underlined):

To include a question on the annual Consistorial Report Form (CRF) regarding whether each congregation offers or supports a food pantry or other local hunger program, and whether each congregation is engaged in advocacy for food justice; and further,

To direct GSC staff to use this information to create and maintain a database on the RCA website of hunger and food programs in or supported by RCA congregations.

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

VOTED: To cease debate.

VOTED: To amend CA 22-2.

VOTED: To adopt CA 22-2 as amended.

The final version of CA 22-2 as amended and adopted reads as follows:

CA 22-2
To include a question on the annual Consistorial Report Form (CRF) regarding whether each congregation offers or supports a food pantry or other local hunger program, and whether each congregation is engaged in advocacy for food justice; and further,

To direct GSC staff to use this information to create and maintain a database on the RCA website of hunger and food programs in or supported by RCA congregations.
(ADOPTED)

CA 22-3
To direct the general secretary to encourage congregations to take action regarding food justice, including but not limited to:

1. Developing programs in conjunction with local school districts to provide food or grocery essentials to lower-income students and families on weekends and during holiday breaks and summers.
2. Holding a Sunday offering at least once annually for those items most needed by their local or regional

food banks, including necessary items not eligible for purchase with food stamps (*i.e.,* menstruation sanitary products, toilet tissue, soap, etc.).
3. Holding a separate financial offering, at least once annually, to help pay off or reduce the amount of school lunch debt held by students in their local public schools or in the nearest school in which there are students with school lunch debt.

A motion was made and supported to amend CA 22-3 as follows (additions are underlined):

. . . with school lunch debt.
4. Supporting and engaging with Bread for the World as "Covenant Churches" for local, national, and international political advocacy to address structural food justice issues.

VOTED: To amend CA 22-3.

VOTED: To adopt CA 22-3 as amended.

The final version of CA 22-3 as amended and adopted reads as follows:

CA 22-3
To direct the general secretary to encourage congregations to take action regarding food justice, including but not limited to:

1. **Developing programs in conjunction with local school districts to provide food or grocery essentials to lower-income students and families on weekends and during holiday breaks and summers.**
2. **Holding a Sunday offering at least once annually for those items most needed by their local or regional food banks, including necessary items not eligible for purchase with food stamps (*i.e.,* menstruation sanitary products, toilet tissue, soap, etc.).**
3. **Holding a separate financial offering, at least once annually, to help pay off or reduce the amount of school lunch debt held by students in their local public schools or in the nearest school in which there are students with school lunch debt.**
4. **Supporting and engaging with Bread for the World as "Covenant Churches" for local, national and international political advocacy to address structural food justice issues. (ADOPTED)**

Disability Access

With each passing year, the buildings of RCA churches and offices get older and more out of date. It's not uncommon for church buildings of a certain age to have inadequate facilities for those with disabilities, whether it be stairless access for those with mobility

difficulties, accessible restrooms, hearing loops for those with partial or near-total hearing loss, access to braille or large print signage for those with impaired vision, etc. One in five people in the U.S. and Canada lives with a disability, visible or invisible, and churches with finite budgets are not always able to adequately provide the necessary updates or repairs to welcome all who desire to participate in person in a church's ministries. Religious organizations in the United States have limited legal obligation under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)[10] but that doesn't mean they don't have a scriptural obligation. Jesus regularly interacted with people with disabilities, healing or curing many along the way, and never denying them access to him or the Word. We see this clearly in Mark 2:1-5, where a paralyzed man in Capernaum is unable to reach Jesus, and his friends go to extraordinary lengths to get him there (eventually cutting a hole in the roof and lowering their friend to be healed by Christ!).

In conversation with both the interim director of the Church Growth Fund (CGF) and the RCA's coordinator for Disability Concerns, members of the Commission on Christian Action learned that a rough estimate of about 70 percent of RCA congregations wouldn't be compliant with the ADA if they were required to be. We also learned that the Church Growth Fund offers a loan program for accessibility building projects at a reduced interest rate[11] and there is currently a Flourishing Churches Grant program that offers grants of up to $50,000 to congregations. While these funds could be used for accessibility building projects, they're limited and carry strict parameters.

Efforts over the years by the coordinator for Disability Concerns to create a permanent endowed fund (solely for the purpose of offering grants, interest free, to congregations seeking to make these accessibility updates in their buildings) have gone unrealized. A grant funded with a seed gift or gifts totaling about $50,000 is estimated to be necessary to start a fund that could become viable and sustainable enough be used for this purpose—and would not be contingent on the restrictions or parameters the other options have. While the CCA celebrates the opportunities that will be provided through the existing Flourishing Churches Grants and CGF programs, we recognize that these could leave out a significant population of the RCA. If Jesus had said "only those who can afford to pay me back with low interest, or those who can meet certain success metrics are eligible for access to me," the story of the man in Capernaum would likely be very different.

The CCA is therefore asking the General Synod to direct the creation of a contribution-based fund that would provide grant funding for congregations that need financial assistance to improve the accessibility of their facilities and for whom existing grant and loan programs may be out of reach. Once this fund is set up, churches and individuals could make donations and estate gifts could be sought to help grow a fund that is specifically designated to help congregations make needed accessibility improvements.

The Disability Concerns section of the RCA website currently lists "8 themes in faith and disability: becoming a church of belonging for people with disabilities."[12] These themes provide an excellent resource for congregations and church leaders to begin learning what life is like for those who navigate the world and our churches while living with disabilities. One of these eight themes is "removing barriers." This section says, "addressing the

[10] Veronica Rose, "Churches and Handicapped Accessibility Requirements," The National Organization on Disability, https://www.cga.ct.gov/2006/rpt/2006-R-0756.htm. December 8, 2006.

[11] "Affordable Loans for Churches," Reformed Church in America, accessed March 1, 2022, www.rca.org/church-growth-fund/church-loans.

[12] "8 Themes in Faith and Disability," Reformed Church in America, accessed March 4, 2022, www.rca.org/equipping-congregations/disability/8-themes-in-faith-and-disability.

barriers that hinder persons living with various impairments in their day to day lives paves the way for greater participation." Removing these barriers in a way that allows ALL congregations access to funds and ALL congregants access to church facilities is the CCA's goal.

With this goal in mind, the Commission on Christian Action offers the following recommendations:

CA 22-4
To instruct the general secretary to create a contribution-based fund for use by the Office of Disability Concerns for the purpose of providing grants to congregations for accessibility improvements; and further,

To instruct the general secretary to report back to the Commission on Christian Action and the General Synod of 2024 regarding the state of the fund. (ADOPTED)

CA 22-5
To add a question to the annual Consistorial Report Form that asks congregations to identify barriers in their facilities and how they are working to improve accessibility and their hospitality to people with a variety of disabilities.

A motion was made and supported to amend CA 22-5 as follows (additions are underlined):

. . . to people with a variety of <u>both physical and cognitive</u> disabilities.

VOTED: To amend CA 22-5.

VOTED: To adopt CA 22-5 as amended.

The final version of CA 22-5 as amended and adopted reads as follows:

CA 22-5
To add a question to the annual Consistorial Report Form that asks congregations to identify barriers in their facilities and how they are working to improve accessibility and their hospitality to people with a variety of both physical and cognitive disabilities. (ADOPTED)

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Church

Given the long-term divisions in the RCA relating to human sexuality that have recently culminated in the formation of the RCA Restructuring Team, the CCA has been cautious in offering recommendations on LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the RCA, noting the volatility of the topic. We cannot deny or ignore, though, that LGBTQIA+ persons are members of our churches, in our pulpits, in our denominational offices, and listening to the often-hurtful things the church says. While the church debates what is often ungenerously characterized as an "issue," we are also talking about and debating the lives of real people whom God has called "beloved."

The CCA laments the ways in which the church has been ungracious and unloving to our LGBTQIA+ siblings, even as we seek to navigate our various understandings of God's intentions for human sexuality. We also lament and reject the incorrect notion that the RCA has a "stated position" on the topic of human sexuality, when in fact the positions that have been taken are not part of the Constitution of the RCA and thus are not constitutionally binding on the narrower assemblies; rather, they are positions taken by a particular General Synod. The CCA further recognizes that while the General Synod statement of 1978 on sexuality states "the denial of human and civil rights to homosexuals is inconsistent with the biblical witness and Reformed theology,"[13] the RCA and many members of her congregations have been actively involved in denying or seeking to limit the human and civil rights of LBGTQIA+ folks (noting that "homosexual" is a relatively clinical term that is not in use as often as it was in 1978) such as same-gender marriage.

In short, the Commission on Christian Action does not find that, on the whole, the Reformed Church in America has dealt with the issues of LGBTQIA+ ordination and marriage with much sensitivity over the years, often stemming from frustration or fear. To this end, the CCA offers the following recommendation as a statement of affirmation:

> CA 22-6
> Regardless of our individual understandings of human sexuality, the RCA's General Synod, meeting at Central College in Pella, Iowa, on June 9–14, 2022, affirms the worth and human dignity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer persons as unique individuals and beloved children of God; and further,
>
> To lament the ways in which the RCA and church universal has failed to consistently recognize the worth of these persons and has often resorted to fear or frustration when speaking *about* human lives in our midst, rather than speaking *to* them with love and compassion.

A motion was made and supported to amend CA 22-6 as follows (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

> ~~Regardless of our individual understandings of human sexuality,~~ ~~t~~The RCA's General Synod, meeting at Central College in Pella, Iowa, on June 9–14, 2022, affirms the worth and human dignity of all ~~lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and~~, ~~queer~~ persons regardless of sexuality or gender, as ~~unique individuals and beloved children~~ beloved, shared image-bearers of God; and further,
>
> To lament the ways in which the RCA and church universal has failed to consistently recognize the equal worth of ~~these~~ all persons and has ~~often~~ resorted to fear or frustration when speaking about human lives in our midst, rather than speaking ~~to them~~ to all with love and compassion.

A motion was made and supported to cease debate.

VOTED: To cease debate.

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13 *MGS 1978*, p. 239.

VOTED: To amend CA 22-6.

CA 22-6 as amended was before the house. It reads as follows:

> The RCA's General Synod, meeting at Central College in Pella, Iowa, on June 9-14, 2022, affirms the worth and human dignity of all persons, regardless of sexuality or gender, as beloved, shared image-bearers of God; and further,
>
> To lament the ways in which the RCA and church universal has failed to consistently recognize the equal worth of all persons and has resorted to fear or frustration when speaking about human lives in our midst, rather than speaking to all with love and compassion.

A motion was made and supported to amend CA 22-6 as follows (additions are underlined):

> . . . rather than speaking to all with love and compassion. <u>Specifically, we acknowledge and lament the harms experienced by LGBTQ persons, whom we embrace as children of God who are welcome in the RCA.</u>

VOTED: To amend CA 22-6.

CA 22-6 as twice amended was before the house.

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

VOTED: To cease debate.

VOTED: To adopt CA 22-6 as twice amended.

The final version of CA 22-6 as amended and adopted reads as follows:

> **CA 22-6**
> **The RCA's General Synod, meeting at Central College in Pella, Iowa, on June 9-14, 2022, affirms the worth and human dignity of all persons, regardless of sexuality or gender, as beloved, shared image-bearers of God; and further,**
>
> **To lament the ways in which the RCA and church universal has failed to consistently recognize the equal worth of all persons and has resorted to fear or frustration when speaking about human lives in our midst, rather than speaking to all with love and compassion. Specifically, we acknowledge and lament the harms experienced by LGBTQ persons, whom we embrace as children of God who are welcome in the RCA. (ADOPTED)**

Areas of Continuing Concern

The Commission on Christian Action regularly studies and reports on a broad variety of topics, many of which we make recommendations on. Below are the issue areas the CCA is continuing to study and seeking to understand how we can encourage the church to take action.

Income Inequality and Environmental Justice

The CCA has been concerned with the ways in which lower socio-economic communities and communities of color are disproportionately the areas in which heavily polluting industries build their factories.[14] In the United States, New Jersey is alone in having active legislation that prevents this practice[15], which is called "environmental racism" and "environmental classism" in some sources.[16] Efforts to incorporate similar laws in some Canadian provinces are underway. When this is coupled with the troubling facts that over 2 million people in the United States don't have access to clean drinking water[17], and that the air that Black, Latino/a, and Asian Americans across North America breathe is 40 percent more polluted on average than the air in predominantly white areas[18], the CCA is gravely concerned and urges the church at large to be so as well. We look forward to continuing researching this topic and presenting ideas in the near future for how the RCA may seek justice on these matters.

The CCA has also been in conversation with the denomination's chief financial officer regarding participation in an advisory meeting seeking to study how fossil fuels funds and funds generated from other environmental polluters may be added to the list of funds the RCA seeks to divest from or limit financial investment in.

Spiritual Abuse

The notion of abuse being perpetrated at the hands of the church and her leaders is something by which the CCA believes all should be horrified. While the notion of spiritual abuse is not new, it's an area of concern that researchers are uncovering more of than ever[19] and is something that affects people across a variety of spectrums: men, women, old, young, straight, queer, cisgender, transgender, elders, deacons, congregants, and pastors. The Commission on Christian Action is gathering resources on how congregations can educate themselves regarding spiritual abuse, how survivors of this abuse can seek healing and justice, and how the church can work to prevent this tragedy from escalating further.

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14 Tashauna Reid and Alice Hopton. "The movement to address environmental racism is growing. This bill could provide the data it needs," Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, March 23, 2021, accessed March 1, 2022, https://www.cbc.ca/news/science/environmental-racism-bill-c-230-1.5954082.

15 Michael S. Warren, "Landmark law to protect N.J.'s poorest communities from pollution signed by Murphy," NJ.com, September 18, 2020, accessed March 2, 2022, https://www.nj.com/news/2020/09/landmark-law-to-protect-njs-poorest-communities-from-pollution-signed-by-murphy.html.

16 "Environmental Racism and Health," Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, accessed March 1, 2022, https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/JSSHOAenvironment.pdf.

17 Closing the water gap in the United States," Dig Deep and US Alliance for Water, accessed March 3, 2022, http://uswateralliance.org/sites/uswateralliance.org/files/Closing%20the%20Water%20Access%20Gap%20in%20the%20United%20States_DIGITAL.pdf.

18 Hiroko Tabuchi and Nadja Popovich, "People of Color Breathe More Hazardous Air. The Sources are Everywhere," *The New York Times*, updated September 7, 2021, accessed March 2, 2022, www.nytimes.com/2021/04/28/climate/air-pollution-minorities.html.

19 Scot McKnight, "What is 'Spiritual' Abuse? A Working Definition," Jesus Creed/*Christianity Today*, December 2, 2020, accessed March 3, 2020, www.christianitytoday.com/scot-mcknight/2020/december/what-is-spiritual-abuse-working-definition.html.

Report of the Commission on Christian Discipleship and Education

The commission shall develop and advocate for strategies for people of all ages to be fully included in the mission and life of the RCA. –Book of Church Order (BCO), *Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 12b(1) (2021 edition, p. 121)*

Education and Discipleship During a Pandemic (reproduced from 2020–2021 report)

During the time of navigating the COVID-19 pandemic, adaptation has been a necessity. This has applied to the work of education and discipleship as well. All over the church, pastors and lay leaders have needed to find new ways to reach out to the parishioners and communities. More and more churches use technology like livestreaming and Zoom to establish new digital platforms on which to do the ongoing work of discipleship.

Many churches have even reported a significant increase in the number of people who view online services and participate in digital learning opportunities. Churches have found ways to adapt, and God has graciously used these new efforts to continue to grow the kingdom of God. Many churches also provided Bible worksheets and educational tools sent home to engage children with what they were learning in children's programming and to aid participation in online church services. Many families appreciated how the necessary adaptations created the practice of a special time and faith conversation with their kids—whether it was attending services online or talking through discussions and worksheets.

It has been an unusual year but in many ways the challenges of the pandemic have expanded many of our churches' ideas of what it means to teach and reach people of all ages and all abilities using various forms of communication. In an unexpected advantage, being online created additional accessibility for people who previously were unable to worship in church because of physical or mental barriers. Additionally, many adults appreciated being able to participate in multiple churches online, particularly the delight of hearing different services preaching on the same Scriptures taken from the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL). God was able to use our difficult situations to broaden our understanding of ministry, outreach, and inclusion in profound ways.

Now that we are beginning to see more of a return to what life looked like before the pandemic, the tendency can be to go back to what we were doing before COVID-19 as well. This would be a mistake, as it would stifle the fruit of innovation that we have seen over the past year. Rather than seeking to "return to normal," what could it look like to continue to innovate for the sake of the gospel? What could it look like to continue to learn best practices from each other?

The commission shall monitor, evaluate, and report on the RCA's progress in ministries of education and discipleship with children, youth, adults, and families. –BCO, *Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 12b(2) (2021 edition, p. 121)*

Consistorial Report Forms

In order to more effectively report on our ministries of education and discipleship, the commission has previously gained approval for contact information for a point person at each church in these areas to be requested on the annual Consistorial Report Form. Unfortunately, some of our attempts to use this data have called to our attention that

many churches are still not providing this information. Our desire is not to misuse this information or to insist on promoting some agenda. Rather, our hope is to support our churches and these individuals. This is an easy, quick thing that you can do to help the commission be able to connect with, encourage, and support your staff or volunteers who are helping with education and discipleship. We urge all churches to pay closer attention to this in the coming year, that we all might work better together.

Adult Education Opportunities

The commission is encouraged by the work being done throughout the denomination to support lay leaders in their studies around theology, church leadership, and governance. Preaching elder and commissioned pastor teaching programs, along with workshops for elders and deacons, are crucial to keeping our churches equipped with lay leadership well-versed in these areas and able to support churches in a variety of capacities and settings.

The commission shall collaborate with RCA staff, assemblies, agencies, and institutions to promote and strengthen the next generation in discipleship with RCA congregations. –BCO, *Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 12b(3) (2021 edition, p. 121)*

Next Generation Discipleship

The commission has been working this year to connect with staff member Anna Radcliffe to work cooperatively to promote next generation discipleship. Many individuals may be aware of the regular newsletters that are disseminated by Anna Radcliffe and Ruth Langkamp advocating for resources like the Growing Young cohorts and Generation Spark programs that challenge our churches to look at how we are or are not prioritizing next generation engagement in our congregations.

Of particular interest to the commission are RCA camp ministries. We have been trying to gauge the status of our camp ministries, specifically during the time of this pandemic but overall as well. We know that these ministries have been significant formation for campers and counselors and have been foundational for future engagement in congregations and even leadership. The commission is looking into ways we can better connect churches with the RCA's camp ministries going forward.

The commission shall advocate for the ongoing preparation of those who carry out the church's teaching ministry. –BCO, *Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 12b(4) (2021 edition, p. 121)*

Children's Ministries Training and Safety Resources

The commission has been in communication with staff member Shelley Henning in the area of KidMin to look more closely at how we might collaborate to provide support to our local congregations. Shelley has expertise in creating children's messages; the commission plans to collaborate with her to provide models and training for the construction of sermons packaged appropriately and accessibly for children of all ages.

The commission would also like to strongly recommend the implementation of a high-quality screening process and child abuse prevention training in all congregations. Many individual churches have done this, and others have not. The commission is working to find accessible training that can be available for all congregations.

APCE and CERCA

In February 2022, many CERCA (Christian Educators, Reformed Church in America) members were able to gather in Chicago as part of the APCE (formerly Association of Presbyterian Church Educators, now Association of Partners in Christian Education) Annual Event. Though the event was delayed for a year and was still impacted by the coronavirus pandemic, CERCA celebrated 40+1 years in existence while APCE celebrated 50+1 years. The annual event was co-chaired by Rev. Kirsty DePree with the theme of "Widening the Circle of Faith," featuring Rev. Jacqui Lewis as one of the plenary speakers.

Approximately 40 CERCA members joined in person, with more online, to remember and celebrate the past, present, and future of discipleship and education in the RCA through a meaningful workshop and celebration dinner. Scholarships were made available especially for this celebration, but every year specific monies are set aside to assist people in attending this educational event. Next year's event will be held January 25–28, 2023, in Birmingham, Alabama.

Annual CERCA Scholarship Funds

Pursuant to the action of General Synod 2019 (DE 19-2, *MGS 2019*, p. 216), the General Synod Council has created a $10,000 fund for CERCA to be used at the rate of $1,000 per year in order to provide for professional and personal growth of those working in RCA education and discipleship ministries (continuing education scholarships, expenses related to continuing education events, etc.).

Scholarships will be awarded on a biannual basis (February and August), pending applications and funds available. Applications may be submitted in advance or subsequent to educational opportunities. Preference will be given to those individuals who have not previously received monies from this fund.

To apply, complete the application and send it with a letter of support from your consistory (governing board) to Kris Woltjer (kwoltjer@rca.org). Applications can be requested from the commission.

Caring and Concern for Educators (reproduced from 2020–2021 report)
One of the many impacts of the pandemic has been a high level of fatigue and burnout among those who serve in ministry. Many pastors, educators, and youth workers are tired and weary after an extremely difficult year. Aside from the larger issues of increased cost of schooling and seminary, higher student debt, and rising health care costs,[20] clergy and youth workers often feel like they need to be working all the time and do not have time for rest, let alone a whole Sabbath. Working in ministry has never been easy, but when the world is as exhausting as it is now, those who tend to the spiritual needs of others are overwhelmed by this burden. The idea of "calling" may sometimes distort expectations of what a ministry job should feel like, the sheer number of jobs that many are performing, and how their larger community could help to alleviate burnout.

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[20] The National Association for Evangelicals found that 59 percent of pastors have no health insurance and 62 percent have no retirement fund or plan. In 2018, the average total student loan debt for a seminary graduate was $54,600. See the full report here: https://blessyourpastor.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/NAE-Research.docx.pdf.

According to Alexis, a former youth minister:

> Being a youth pastor requires more than my Biblical Studies degree. You are an event planner, a counselor, a graphic designer, a marketing team, a public speaker, and a lot more. The high turnover in youth ministry is not a secret. What I would love to see is the culture around ministry to change, because what we are doing right now isn't working. Pay your staff better. And if you can't do that, set up better systems of support for them. Acknowledge that emotional and spiritual work is still difficult, even if it looks to you like only soft skills. I felt like I had a calling. I've been told that I do by spiritual leaders I really respect. But it has been such a struggle and I so often feel like I've failed God and I've failed my kids. I wonder if maybe I was wrong about that.[21]

We have seen advocacy for churches to provide their pastors some extra time away for rest and renewal after the leadership demands of the past year. However, we really haven't seen that conversation happen when it comes to youth workers and educators. So the commission would like to give a few words of encouragement for how you can care for the youth workers and educators in your churches and communities.

First, thank them for everything they've done to lead and serve through the pandemic. Make sure they know that all that they have done has not gone unnoticed. Share stories with them of how God has used them to bless, disciple, and care for people during the pandemic. Second, give them opportunities for extra rest and renewal. This could be an extra week of vacation or the ability to attend another conference. Find ways to let them know that their personal health, physically, mentally, and spiritually, is just as important as everything that they do for your church.

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[21] For more stories of clergy dealing with burnout, see Anne Helen Peterson, "The Contours of Clergy Burnout," September 24, 2020; https://annehelen.substack.com/p/the-contours-of-clergy-burnout.

Report of the Commission on Christian Unity

The General Synod is responsible for the ecumenical relations of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) (*Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 5 [2021 edition, pp. 69-70]). In response to the full sweep of Scripture toward the unity of believers, and to fulfill its constitutional responsibility, General Synod has constituted the Commission on Christian Unity to oversee ecumenical commitments, to present an ecumenical agenda to the church, and to carry out ecumenical directives given by the General Synod. Since its creation in 1974 (*MGS 1974*, R-6, pp. 201-202) and its adoption by General Synod in 1975 (*MGS 1975*, R-4, pp. 101-102), this commission has served General Synod by coordinating a range of ecumenical involvements reaching all levels of mission in the RCA as defined by the *Book of Church Order* in this way (Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 3b [2021 edition, p. 114]):

1. The commission shall initiate and supervise action with respect to the Reformed Church in America's membership in or affiliation with ecumenical bodies.
2. It shall engage in interchurch conversations and appoint ecumenical delegates to other church bodies.
3. It shall inform the church of current ecumenical developments and advise the church concerning its ecumenical participation and relationships.

The commission also seeks to educate the RCA on ecumenical matters and advocates for actions and positions consistent with RCA confessions and ecumenical practices as outlined in "An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America," adopted by General Synod in 1996 (*MGS 1996*, R-1, p. 197). General Synod may also refer ecumenical matters to the commission for study and implementation.

RCA Ecumenical Involvement: An Overview

The RCA holds a historical commitment to active involvement in ecumenical conversation and cooperation with churches throughout North America and around the world. It is both a charter member and active supporter of historic ecumenical bodies like the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches and a driving force behind bold and needed newer ecumenical initiatives like the Global Christian Forum and Christian Churches Together. In this work, the RCA is variously represented by staff and by ministers, elders, and members—elected or appointed, paid or volunteer—who have committed both their gifts and time to promote a greater witness to the unity Christians have in Christ as they share in the witness and grace of the gospel of Jesus Christ with believers from around the corner or around the world. Periodically through the year, and especially following participation in ecumenical events or meetings, these appointees provide brief reports to the Office of the General Secretary and to the Commission on Christian Unity.

This ecumenical work the commission does on behalf of the RCA is anchored in and shaped by the direction of the whole of the RCA. In this complex and changing time for the church, in which so many, locally and globally, are trying to figure out how best to witness to the gospel of Christ, we believe deeply in our clearly stated commitment of "working with all the partners that God provides," as the RCA has spoken to the world in its framing of Transformed & Transforming. The commission is committed to advancing the work and ministry of the RCA through this commitment of partnership; moreover, the commission believes the witness and influence of the RCA can be similarly transforming the world at this point in history.

This commission assumes the task of synthesizing this material into its own comprehensive report, which it presents each year to General Synod. The first portion of the report of the commission provides an overview and summary of the RCA's formal ecumenical work worldwide through conciliar groups and its impact on the ministry and witness not only of these groups but on the work and witness of the RCA. In the second part of this report, the commission presents reasons for celebration, lament, and profession at this moment in the church's history, as the church continues to struggle with its response to Jesus's prayer "that they may all be one" (John 17:21).

World Council of Churches

The World Council of Churches (WCC) is "a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior according to the scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is a community of churches on the way to visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and in common life in Christ."

The WCC gathers its community from 352 churches in 120 countries representing over 580 million Christians worldwide. The WCC's highest legislative body, its assembly, meets approximately every seven years. Although delayed due to the pandemic, the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches will take place in Karlsruhe, Germany, from August 31 to September 8, 2022, under the theme "Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity." RCA delegates to the 11th Assembly include Rev. Eddy Alemán, Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, Rev. Carlos Corro, and Rev. Stacey Duensing Pearce. The 11th Assembly will bring together over 4,000 participants from around the world for shared worship, learning, and work.

Days before the 11th Assembly, several pre-assemblies will meet to allow deeper connection and discussion in focused areas. The themes of the pre-assemblies are Women and Men, Indigenous Peoples, People with Disabilities, and the Ecumenical Youth Gathering. Rev. Stacey Duensing Pearce has served the denomination on the planning committee for the Ecumenical Youth Gathering Pre-Assembly as the chair for Spiritual Life. She serves in the role on behalf of the Global Christian Forum.

The Central Committee is the continuing body that implements WCC policies enacted at the assemblies, reviews and approves programs, establishes the budget and secures financial support, and generally oversees the work of the WCC between assemblies. Rev. Eddy Alemán serves on the Central Committee, continuing the unbroken line of general secretaries of the RCA serving the WCC in this capacity.

Rev. Dr. Ioan Sauca, a priest of the Orthodox Church in Romania, serves as the acting general secretary of the WCC until the end of December 2022.

For more information on the work and mission of the WCC, go to www.oikoumene.org.

World Communion of Reformed Churches

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Reformed Ecumenical Council merged to form the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in June 2010. The RCA was a charter member of the former WARC and enthusiastically worked to support the coming together of these two ecumenical bodies into one. This renewed fellowship of Reformed, Presbyterian, Congregational, Waldensian, United, and Uniting churches is a network of 230 Protestant churches in 108 countries, with a combined estimated membership of 100 million people.

The 26th General Council of the WCRC took place in June 2017 in Leipzig, Germany, with the theme "Living God, Renew and Transform Us." The council dealt with issues of justice, church unity, and world renewal. More than 1,000 delegates, observers, staff, and invited guests gathered in Leipzig, making it the largest international ecclesial event in Germany during the Reformation Jubilee (commemorating 500 years since Martin Luther ignited the Reformation). During the General Council, the WCRC associated with the "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification," a document forged between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation, which has since also been affirmed by the World Methodist Council. Additionally, the council celebrated the signing of the "Wittenberg Witness," a document crafted between the WCRC and the Lutheran World Federation that expresses a commitment to Christian unity as Reformed and Lutheran Christians live and work together to further a common Christian witness to a broken and troubled world.

The WCRC is "called to communion and committed to justice." Through robust engagement with the Word of God and the call of the Holy Spirit, the WCRC is always being transformed as it strives for the full and just participation of all. In its diversity, the WCRC seeks to be a living expression of "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). As a global koinonia, the communion is marked by discerning, confessing, witnessing, and being reformed together. With all the partners God provides, the WCRC works for the transformation of the whole world, so that all humanity and the whole of creation might live life in its fullness (Deuteronomy 30:19; John 10:10).

The WCRC may be best known worldwide for the Accra Confession, a groundbreaking statement issued at the General Council held in Accra, Ghana, in 2004, declaring that Christians are called by biblical teachings to be advocates of social, economic, and ecological justice. The text of the Accra Confession can be found at wcrc.ch/accra.

The WCRC is in an interim period of discernment following the conclusion of Chris Ferguson's term as general secretary on August 31, 2021. Three executives—Hanns Lessing (Evangelical Church of Westphalia), Philip Vinod Peacock (Church of North India), and Phil Tanis (Reformed Church in America)—are currently sharing the responsibilities of the position of general secretary while determining the long-term financial sustainability of the organization. The commission wishes to thank Phil Tanis for continuing to provide leadership in the areas of communication and operations within this new role.

For more information on the WCRC and its work, go to www.wcrc.ch.

Global Christian Forum

The Global Christian Forum (GCF) embraces a new form of worldwide ecumenical dialogue drawing for the first time world leaders from Evangelical, historic Protestant, Orthodox, Pentecostal, Catholic, and African Instituted churches into a new place of relational, rather than structural, fellowship. Begun quietly in the 1990s, with RCA involvement from the very beginning, it is responding to the rapid shift in global Christianity marked by new vitality and growth in the churches in the Global South, often in Pentecostal and Evangelical expressions that have no links to broader ecumenical bodies. From the start, the WCC, the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the World Evangelical Alliance, the Pentecostal World Fellowship, and others have been supportive of the GCF's work.

The Guiding Purpose Statement of the Global Christian Forum is "to create an open space wherein representatives from a broad range of Christian churches and inter-church

organizations, which confess the triune God and Jesus Christ as perfect in His divinity and humanity, can gather to foster mutual respect, to explore and address together common challenges." On February 22–23, 2022, the Global Christian Forum's International Committee (its governing board) met in Rome, with some guests joining online. The committee shared faith stories, heard from global speakers, conducted GCF business, and spent time planning for the next Global Gathering of the GCF, planned for April 15–19, 2024. Rev. Dr. Casely Essamuah, an ordained minister in the Methodist Church, Ghana, serves as the secretary of the Global Christian Forum.

Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary emeritus of the RCA, serves on the GCF Committee and its Facilitation Group (the executive committee). Rev. Stacey Duensing Pearce serves as a youth delegate to the extended Facilitation Group.

For more information on the Global Christian Forum, visit www.globalchristianforum.org.

National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA

Since its founding in 1950, the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC) has been a visible presence for ecumenical cooperation among Christians in the United States. The 37 member communions—from a wide spectrum of Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox, Evangelical, historic African American, and Living Peace churches—include over 40 million persons in more than 100,000 local congregations across the nation. The RCA was a charter member of the NCC, and our general secretary, the Rev. Eddy Alemán, serves on its governing board. The RCA is also represented on the NCC's Convening Tables on Interreligious Relations, Christian Education, Faith Formation and Leadership, and Faith and Order. Among others, the commission would like to acknowledge the work of Kitt Jackson, Jeff Lampen, and Rev. Laura Osborne at these Convening Tables.

For the past eight years, James Winkler has been the president/general secretary of the NCC. Under his leadership, the NCC continued to offer an important witness to the power of a shared voice among Christians. The NCC recently completed a project to publish an updated version of the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, the NRSVue.

As Mr. Winkler ends his last term in this position, an interim general secretary will be named while a search for new president/general secretary begins. Meanwhile, the NCC's current multi-year focus on ending racism (which began in 2018) dominated the presentations at their 2021 Christian Unity Virtual Gathering. The Faith and Order Convening Table has formed study groups around three areas related to ending racism: Awakening to the Reality of Racism as the Original Sin of the U.S.; Confronting White Supremacy as the Defining Myth of the U.S.; and Transforming the Church and Humanizing the Public Square. The NCC responds to other urgent issues as well, most recently the invasion of Ukraine.

The website of the NCC is www.nationalcouncilofchurches.us.

Christian Churches Together

Formed in 2001, Christian Churches Together (CCT) is the broadest Christian fellowship in the United States. It represents members from the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, historic Protestant, historic Black, Evangelical, and Pentecostal families of Christian churches. In addition, its membership includes national organizations, such as Bread for the World and Sojourners. It is this mix of churches and religious organizations that makes the CCT unique among North American ecumenical organizations. One of the distinctive characteristics of CCT is its intentional focus on relationship-building and mutual understanding instead of

theological consensus–building. This feature has created the ideal context for Christians from very diverse communities, and often with very different convictions, to come together in a unique and holy manner.

At CCT's last in-person meeting (Montgomery, Alabama, in 2019), speakers and participants engaged in dialogue on the nature and purpose of the church in a culture still plagued by racism. The group prayed over historic sites in the United States' history of enslavement and toured the deeply moving Legacy Museum and lynching memorial. CCT participants also enthusiastically approved a new vision, mission, and values statement, by which they committed to three guiding principles:

1. Forging loving relationships among Christians, who are bound together by the Spirit of God through Christ Jesus (Loving Relationships)
2. Humbling ourselves and learning theologically from each other (Learning Theologically)
3. Leading Christians in the U.S. into action together that will transform the world (Leading Actions)

The CCT process (based on Loving Relationships, Learning Theologically, and Leading Actions) is a way for CCT members to commit to working together in discernment to engage in steps that lead to beloved community.

In 2020 and 2021, the annual forum moved online, addressing the theme of "Called to Do Justly, Love Mercy, and Walk Humbly" as well as the challenges produced by the pandemic and the urgency of unity in a divided world. Well-known leaders from each family group (Roman Catholic, Orthodox, historic Protestant, historic Black, Evangelical, and Pentecostal) spoke on the designated topics, led worship, and facilitated conversation across difference through Bible study and theological reflection.

Among the many benefits of participating in CCT, the annual forum serves as an opportunity to build personal relationships with people across the church to come to a more nuanced understanding of the differences and commonalities between communions, to grow together in Christ, to deepen spiritual wisdom, to identify new possibilities for a shared witness, and to act as a unified voice in speaking to contemporary culture on issues of spirituality, life, justice, and peace. The model of receptive ecumenism is foundational to this work, which means that at the CCT table, we approach the other with humility and with the goal of receiving as a gift a better understanding of each other's theologies, histories, missions, and practices. This is consonant with CCT's goal of increasing the religious literacy of Christians in the U.S.

In 2021, CCT saw a change in leadership. After eight years of faithful service to CCT, the Rev. Carlos Malavé stepped down from his position as CCT's executive director. Dr. Monica Schaap Pierce (from the Reformed Church in America), who had served on the CCT Steering Committee and as the organization's treasurer, has taken on the role of interim executive director. CCT is currently in the process of launching a national search for its next permanent director.

CCT's website (www.christianchurchestogether.org) provides additional information about its mission and activity.

The CCT portion of this report was prepared by Monica Schaap Pierce, Ph.D., interim executive director of the CCT.

Formula of Agreement Relationships

In 1997, the RCA, in conjunction with its Reformed ecumenical partners the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the United Church of Christ, approved a historic agreement with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America known as the Formula of Agreement. This landmark agreement brought the four churches—already partners in a number of ministries, both in North America and around the world—into full communion with each other.

Since that agreement, the working relationships between the churches have remained close and vibrant, if not always very public. Leaders from within the RCA have historically served in positions with the church council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and on the ecumenical committee of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). While the commission regularly looks for means of cooperation between the partner denominations, it also acknowledges that, in fact, much ecumenical work between these denominations happens at the local level, where Reformed and Lutheran congregations join in ministries of worship, education, and service. Behind the scenes, denominational staff from the respective churches, including general secretary Rev. Eddy Alemán, meet both to support each other in their respective work and to plan for possible joint historic streams of Protestant Christianity at a time when their common witness makes the gospel of Jesus Christ more available to more people in more places.

To help churches grow in mutual understanding and, in particular, to implement the Formula's provisions for the exchange of ministers at the local level, denominational staff of each of the Formula churches have produced a revised guide in "The Orderly Exchange of Ministers of Word and Sacrament" document: images.rca.org/docs/ministry/FormulaOfAgreement.pdf. We commend this resource to those classes, ministers, and consistories that are considering an exchange of ministers with other Formula churches.

Roman Catholic–Reformed Dialogue

For over 50 years, the RCA has participated in an ongoing theological dialogue with other Reformed and Roman Catholic representatives. In 2017, the Roman Catholic–Reformed consultation concluded its eighth round of dialogue. Included in the dialogue were representatives from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the United Church of Christ, the Christian Reformed Church in North America, and the RCA. The dialogue focused on ecclesiology and, in particular, on the roles of the Trinity, covenant, Word and sacrament, mission, and unity and diversity in the life of the church. The dialogue also examined ecclesial ministry and oversight and uncovered a unifying affirmation that ecclesial ministry and oversight are undertaken personally and collegially in service to the church, not just for the church's own sake, but for the sake of the world God so loves. The commission commends the report of the eighth round, titled "The One Body of Christ: Ministry in Service to the Church and the World," to churches for study. The text can be found at images.rca.org/docs/synod/TheOneBody.pdf.

The ninth round of dialogue will commence in Chicago in 2022 and will focus on the relationship between justification and justice. Representatives from the RCA include Rev. Eddy Alemán, Monica Schaap Pierce, Rev. Laura Osborne, and Mark Veldt. The prospectus for the ninth round can be found at images.rca.org/docs/synod/ProspectusNinthRound.pdf.

Action Taken in Response to General Synod 2021

The 2021 General Synod voted "to encourage the Commissions on Christian Unity and

Christian Action to explore widening the RCA's presence in non-religious national and international organizations" (*MGS 2021*, ONB 21-6, p. 115).

This action was revised from the original overture stated below.

> …to direct the General Synod Council and the general secretary, in consultation with the Commissions on Christian Unity and Christian Discipleship and Education, to appoint people to serve as the RCA representative to international organizations (*MGS 2021*, Overture 6, p. 115).

In response, the Commission on Christian Unity contacted the Commission on Christian Action to investigate together the possibility of "widening the RCA's presence in religious and national and international organizations." As a first step, our commissions reached out to our Formula of Agreement partners and inquired as to their level of involvement in such potential partner organizations. Secondly, our commissions contacted a past United Nations (UN) representative to investigate the plausibility of delegating RCA representatives to non-religious national and international organizations. While some of our Formula of Agreement partners do have offices (and therefore staff) at the UN to represent their denominations, our Formula of Agreement partners mentioned that these connections are also naturally in place through our ecumenical connections with the WCC and the WCRC. Furthermore, in reaching out to a past UN representative, our commissions learned that the process of obtaining a place or voice at an organization such as the UN requires so much time and effort that it would take the work of a full-time staff member to lobby for such a position. It is the opinion of the Commission on Christian Unity that, should the RCA desire to increase contact with non-religious organizations, the best course of action would be to continue that work through the already existing relationships of our ecumenical partners.

Blessing in a Time of Gracious Separation

Following the decision of General Synod 2021 to adopt terms that would allow for the gracious separation of congregations from the denomination, the commission recognizes the hard work of blessing and lament being done by many classes. These classes lovingly, yet sorrowfully, send congregations into denominations and networks in which it is hoped they will find what they need to live more fully and faithfully into Christ's call.

In an effort to fulfill its mandate to "engage in interchurch conversations" and "advise the church concerning its ecumenical participation and relationships," the commission encourages members of the Reformed Church in America to maintain fraternal relationships characterized by a deep and abiding love for those individuals and congregations who go out from our midst. We desire to be bridge builders rather than bridge burners.

As an example of our continuing affection for those to whom we have said goodbye, the commission recommends efforts to formulate liturgical blessings within classes to be given following classis votes to transfer congregations out of the Reformed Church in America. Additionally, the commission recommends the establishment of relationships of mutual love, support, and cooperation with denominations and networks that have welcomed congregations formerly found within the Reformed Church in America.

Response to the War in Ukraine

On February 24, 2022, shortly after the Russian invasion in Ukraine, the Commission on Christian Unity began to take steps to express our solidarity with our sisters and brothers

in Ukraine. Reflecting on experiences in Ukraine and relationships with beloved Ukrainian brothers and sisters in Christ, the commission determined the need for proactive action on the part of the RCA as it continued to engage with its partners in the area. The following relationships were noted as key to the support of the RCA for people of Ukraine:

- The Reformed Church in Hungary (Magyarországi Református Egyház) which has several member churches in Ukraine.
- Our missionaries in neighboring Hungary and Romania.
    - Doug McClintic, who is working with Hungarian Reformed Church partners to determine means by which we can support them and their churches.
    - Felipe and Janelle DeWaard-Silva, missionaries and church planters in central Romania, who are partnering with a Baptist church near the Ukrainian border to assist refugees and are willing to provide temporary housing within their facilities.
- The organizational leadership of our ecumenical partners in Europe (PC[USA], ELCA, Church World Service, etc.) as we continue to coordinate our efforts together.

Efforts are ongoing to present a united and prophetic voice against the aggressive and violent actions of the Russian government and especially against the complicit and antagonistic rhetoric of key leadership within the Russian Orthodox Church. Fearful of the encroachment of a western worldview within the milieu of the Russkiy Mir ("Russian World"), Patriarch Kirill of Moscow has emboldened the thrust of Russian forces into Ukraine in an attempt to insulate the Russian people against liberal values. This commission stands firm against the belief that such violence is an appropriate response to such fear, urging submission to the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, who reprimanded Peter for drawing his sword and striking the servant of the High Priest, saying, "Put your sword back in its place, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword" (Matthew 26:42).

REPORT OF THE INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE

Missional Mandate

The missional mandate for the work of the Interreligious Subcommittee of the Commission on Christian Unity of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America is found in the 2018 report of the Interreligious Task Force:

> The primary purpose of the church of Jesus Christ is to bear witness to God's saving grace and love in a world imbued with cultural and religious diversity. We are, in this sense, a missionary people, called by God to use our gifts in God's renewing and reconciling work in all its dimensions. This entails working with our neighbors to bring healing and hope to the many victims of poverty, injustice, and oppression while also embracing Jesus' call to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19) (*MGS 2018*, p. 92).

Where We Are and Where We Are Going

Laura Osborne was hired as coordinator for interreligious relations in June 2019. The Interreligious Subcommittee was formed in August 2019. In the fall of 2018 the recruiting for the team began.

The subcommittee met via Zoom five times in 2021. During three of the meetings, we

were joined by the Christian Reformed Church in North America's (CRCNA) Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee. We made a joint commitment to work together and share resources.

There is an urgency to share Jesus with others and to love our neighbor. With those urgencies at hand, our team is working on a few items with the team from the CRCNA:

1. A shared database of interfaith "champions" to show which locations in the U.S. and Canada have the most connections. With that information we can help resource churches that have these champions in their area and help find resources in the areas that don't.
2. Communications: We are working with the CRCNA to help create a joint website for our work to better resource churches. These resources would include but are not limited to webinars, books, curriculum and study guides, and videos.

The RCA team is working on these goals:

1. As mandated by General Synod, we have worked on the joint statement with the CRC and are tweaking it as needed.
2. Resourcing churches that are trying to connect with their neighbors of another faith and elevating the stories of churches that already are connecting.
3. Collaborating with Local Missional Engagement, refugee coordination, and other departments that intersect with other faiths to be a resource.
4. Observing how our colleges and seminaries are training the next generation of leaders in world religions. If this isn't being done or can't be done, then we can find a way to work more closely with the churches nearby to help equip students. The subcommittee is working now to add a seminary student and an undergrad student to the subcommittee.
5. Readying volunteers to help love their neighbor of another faith as they serve at home and abroad.
6. Partnering with the Al Amana Centre in Oman to help bring more groups to be trained in interfaith work, scriptural reasoning, and interfaith dialogue.

Interreligious Work in 2021

This past year brought great challenges and also deep connection. The coordinator for interreligious relations has the opportunity to work together with many people. In conjunction with the Commission on Christian Unity's Interreligious Subcommittee, work is done to connect churches and individuals to their neighbor of another faith. This takes shape in many ways: through partnerships, a rich history of interfaith work, and new initiatives.

For a fuller summary of interreligious work in 2021, please see the General Synod Council's report on Transformed & Transforming on pages 114-128.

Most of our shared interreligious work is with our CRCNA partners. There are many joint communities of practice and sharing of resources. The largest project is called Journeys into Friendship, which is a place for connection and for mutual encouragement, prayer, and learning. We work together to develop a library of resources, to invite more people to join us, to walk alongside congregations stepping into ministry with refugees, immigrants, or international students, to support church planting movements among our new neighbors,

and to promote a Reformed approach to interfaith dialogue that balances openness with an authentic witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Along with our other ecumenical partners, Rev. Laura Osborne serves on the steering committee for Shoulder to Shoulder, our strategic partners in countering discrimination and violence against Muslims.

Working with folks from other faiths is such a blessing, though such relationships can be tricky to navigate. We start in different places with regard to faith but are committed to trying to meet each other at the places we have in common.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Laura Osborne on behalf of the Interreligious Subcommittee

Report of the Commission on Christian Worship

The commission met in person on February 21–23, 2022, in Orlando, Florida. It was the first in-person meeting in over two years. During the meeting, the commission looked forward and back in regard to the worship of the Reformed Church in America (RCA), considering resources for Spanish speaking congregations, the organization of past liturgies, guidelines for communion, worship at General Synod, assignments from General Synod 2021, and a lost order from 2000.

Worship in Hispanic Congregations

The Commission on Christian Worship (CCW) seeks to be welcoming and supportive of the many Spanish-speaking congregations becoming part of the RCA. Reaching out to the Council for Hispanic Ministries and to Hispanic church planters, the commission took initial steps to see how we can grow supportive relationships in this area. We look forward to deepening ties as we move forward.

As a resource for use throughout the RCA, the commission makes the following commendation:

Santo, Santo, Santo/Holy, Holy, Holy: A Bilingual Hymnal is an excellent resource for RCA congregations who are answering the call to integrate Spanish- and English-speaking peoples together in worship. The Commission on Christian Worship has reviewed and commends this unique hymnbook to all RCA congregations. The development and publication of *Santo, Santo, Santo* was under the direction of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, proven curators of hymns and praise songs familiar in most RCA settings with careful consideration given to the theology of the texts. This hymnbook offers a balanced blend of old and new, as well as the incorporation of songs composed in English and translated to Spanish, as well as vice versa. In some cases, the authors have produced original, modern translations of traditional Spanish songs that are rarely, if ever, made available to an English-speaking audience. The layout of the songs utilizes both languages seamlessly and efficiently for a user-friendly experience, and this resource is available to churches at an extremely affordable rate. To discover more about this hymnbook and accompanying resources, see worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/santo-santo-santo-holy-holy-holy-a-bilingual-hymnal.

Availability of RCA Liturgies

In fulfillment of our responsibility to "…disseminate worship resources for church and personal use" (*Book of Church Order,* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 11b(2) [2021 edition, p. 120]), the CCW has worked in the past year to extensively revise and reorganize the liturgy pages and resources on the RCA website. Congregational leaders are encouraged to go to www.rca.org/liturgy to find all current orders of The Liturgy, as well as additional liturgies, the *Directory for Worship*, and a treasury of prayers. As of April 2022, the "Liturgy of the RCA" webpages now largely align with *Worship the Lord*, with the addition of orders that have been approved by General Synod (and ratified by classes, where required) since the 2005 publication of that print resource.

A significant accomplishment of the rebuilding of the "Liturgy of the RCA" webpages has been the vast improvement of the Spanish language resources (see the "Looking for liturgy in Spanish?" link). Those resources are now available (as fully as possible) in the same accessible formatting as the English language resources.

Recognizing that the electronic resourcing and accuracy of The Liturgy and of worship resources is essential for the churches, the CCW commits itself to the ongoing monitoring of our worship resources on www.rca.org. That commitment includes work to provide liturgies in Korean and Mandarin.

The Lost Order

As the CCW researched the *Minutes of the General Synod* (*MGS*) over the past decades to assure the accuracy of our orders, one order that our commission failed to see through to completion was discovered. The "Order for the Organization of a New Church" was approved by General Synod 2000 (*MGS 2000*, R-41, p. 227) for a three-year period of study and provisional use. In the CCW transitions of the following years, any looping back for final approval was forgotten. A search of the relevant minutes of the commission shows no feedback over the past two decades. In consultation with RCA Church Multiplication, the CCW has learned that the order as approved in 2000 is not well suited in style to the current needs of organizing congregations. CCW commits to working with Church Multiplication to provide a resource that meets the needs of new congregations and the RCA as a whole.

General Synod 2021 Request for a Liturgy of Lament

The most recent General Synod adopted recommendation CA 21-3 (*MGS 2021*, CA 21-3, p. 204):

> To instruct the general secretary, in consultation with the Commission on Race and Ethnicity, the Commission on Christian Action, the Commission on History, and the Commission on Christian Worship, to craft a Liturgy of Lament for use by RCA congregations relating to the specific roles the RCA has played in oppression of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people of North America, from our earliest days on the Lenape land our church forebears called New Amsterdam, to our members' involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, to present day issues of injustice and indifference.

At the request of the general secretary, the CCW has taken up this work. The goal is to create a liturgy of lament that can be used as a special service throughout the RCA. This requires research, consideration, adaptation, coordination, and seeking of God, which could not fit into the time for the liturgy to be ready to present at General Synod 2022. The CCW looks forward to guiding this process with the general secretary. If anyone has resources that they believe would be helpful for this Liturgy of Lament, please reach out to CCW member Rev. Kent Frens (kent@tccrca.org) or staff member Erika Fleming (efleming@rca.org).

Guidelines for Communion

In February 2020, the Commission on Christian Worship met in person in Phoenix, Arizona. The goal for that meeting was to produce and share with the denomination guidelines to help make the Lord's Table more welcoming, especially to those with gluten sensitivities or intolerance. One month later, the guidelines for gluten-free communion were no longer a priority due to the pandemic. The questions shifted from: "How can we celebrate the Lord's Supper gluten free?" to "Is taking the sacrament even possible virtually?" And then, "How do congregations prepare and share the elements in ways that minimize risk of infection?" The commission decided it was best to wait on releasing these guidelines.

Now, in spring 2022, as congregations return to worship in person and celebrate the

Lord's Supper together again, the Commission on Christian Worship commends to the General Synod these guidelines for celebrating the sacrament gluten free. These guidelines are meant to help congregations discover how they might welcome people with gluten intolerances to the table.

THAT ALL MAY COME
GLUTEN-FREE GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNION IN THE RCA

The Liturgy for the Lord's Supper invites us to the table with these familiar words: ***"Come, for all things are now ready."*** [1]

The day before his death, Jesus commanded his disciples to get things ready for the Passover Meal.[2] At that meal, Jesus instituted what we now celebrate in the Lord's Supper.[3] Preparations for this sacrament are an essential element for the feast. These preparations should consider the people in our churches who endure a variety of food allergies, including gluten intolerance.

The real presence and real partaking of Christ is experienced in our simple actions: sharing food and drink, remembering Christ's sacrifice, experiencing oneness in and with Christ, and renewing our hope in the promised kingdom of God.[4] "It is in the act of eating and drinking that Christ feeds us with his presence through the power of the Holy Spirit."[5] The meaning of the sacrament and communion with Christ and others is more important than the physical elements.[6] Because of this, wine may be grape juice, and bread does not necessarily have to be made out of wheat.

The Lord's Table is where God meets the church in the person of Jesus Christ and sacramentally binds us together as the body of Christ. The following guidelines are provided to aid the elders in communion preparations and to increase awareness and sensitivity to the need for full inclusion. Bread preparations that include options for people with gluten intolerance (or other allergies) ensure that all may join in the joyful feast of our Lord.

Full Inclusion

The best practice for full inclusion of all those with gluten intolerance is to provide only gluten-free elements at the Lord's Table. Some people have a variety of gluten-related health issues, including celiac disease, wheat allergy, and non-celiac gluten sensitivity (NCGS). These medically recognized intolerances and sensitivities have created a barrier to full communion in the body of Christ. Utilizing only gluten-free bread or wafers at the table ensures that all are welcome.

Individual Service

The individual service option addresses cross-contamination concerns by maintaining strict safety guidelines regarding the separation of gluten and gluten-free breads. Providing separate gluten-free stations or plates allows for the participation of all people at the table. While this may be a practical option for most congregations, it will call attention to people with gluten intolerance. Furthermore, this separates the congregation from sharing the common loaf.

Alongside

In some ministry contexts, it may be possible to serve communion with a gluten-free option alongside wheat-based bread. Providing a gluten-free option alongside can be done in a

variety of ways depending on the traditions of the congregation. In serving alongside and allowing people to partake together, cross-contamination becomes a concern for people with severe intolerance. This option excludes people from freely coming to the table.

Guidelines

General Considerations

- Where to find gluten-free breads and wafers:
  - Search the internet for gluten free bread or wafers (e.g., "gluten free bread near me").
  - Communicate with people who regularly purchase gluten free products.
- Gluten-free bread or wafers used for communion should be labeled as: "no gluten," "gluten-free," "free of gluten," or "without gluten."[7]
- Local bakeries should ensure that the gluten-free bread was prepared separately from regular wheat breads and pastries.
- Gluten-free does not guarantee allergen free.
- Create an environment where people feel free to share their allergy concerns with the leadership of the congregation and with one another.[8]

Full Inclusion Practical Guidelines

- Gluten-free communion requires thorough cleansing of the preparation area, the communionware, linens, and the utensils used for preparing communion.
- Those preparing communion must wash their hands thoroughly.[9]
- To avoid cross-contamination, wheat products must not be present.

Individual Service Practical Guidelines

- Serving by intinction
  - Have a separate gluten-free station using the practical guidelines for full inclusion (above). This station should include both the gluten-free option and the cup.
  - Be clear when inviting worshipers to the table which station is gluten free.
- Serving when trays and plates are passed
  - Keep a separate plate only used for gluten-free bread that is prepared using the practical guidelines for full inclusion (above).
  - Designate a server for the gluten-free option. This person should only handle the gluten-free plate.
  - Be clear when inviting worshipers to the table which server has the gluten-free option and how worshipers should indicate they require gluten-free elements.

Alongside Practical Guidelines

- Gluten-free bread or wafers may be offered alongside their wheat equivalent.
- To limit cross-contamination, separately prepare gluten-free and wheat products.
- Gluten-free and wheat breads should be separated when transporting to the table and during the service. This may be two separate plates, a dish on a tray, or a napkin on a plate.
- If people are invited forward for intinction, the bread server may hold both options, allowing the individual to choose.
- Be clear when inviting worshipers to the table that elements are not free from cross-contamination.

A resource from the RCA Commission on Christian Worship

Endnotes

1. RCA Liturgy for the Order for the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper (1968)
2. Matthew 27:17-19; Luke 22:7-13; Mark 14:12-16
3. Matthew 27:26; Luke 22:19; Mark 14:22
4. Belhar Confession, Clause 2; Belgic Confession, Article 35
5. Gregg Mast, *In Remembrance and Hope* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998): 24.
6. Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 79
7. https://www.fda.gov/food/food-labeling-nutrition/gluten-free-labeling-foods
8. RCA *Book of Church Order* Chapter 1, Part I, Article 5, Section 3b (2021 edition, p. 22)
9. https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/safe-food-handling/keep-food-safe-food-safety-basics/ct_index

CW 22-1
To commend "That All May Come," guidelines for gluten-free communion developed by the Commission on Christian Worship, to RCA congregations, assemblies, institutions, and any other RCA body that arranges the celebration of the Lord's Supper, and to make these guidelines available on the RCA website. (ADOPTED)

General Synod Worship

The commission continued to refine guidelines that can help shape and form worship together at General Synod. These guidelines seek to recognize the unique nature of General Synod worship as we gather together from across the continent, from a wide variety of styles and cultural backgrounds, and, together in our work, seek the will of God. Worship at General Synod should be hospitable, varied, authentic, and to the glory of God. The challenge is to forge many "I" voices into a common and authentic "We"—to become, by the grace of God, the body of Christ, assembled to listen to God's Word, to discern God's will for fulfilling our ongoing mission, and to pray for the lost and broken world God loves so much. It is a joy for the CCW to work with the president and vice president of General Synod on worship that brings many voices together in worship.

Thank You

The commission expresses deep gratitude to Rev. Dennis TeBeest, whose term on the Commission on Christian Worship is ending. He has provided deep institutional knowledge in the area of RCA worship and this commission, a heart for the liturgies of the RCA, and a passion for having things done decently and in order. It was Dennis who went back through more than 20 years of General Synod minutes, finding lost orders, tracking which liturgies had been approved and when, and seeing what others might have missed. This type of work has blessed the commission and made it better. Dennis will be missed on this commission. God's blessing for our fellow servant of Christ. The commission has also been blessed by the assignment of General Synod Council (GSC) staff person Erika Fleming. She is a great addition to our work, and we are thankful for her support.

Report of the Commission on Church Order

The Commission on Church Order (CCO) is responsible for "making recommendations concerning the content, structure, and style of the *Book of Church Order*" (*BCO*) and for providing "advisory responses to requests for interpretation of the *Book of Church Order*" (*BCO*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 4b [2021 edition, p. 114]). To fulfill these responsibilities, the CCO met in person on November 11 through 13, 2021, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and in a series of three Zoom video conferences (December 10, 2021; February 10, 2022; March 1, 2022). On several other occasions, the commission consulted with General Synod officers, General Synod Council (GSC) staff, as well as officers and members of other assemblies, agencies, commissions, and institutions—sometimes informally and other times more formally—to provide advisory responses.

Referrals from General Synod 2021

The CCO received one direct referral from the 2021 General Synod (ONB 21-10) and was instructed to consult or appoint delegates to task forces completing the work of three other referrals (EC 21-23, RF 21-1, and TE 21-5).

ONB 21-10 Affinity Regional Synods

In response to an overture that proposed to restructure the denomination using affinity synods, the 2021 General Synod voted:

> 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 and the Commission on Theology to study the structure and implications of affinity synods, with a report to General Synod in 2022.
> (*MGS 2021*, ONB 21-10, p. 123)

In the relatively recent history of the Reformed Church in America (RCA), we are not the first to think about a significant restructuring of regional synods. In fact, the purpose of regional synods has been questioned throughout the entirety of their existence. Going forward, important questions remain. The restructuring of regional synods, affinity based or otherwise, is part of a larger conversation ignited by the Vision 2020 Report, which identified as one of the four guiding principles for the RF 21-1 restructuring team the need to evaluate "the viability, responsibility, and effectiveness of regional synods and General Synod," noting specifically that "our research shows that the future RCA will not be large enough to sustain the regional synod assembly" (*MGS 2021*, p. 91). This report will focus on the benefits and challenges of organizing regional synods by affinity.

What Do We Mean by Affinity?

The use of affinity as an organizing principle suggests that the structure of RCA assemblies will be less dependent on geography and more dependent on relationships centered around some other characteristics and core values, or mission priorities and practices, that an assembly may adopt. In the past, regional synods and classes have been discouraged from pursuing ministry across geographic bounds without the permission of the other assemblies. For example, the *BCO* includes the following provision: "When an organizing church is initiated by a classis not within the classis's own geographic area, the initiating classis shall receive the permission of the classis in which it intends to initiate

its ministry" (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 6 [2021 edition, p. 39]). While clear communication between assemblies remains a necessity, it is accurate to say that the assemblies of the RCA already have adopted affinity as an organizing principle (*e.g.*, the Classis of the City is organized primarily around mission to urban city centers and the Classis of the Americas is organized primarily around ethnicity). It is also accurate to say that the General Synod has approved the transfer of churches between classes and the transfer of classes between regional synods regardless of geographic proximity (*e.g.*, most recently, transferring Addisville Reformed Church from the Classis of Delaware-Raritan to the Classis of Central California in 2021 and transferring the Classis of the City from the Regional Synod of the Far West to the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics in 2018).

What Are the Roles and Responsibilities of Synods?

Regional synods are an assembly, can be a judicatory, and may develop a programmatic structure. In the late 1990s, a task force studying the purposes of regional synods noted the critical distinction between the responsibility to superintend and supervise (what it called "governmental structures") and the role of mobilizing specific ministries (what it called "programmatic structures"). As an assembled body of elders and ministers, the regional synod exercises "a general superintendence" over its classes (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part III, Article 2, Section 1 [2021 edition, p. 65]). The regional synod acting as a judicatory exercises "an appellate supervisory power over the acts, proceedings, and decisions" of its classes (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part III, Article 2, Section 2 [2021 edition, p. 65]). Notably, the task force reported that the regional synod's role as an intermediary appellate judicatory (or as the final court of appeal for cases originating with the board of elders) has "never been doubted" (*MGS 2000*, p. 432).

While their governmental structures have remained fairly consistent over time, in many ways their programmatic function has changed significantly and varies widely. It is fairly evident that there is significant variation in the self-determined functions of the eight regional synods today. The reason for that is the broad provision in the *BCO* allowing a regional synod to "create whatever organization it desires for the furtherance of the work of the gospel within its bounds, provided such organization does not infringe upon the prerogatives of the several classes or churches" (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part III, Article 2, Section 5 [2021 edition, p. 66]).

What Are Some Benefits of Affinity Synods?

The answer to this question may vary depending upon the particular role of the regional synod being considered. Administratively, it may be prudent to have the regional synod aligned with certain theological convictions shared by all of its classes (this may naturally develop if there is a significant reorganization of the denomination into affinity classes, since a regional synod is constituted by elder and minister delegates from its several classes). It seems more likely that affinity synods would be helpful for the peace of the church judicially and programmatically. An affinity-based commitment to a common understanding of the application of the gospel may make it easier for the regional synod to organize and accomplish its missions and programs in a united way.

Judicially, when the synod considers complaints against a classis or appeals from the action of a classis, the cases would be considered from a common frame of reference and a similar understanding of biblical accountability. It is worth noting that our order already provides a way to respect the decisions made by the classis even though the regional synod as a whole may disagree. In describing the process for appeals, the *BCO* states that the "judicatory hearing the appeal shall give deference to the decision of the lower judicatory"

(*BCO*, Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 11 [2021 edition, p. 97]). If this principle is applied more broadly to all judicial business, and if additional limitations were added to the *BCO* to specify affinity synods as the final judicatory in certain matters beyond cases originating with a board of elders (*e.g.*, decisions related to ordination and marriage), then the regional synod (and, by extension, the General Synod) could be spared contentious debate.

What Are Some Concerns of Affinity Synods?

As the commission considered the use of affinity as an organizing principle for regional synods, we wondered what an appropriate basis would be for determining an assembly's primary affinities. Furthermore, once a determination is made and a restructuring based on affinities begins, where should that process end? Designating affinities at the regional synod level may introduce considerable uncertainty that, in turn, would ultimately lead to demands for further restructuring—how frequently should the primary affinities be allowed to change? Other considerations worth noting, perhaps not direct concerns about affinity synods themselves but about the transitional process into affinity synods, include clear implications for current regional synod staff as well as a need to review the effects on membership or representation on other assemblies, agencies, and boards.

Would Affinity Synods be an Effective Means of Restructuring the RCA?

As noted earlier, we are not the first to be thinking about a significant restructuring of regional synods. The aforementioned Task Force on the Responsibilities and Purposes of Regional Synods and Classes concluded in its final report to the 2000 General Synod:

> In sum, the task force, having conducted reviews of the responsibilities and purposes of the regional synods and classes, affirms the positive roles that regional synods play in the RCA today. Classes and regional synods need to be in constant conversation so that synods do not infringe upon the prerogatives of the several classes or churches within their bounds. As to the relationships between regional synods and the General Synod, the task force notes that what is most needed is regular conversation around strategic planning and a shared sense of vision for the ministry of the RCA (*MGS 2000*, p. 434).

The commission believes that the assemblies should be in constant communication; in particular, the time is right for the regional synods, in consultation with their classes, to be proactive in considering the optimal size of a classis. When is a classis too small to effectively carry out its task of superintendence and supervision for the wellbeing of its ministers and congregations? Is it possible for a classis to be too large? Is there a minimum number of classes required for a regional synod? Additionally, it was a mere three years ago that the Commission on Church Order, together with the Commission on Theology, presented a report on the meaning of the word "bounds" in the *BCO* (see *MGS 2019*, pp. 238-245, for the full report). In response to the report, the 2019 General Synod adopted the following recommendation (CO 19-2):

> To advise regional synods to be guided by the following policies in forming, combining, and disbanding of classes and the transfer of churches between classes:
>
> 1. Classes should be created, maintained, and structured so that they can fulfill their primary calling–guidance and governance.
> 2. Ethnic classes should be formed only after prayerful discernment and with caution.

3. The creation and structure of classes should seek to maintain the unity, purity, and peace of the church.
4. Classes should be created, maintained, and structured so that all the gifts of congregations can be fully received.

The commission reaffirms this advice and believes it would be helpful to apply this advice to any consideration of restructuring regional synods. The synods exist for the benefit of the church but are not the essence of the church (as concluded by Allan Janssen in *Constitutional Theology*, second edition, pp. 215-216 [Reformed Church Press, 2019]). It seems unwise to spend significant time restructuring regional synods if they are in fact going to be eliminated as part of the broader denominational restructuring being considered. However, if they are to be eliminated, the governmental responsibilities currently delegated to the regional synods will need to be assigned either to the classes or to the General Synod.

Ultimately, while it is clear that the General Synod can "form regional synods" and "make changes in their boundaries" (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 3 [2021 edition, p. 69]), it is less clear how beneficial doing so based on affinity would actually be. Is the existence of regional synods in general, or affinity synods in particular, a problem to be solved or a reality to be embraced? The commission believes the answer to this question depends largely on the RF 21-1 restructuring team conversations as it considers the role that affinity will have both in the structure of classes and regional synods. We trust that God's Spirit is working through the process, and the commission will provide further advisory responses or facilitate drafting proposed amendments to the Constitution of the RCA if instructed to do so.

EC 21-23 RCA Archives Task Force

The commission designated members Brian Andrew, Christopher Jacobsen, and Joshua Scheid to serve on the working group to seek clarity and resolution of the concerns expressed to the General Synod Council (GSC) by the Commission on History regarding the denominational archives. Over the course of four meetings, the task force identified short-term management concerns and recommended that the GSC monitor compliance with current archives policies. The task force also identified longer-term concerns related to staffing, oversight, and financing of the archives that warrant further consideration.

RF 21-1 Restructuring Plan for the RCA

At its November meeting, the commission met with general secretary Eddy Alemán to discuss the formation and responsibility of the restructuring task force. The commission recommended that the General Synod Council (GSC) not appoint a specific member of the commission to the task force, but instead that the commission will make one or more of its members available to the task force, understanding that the number or relevant experience and expertise to best serve the task force may vary as the work progresses.

TE 21-5 Proposed Amendments to the Organizational Documents of Western Theological Seminary

The commission designated members Jennifer Van Regenmorter and Joshua Scheid to serve as liaisons in consultation with the General Synod Council (GSC) regarding the Board of Trustees' request for Western Theological Seminary (WTS) to become an independent but officially related seminary of the RCA. The commission prepared several iterations of a document designed to facilitate discussion between the GSC and the WTS

board. The commission's goal was to help the GSC, WTS board, and ultimately the General Synod itself think about the considerations and understand the implications of the request in order to make an informed decision. The substance of that document is included in the GSC report.

Timing for Submission of Reports and Overtures

Amid the numerous inquiries into the peculiar circumstances of holding a postponed session of General Session in 2021, the commission identified a need to review the appropriateness of references to deadlines in the *BCO,* particularly as they relate to such things as reports, overtures, and classis votes on constitutional amendments.

Ironically, the word "deadline" does not appear in the *BCO*, although there are many references to the minimum required or maximum allowable time periods for certain actions. Rather than naming a particular date, most of the deadlines described in the *BCO* require some calculation, providing sufficient specificity yet suitable flexibility. The timing for the submission of overtures to the General Synod has two unusual characteristics: the section provides a specific date for classes while a calculated date for regional synods, which raises questions regarding the effect of this provision when submitting overtures to postponed or special sessions of the General Synod; and twice the word "postmarked" is used, suggesting that overtures must be physically delivered by the U.S. Postal Service or similar logistics service. Of course, much has changed in recent years and most communication between assemblies of the RCA is usually accomplished by email. After consulting with officers and staff of various assemblies regarding the appropriateness and practical implications of this section, the commission presents the following recommendation:

CO 22-1
To approve the following amendment to the *Special Rules of Order of the General Synod* in the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part II, Article 2, Section 7 (2021 edition, p. 130) for submission to the next General Synod for final approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

Section 7. Submission of Overtures

The General Synod may receive overtures from a classis or a regional synod. It shall not receive overtures which deal with matters under adjudication or which make either direct or implied charges against persons. Overtures from classes shall be submitted to the General Synod office ~~or postmarked not~~no later than ~~March 31~~two months before a session of General Synod. Overtures from regional synods shall be submitted to the General Synod office ~~or postmarked within ten days of the close of the annual session of the regional synod~~no later than three weeks before a session of General Synod. (ADOPTED)

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance was to vote in favor of CO 22- 1.

Additionally, the commission believes that the deadline for submission of reports to the General Synod is ambiguous. Currently, the deadline is "three months before synod

opens." However, in the event of a postponed session, does that mean three months prior to the opening of the session that will be adjourned or three months prior to the opening of the postponed session (which could result in a significantly different deadline; for example, in 2021, the difference was approximately three months)? To provide a clearer deadline and consistent language with the deadline for the submission of overtures, the commission presents the following recommendation:

> **CO 22-2**
> **To approve the following amendment to the *Special Rules of Order of the General Synod* in the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part II, Article 2, Section 5 (2021 edition, p. 129) for submission to the next General Synod for final approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):**
>
> ***Section 5. Preparation of Reports***
>
> **Reports shall ordinarily be reviewed by the reporting agency. If this has not taken place, a statement shall be appended to the end of the report, indicating: who wrote the report, who reviewed the report, and who approved the report. Reports to General Synod shall be submitted to the General Synod office three months before ~~synod opens~~a session of General Synod. (ADOPTED)**

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance was to vote in favor of CO 22- 2.

Advisory Responses to Requests for Interpretation

The commission received several inquiries related to the interpretation or application of the *BCO*. What follows is a summary of some of the more significant advisory responses provided by the commission.

Status of Minister When a Church Affiliates with Another Denomination

Following the 2021 General Synod's adoption of the RF 21-3 Rules and Regulations for gracious separation, the commission received a number of questions about the appropriate status for ministers of Word and sacrament who, for one reason or another, wish to remain members of the classis even though the congregations they serve have withdrawn from the RCA to affiliate with another denomination (the commission is careful to note that a consistory's petition to withdraw, and the action of the classis on it, is a separate process from the transfer of a minister).

The commission advised that a minister may remain a member of the classis and that the classis may act at its discretion in the supervision of its enrolled ministers; indeed, the classis must act consistent with its ongoing ability to function appropriately. The classis has three options: (1) it may officially recognize the minister as a specialized minister actively serving in a ministry that is not under the jurisdiction of the classis; (2) it may classify the minister as without charge, which indicates a minister is either (a) currently between called or contracted ministry positions, or (b) active but not serving in a ministry approved or commissioned by the classis; or (3) pursue charge and discipline, presumably for desertion of office. Each of these options has different implications for the classis to consider, including but not limited to classis voting and quorum requirements, a minister's

eligibility for life and long-term disability insurance through the Board of Benefits Services, and retirement contributions. An expanded advisory response document was distributed to all stated clerks, and it may be requested from the commission moderator.

Statistical Reporting and Assessments for Affiliated Churches

Following the approval of the new *BCO* article on affiliated churches (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 9 [2021 edition, pp. 28-29]), stated clerks and GSC staff asked the commission for an advisory interpretation of the provision's implications for statistical reporting and assessments. The act of dual affiliation requires approval by official action of the classis. For an RCA church that is dually affiliating with another denomination, there should be no change in the reporting of revenues and membership. Dual affiliation is intended to aid the congregation in its local, contextual ministry, but it does not circumvent the accountability and responsibility of the consistory and its ministers to the classis and the Constitution of the RCA. The commission acknowledges that the provision for receiving a non-RCA congregation as a dually affiliated church is less than clear and has requested feedback from stated clerks to help the commission consider clarification in the year ahead. An expanded advisory response document was distributed to all stated clerks, and it may be requested from the commission moderator.

References to Sessions and Meetings in the *BCO*

When working through the various issues related to the cancellation and postponement of the 2020 and 2021 General Synods, the commission became aware that the varying references to sessions of General Synod in the *BCO* (e.g., sessions, stated sessions, special sessions, annual sessions, regular sessions) are not always consistent or correct. Sometimes "session" is used but "meeting" is the appropriate term; other times "meeting" is used but "session" is the appropriate term. For many assemblies in the RCA, the session and meeting often coincide, but the two are distinct parliamentary terms. A *session* is a complete unit of proceedings of an assembly, which may consist of one or more connected *meetings* (most notably, each annual General Synod is a single session made up of a series of meetings over several days). The commission reviewed all 162 occurrences of "session," "meeting," and their variations for appropriateness, identifying a number of corrections and clarifications which are detailed as items #4 through #10 in the editorial changes section below. Four of the occurrences are not included in the editorial changes reported below because they are already included in amendments that either were adopted by the 2021 General Synod and sent to the classes for approval or are proposed to the 2022 General Synod.

Additions and Revisions to the *BCO* Glossary

The commission updated several entries in the glossary that is now included as a non-constitutional resource in the digital and print versions of the *BCO*. All the updates appeared in the 2021 edition of the *BCO*, except for the revision to the entry for "session," which will be included in the next edition. The commission approved the following revisions to existing entries (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

> **affiliate**. <u>*verb* The act of joining or creating a relationship with</u> a church, assembly, or denomination. (1.II.10; 1.II.14)
>
> **session**. A complete unit of proceedings of an assembly which may consist of one or more connected meetings. (1.I.1.1; 1.II.4.1; 1.III.4.1; 1.IV.4.1) ~~In the section on Union Churches (1.I.7), this term is used to describe the Presbyterian equivalent of the consistory.~~

The commission approved the following new entries:

> **agent**. A person or group that has been empowered to act on behalf of an assembly. Agents of General Synod have been given responsibility to endorse a minister as qualified to serve as a specialized transition minister, to supervise the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process of a candidate for ministry, and to implement decisions, policies, and programs of the General Synod. (1.II.7.6, 1.II.11.3, 3.I.3.6b)
>
> **enrolled**. A designation given to certain persons as members of a group granting them certain rights and privileges. Applicants are enrolled as Candidates for Ministry after examination and approval by the classis. (1.II.11; 1.II.12) RCA ministers are enrolled in the classis by signing the Declaration for Ministers of Word and Sacrament. (1.II.15.4b) Ministers from other denominations are enrolled when installed in an RCA church or upon request and with the approval of classis when serving within the classis. (1.I.2.4; 1.II.15.15)
>
> **officially related**. Any agency, board, or institution with an enabling document approved by the General Synod and whose governing boards include at least three members who are designated by the General Synod. (1.IV.7.3; 1.IV.7.5)
>
> **policy**. A governing principle, plan, or course of action. The General Synod alone shall determine denominational policy. (1.IV.2.4)
>
> **regulation**. A rule or directive approved by the General Synod to put into effect any and all articles of the Government, the Disciplinary Procedures, the Formularies, and the Liturgy of the Reformed Church in America. (Rules and Amendments, Sec. 1)

Editorial Changes to the *Book of Church Order*

During the ordinary course of its work, the commission occasionally identifies stylistic, non-substantive matters for correction in the *BCO*. The commission annually reports any such findings to the General Synod and then communicates the changes to communication and production staff to be reflected in the next edition of the *BCO*. This year, the commission agreed upon the following editorial revisions:

1. *Including our Canadian churches.* There are ten instances of the word "state" used in its geopolitical or territorial sense; however, nine of them do not include a reference to "province" or "provincial" and the one that does incorrectly uses the conjunction "and." The commission agreed to expand the word "state" to "state or province" in Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 13 (2021 edition, p. 17); Chapter 1, Part I, Article 7, Section 2l (2021 edition, p. 25); twice in Chapter 1, Part I, Article 7, Section 2m (2021 edition, p. 25); Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 2 (2021 edition, p. 37); Chapter 1, Part II, Article 9, Section 4 (2021 edition, p. 41); and Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Section 1 (2021 edition, p. 42). The commission agreed to expand the word "state" to "state or provincial" in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 6, Section 1 (2021 edition, p. 34) and Chapter 1, Part III, Article 6, Section 1 (2021 edition, p. 67). Finally, in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 17, Section 4a.4 (2021 edition, p. 62), the commission agreed to change "state and provincial law" to "state or provincial law."

2. *References to the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency.* The acronym "MFCA" is used in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 2c (2021 edition, p.

49); in all other places the agency is referred to by its full name. The commission agreed to replace the term "MFCA" with the agency's full name in Section 2c. The commission also noted that the agency is identified by its full name followed by "(MFCA)" in Chapter 3, Part I, Article 9, Section 5 (2021 edition, p. 124), and agreed to delete the parenthetical abbreviation since the acronym is no longer used anywhere else in the *BCO*.

3. *Email as a reasonable method of communication.* As noted in the commission's review of deadlines for the submission of overtures, email is a commonly accepted standard of communication. The commission agreed to amend Note 10 (2021 edition, p. 100) of the non-constitutional Explanatory Notes on Chapter 2: The Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures to read as follows: "Provide" means reasonable efforts to deliver, such as hand delivery, certified mail, or email.

4. *Session as a governing body.* The word "session" is used to describe the Presbyterian equivalent of consistory nine times in the Plan of Union for union churches in Chapter 1, Part I, Article 7, Section 2 (2021 edition, pp. 23-26). However, the term is too limiting, as union churches may be formed with churches from Reformed denominations that use other terminology to describe a church's governing body (*e.g.*, council). Therefore, the commission agreed to replace each instance of "(session)" with "or governing body" in Section 2: one occurrence each in Sections 2e, 2f, and 2v; twice each in Sections 2g, 2o, and 2q.

5. *Session should be meeting.* The commission agreed to correct the use of "session" to "meeting" in Chapter 3, Part I, Article 8, Section 1 (2021 edition, p. 123) and Chapter 3, Part II, Article 2, Section 8 (2021 edition, p. 130).

6. *Meeting should be session.* The commission agreed to correct the use of "meeting" to "session" (in either its singular or plural form) twice in Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 19 (2021 edition, p. 19); once in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Section 4d (2021 edition, p. 44); twice in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 15, Section 10 (2021 edition, p. 57); twice in Chapter 1, Part III, Article 4, Section 2 (2021 edition, p. 66); twice in Chapter 2, Part II, Article 2, Section 6 (2021 edition, p. 93); twice in Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 7 (2021 edition, p. 97); and once in Chapter 3, Part I, Article 11 (2021 edition, p. 126). There is also one correction in Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 5, Section 3 (2021 edition, p. 72), though this occurrence will be further revised for consistency: "General Synod meeting" will become "session of General Synod."

7. *Consistent prepositional phrasing for sessions of an assembly.* For consistency of usage within the *BCO*, the commission agreed to change "classis sessions" to "sessions of classis" (in either singular or plural usage) in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 4, Section 1 (2021 edition, p. 33); Chapter 1, Part II, Article 5, Section 1 (2021 edition, p. 33); and Chapter 1, Part II, Article 17, Section 3b (2021 edition, p. 61). The commission agreed to change "regional synod sessions" to "sessions of regional synod" in Chapter 1, Part III, Article 4, Section 1 (2021 edition, p. 66). Finally, the commission agreed to two changes in Chapter 1, Part III, Article 5 (2021 edition, p. 67): changing "the synod's annual meeting" to "a stated session of the synod" in Section 2 and changing "the annual meeting of the synod" to "a stated session of the synod" in Section 3.

8. *Consistently using "stated" rather than a variety of its synonyms.* Where appropriate, the commission agreed to change "regular" to "stated" for

consistency when referring to an assembly's periodic business meeting prescribed by its bylaws. There are 11 such instances: Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Section 4d (2021 edition, p. 44); Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 5 (2021 edition, p. 52); Chapter 1, Part II, Article 15, Section 10 (2021 edition, p. 57); Chapter 1, Part II, Article 17, Section 3b (2021 edition, p. 61); Chapter 1, Part III, Article 2, Section 3 (2021 edition, p. 65); Chapter 1, Part III, Article 2, Section 4 (2021 edition, pp. 65-66); Chapter 1, Part III, Article 5, Section 2 (2021 edition, p. 67); Chapter 2, Part I, Article 3, Section 5c (2021 edition, p. 83); Chapter 2, Part II, Article 2, Section 4 (2021 edition, p. 92); Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 4 (2021 edition, p. 96); and Chapter 3, Part I, Article 4, Section 3 (2021 edition, p. 112). In two instances related to the General Synod, the commission agreed to change "annual" to "stated" for consistency, which has the added benefit of future proofing the two occurrences should the General Synod ever decide to meet on a frequency other than annually: Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 5, Section 1 (2021 edition, p. 72) and Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 5, Section 2 (2021 edition, p. 72).

9. *Grammatically simplifying special quorum requirements.* Where a special quorum requirement is designated, the commission agreed to clarify sentence structure and make all four occurrences consistently read: "where a quorum that meets the requirements for a stated session of classis is present." This change affects Chapter 1, Part II, Article 9, Section 4 (2021 edition, p. 40); Chapter 1, Part II, Article 9, Section 6 (2021 edition, p. 41); Chapter 1, Part III, Article 2, Section 3 (2021 edition, p. 65); and Chapter 1, Part III, Article 2, Section 4 (2021 edition, pp. 65-66).

10. *Remove grammatically redundant and unnecessary occurrences*. The commission agreed to change "stated session or special session" to "stated or special session" in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 9, Section 4 (2021 edition, p. 40) and Chapter 1, Part II, Article 9, Section 6 (2021 edition, p. 41). The commission agreed to delete the redundant "regular or" from "regular or stated session" in Chapter 2, Part I, Article 5, Section 11c (2021 edition, p. 87). The commission agreed to delete the unnecessary definite article "the" in Chapter 1, Part III, Article 5, Section 1 (2021 edition, p. 67) so that "at the sessions of the regional synod" now will read "at sessions of the regional synod."

Elections and Appointments

The commission elected Joshua Scheid to serve as its corresponding delegate to the 2022 General Synod and elected Joshua Scheid to serve as both its moderator and secretary for the annual term beginning July 1, 2022.

Giving Thanks

The commission is deeply grateful for Paul Karssen, staff to the commission, for his invaluable guidance and support. The commission also sincerely appreciates Angela Worthley for her assistance in navigating the commission's transition from its old private page to Google Drive and Maria Orr (and RCA communication and production staff) for her diligent and detailed work updating the published version of the *BCO* each year.

Respectfully submitted,
Joshua Scheid, moderator

Report of the Commission on History

The Commission on History was established in 1966 to advise the General Synod on the collection and preservation of official denominational records. In 1968, the commission was given oversight of *The Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America* (RCA), and the General Synod of 2003 added the instruction that the commission "offer a historical perspective, either orally or in writing, on matters being presented to the General Synod." The *Book of Church Order* (Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 5) further assigns the commission to "actively promote research on, interest in, and reflection on, the history and traditions of the Reformed Church in America," to "inform the Reformed Church in America of the relevance of the denomination's history and traditions to its program, and regularly review denominational resources that present the church's history," and to "provide a 'history center' by regularly reporting on the activities of the Reformed Church in America's educational institutions as these relate to the history and traditions of the denomination." This is our 56th report to a General Synod.

The General Synod Council and its staff do their work and serve the synods, classes, and congregations informed by the Transformed & Transforming goals approved by the 2013 General Synod. This commission works to help the church look at those 15-year goals in the larger context of our history. To review a list of such transformations, please see previous reports to General Synod.

The people of God have always emphasized the importance of memory, both individual and collective, to see God's faithfulness and allow us to learn from the good and bad of the past as we seek to be faithful to God's calling in the future. This commission reflects on the past, reacts to the present, and provides for the future, offering the whole church a perspective that is not *just* a historical perspective, but a perspective informed by historical insight to create a common understanding on which transformation can be built.

To do this work faithfully, the commission met electronically (via Zoom) on Friday, November 5, 2021; Friday, January 28, 2022; and Thursday, February 24, 2022; as well as communicating regularly via email and phone.

Chronicles of Transformation

The Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America, now in its 54th year, has recently produced the following book:

- *An RCA Reader: Outlining the History of the Reformed Church in America in Seventy-Five Documents*, edited by James Hart Brumm

The following books are in progress:

- *Collecting Chronicles, Maintaining Tradition, and Preserving Acts of Disciples: Essays in Honor of Russell L. Gasero*, edited by James Hart Brumm
- *Shepherding a New Generation of Leaders: Essays in Honor of Cornelis G. Kors*, edited by Bradley Lewis
- *Rivers of Living Water: Essays in Honor of James V. Brownson*, edited by James Hart Brumm
- *The Canons of Dort: God's Freedom, Justice, and Persistence*, by Eugene P. Heideman, edited by Donald J. Bruggink
- *The Church Speaks, vol. 3*, edited by David Komline

The book *Called to Serve: Essays on RCA Global Mission*, edited by Charles Van Engen, Jean Van Engen, and Sally Tapley, is currently being translated into Spanish. Also, in collaboration with RCA Global Mission, the Commission on History is working to expand the Missionary Memoirs Series and hopes to find a new general editor of that sub-series.

The Commission on History, working with the RCA Archives, continues publishing the *Historical Series* under Reformed Church Press, which allows us to explore more electronic and on-demand publishing, utilizing online platforms such as Amazon. James Hart Brumm, director of the Reformed Church Center at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, has been serving as general editor of the series since July 1, 2018. As of June 2018, Donald J. Bruggink serves as general editor emeritus. Matthew van Maastricht, pastor of the Altamont, New York, Reformed Church and an adjunct faculty member at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, continues as general editor of the Congregational History Series.

The June 2000 *Minutes of General Synod* reflect that the Commission on History's responsibilities were successfully revised. One of commission's responsibilities is to actively promote research on, interest in, and reflection on, the history and traditions of the Reformed Church in America through means it may find effective. In addition, the commission shall inform the Reformed Church in America of the relevance of the denomination's history and traditions to its programs and regularly review denominational resources that present the church's history. We also provide instrumental advice to the General Synod concerning the denomination's archives.

Recently, your commission launched the RCA 400 Series in celebration of our upcoming 400th anniversary in 2028. Like the Congregational History Series, this is a sub-series of the *Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America.* Steven Pierce serves as the general editor, and Corstian Devos, Russell Gasero, and Matthew Gasero all serve on the RCA 400 Series team. The books in this series will help educate the church on how our Reformed past informs the present and grows us into the future. Many of the authors will draw from the deep well of our RCA Archives and attempt to answer several questions: What is the Reformed Church in America? How is it distinctive from other Christian communities? Which beliefs, values, and practices stand at the heart of this communion? What challenges has it overcome, and how is it being challenged today? How is it structured and governed? What biblical principles undergird and vitalize its ministries? How can its rich heritage help it move into the future?

In January 2022, the RCA 400 Series produced the following books:

- *Why Do We Have Archives? An Answer Through Illustrations from Reformed Church Footprints #1 to #25*, by Russell L. Gasero
- *Foundations of Reformed Church Polity: The Rhyme and Reason of the Order*, by Matthew J. van Maastricht

Forthcoming books in this series include:

- *Pursuing Unity in a Divided World: The History of Ecumenism in the Reformed Church in America*, by Monica Schaap Pierce
- *The Reformed Church in America and the Reign of God: The Dilemmas of a Denomination*, by Daniel J. Meeter
- *Our Reformed Church: Four Centuries of a Living Faith*, by Steven D. Pierce

Remembering Our Transformations

In addition to the *Historical Series,* your commission works with the RCA digital archivist, Matthew Gasero, providing review and support of his work through the Archives Advisory Committee, which is formed of commission members, and through his regular reporting to the commission on the ongoing work of the Archives. Matthew also serves as managing editor for the *Historical Series* and helps your commission to take note of various important anniversaries in the life of the denomination in ways that can illuminate our present ministries.

We have had a professional archivist since May 1, 1978. Prior to that, we had, through the Commission on History, the New Brunswick Theological Seminary faculty, and the Sage Library staff, people caring for the Archives going back for decades before this.

The offices of the Archives are housed in Sage Library at New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS), where a significant portion of the RCA Archives has been located since the library opened in 1875. The multicultural environment of the New York metropolitan area helps the Archives be not just a Dutch-American history resource, but a well of information for all of the cultural expressions that now make up the RCA. Over the years, in addition to keeping the General Synod informed of aspects of our history and providing resources to congregations, classes, synods, and researchers, the Archives have saved the denomination hundreds of thousands of dollars through careful records management; with over 400 years of manuscripts, it is through careful stewardship that the right paper can be found at the right time.

In October 2015, responding to the limits of archival finances and the changing, growing needs of the Archives as a resource for the church and the world, and seeking to affirm and strengthen the historic ties between seminary and archives, the Trustees of NBTS pledged an annual grant of $10,000 from Lilly Endowment Inc. to be matched by the General Synod Council (GSC), for each of ten years, to expand the work of the Archives, in partnership with the seminary and its Reformed Church Center, and give it a more stable and secure base into the future. This commission is grateful that the seminary, under its president, Micah McCreary, is continuing to honor that commitment.

Because of the limits on available resources for operations, the GSC has been unable to match these annual grants, so this commission has annually provided the matching funds from the Historical Series Revolving Fund. These resources help transform the scope of what the Archives can do, making our history more accessible to everyone as a tool for building our future. The Commission on History has voted to work with the RCA Advancement office and the Archives to help secure a plan for long-term funding beyond the ten-year scope of the grant.

Your commission acknowledged the significant extra demand this puts on the Historical Series Revolving Fund and also the significant commitment this represents on the part of New Brunswick Theological Seminary. There are virtues in thrift; however, this is an opportunity that has long-term benefits for the whole church, and your commission renews its call for the whole church, as represented by the GSC, to find ways to join in responding to this challenge.

There are creative ways to help fund the work of the Archives. For example, when Aberdeen Reformed Church closed within North Grand Rapids Classis, the executive committee of the classis voted unanimously to tithe a significant sum of the sale of the property to the RCA Archives. By taking such an action, it will allay the ever-growing

expenses of transporting, storing, and preserving these important church records. Your commission strongly encourages other classes to consider doing the same.

Your commission has requested that the RCA Archives investigate the full digitization of the *Christian Intelligencer*, *The Mission Field*, and *Mission Gleaner*. The goal is to produce quality, legible digital copies of these publications that are searchable. Your commission will also seek the help of General Synod Council to assist with funding for this project. In addition, your commission has requested the RCA Archives procure Quark Express to prepare PDF versions of the *Church Herald*.

The work of the Archives is mandated by the General Synod in its Policy and Purposes statement. Since 1978, the Archives of the Reformed Church in America has grown tremendously, both in quantity of records and in scope of responsibilities. For the first three decades, it struggled with a single staff person as it increased in complexity and scope. In the last decade, it was able to add an additional part-time staff person. Yet, the volume of materials and the scope of responsibilities increased rather than diminished. In the last two years, the staff has been cut in half, and if we include the total hours committed by the staff, that cut is closer to eliminating two full-time staff.

Matthew Gasero handles all aspects of the Office of Historical Services now. This is on top of his previous responsibilities as digital archivist. He has the full support of your commission and has done a tremendous job promoting and enhancing these essential ministries.

Being Informed by Past Transformations

In his book *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC*, Frederick Buechner writes that "biblical faith takes history very seriously because God takes it very seriously."[22] History is so important to God, according to Buechner, that God initiated it, entered it, and has promised to one day "bring it to a serious close." In order to understand our past, which informs our present, the study of history becomes paramount. This is certainly true of Christian history as well as denominational history. The past affects the present, and ultimately the future, confirming the age-old wisdom that "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."[23]

Your commission acknowledges that not everyone enjoys reading history. Depending on the subject, it can feel distant, tedious, and irrelevant. And yet Christianity is a history-moored faith, instructing us and helping us gain perspective. Buechner, contrasting biblical faith with other world religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism, says, "history is not an absurdity to be endured or an illusion to be dispelled or an endlessly repeating cycle to be escaped. Instead it is for each of us a series of crucial, precious, and unrepeatable moments that are seeking to lead us somewhere."[24]

While the "somewhere" has been debated over the centuries, Christian history points to God's unbending faithfulness and the reality that life has a direction—one where we are being led back to God, to our life's source, and ultimately to wholeness. Life and faith

22 Frederick Buechner. *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 38.

23 George Santayana. *The Life of Reason: Reason in Common Sense* (New York: Scribner's, 1905), p. 284.

24 Buechner, p. 38. He adds, "True history has to do with the saving and losing of souls, and both of these are apt to take place when most people, including the one whose soul is at stake, are looking the other way."

are rooted in the mystery of God's love, merging in surprising ways throughout history. What's needed are eyes that see and ears that hear. "We want," mused Lutheran theologian Paul Tillich, "only to communicate to you an experience we have had that here and there in the world and now and then in ourselves is a New Creation, usually hidden, but sometimes manifest, and certainly manifest in Jesus who is called the Christ."[25]

Without question, discerning just how God operates throughout all of human history is a difficult discipline. It requires honest humility since we "see in a mirror, dimly"[26] and have only a glimpse into the spiritual realm. We wait with eager anticipation for the time when we will see and understand and know God fully. Until then, we recall those haunting words spoken through the prophet long ago: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord."[27]

Historically, ours is a faith that's more interrogative and less doctrinaire.[28] In the Reformed tradition, we've grown accustomed to dancing with our doubts, and we attempt to tackle those nagging existential questions that encompass a wide range of subjects. This work is always done best in community. Together, we accomplish these things while also affirming those tenets that have traditionally united us as a Reformed church, as the body of Christ in North America:

- The wonder of creation
- The humility of God in Jesus Christ
- The transforming power of the Holy Spirit
- The miracle of forgiveness of sins
- The gift of new life in communion
- The call to the ministry of reconciliation
- The promise of the consummation of God's reign[29]

We are confessional Protestants who adhere to a Trinitarian theology, and since the Protestant Reformation, we have stressed the belief that salvation is by grace through faith alone. When someone comes to faith, it is God who initiates that saving work. In addition, our churches are, and have been, non-hierarchical, self-governing congregations. The decision-making power resides primarily in the local church, in various times and places of relative autonomy. Our common beliefs and shared practices far outweigh the things that seek to divide us.

Your commission is fully aware of what's at stake as we consider our future as a Christian denomination. We are holding this tension with the rest of our brothers and sisters. The fracturing of the Reformed Church in America would be one more ecclesial tragedy. We remain hopeful—and pray—that it can be averted. After all, for 394 years we have had a continuous ministerial presence in North America—148 years before the colonies gained independence from Great Britain. That is a remarkable fact. It means we remain the oldest operating Protestant ministry in the U.S., without any interruptions since 1628.

Our history wouldn't even be possible without our willingness to tell it. We are people

25 Paul Tillich. *The New Being* (New York: Scribner's, 1955), p. 18.

26 1 Corinthians 13:12, NRSV.

27 Isaiah 55:8, NRSV.

28 Daniel L. Migliorie. *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, second ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 2.

29 Migliorie, p. 3.

of a story, of an *experience* (Tillich), and we keep those cherished memories alive when we share our stories with others. The person who loses touch with their story is like the candle that has lost its wick, essentially losing purpose and significance. "Despite their individuality," writes historian Ronald Wells, "Christians find their true identity firmly rooted in a collectivity: We are not alone in this life but members one of another. … Our collective membership in [God's] kingdom rests on a common affirmation of a story. Christians *are* Christians not solely because they made a 'decision for Christ' but because they became 'members incorporate' of Christ's Body" (italics added).[30]

We may have our differences, but those differences pale in comparison to what has united us over these many years. We overcame our quarrels during some very tense moments in our denomination's history. While some have left for new adventures, others have stayed the course, keeping their promise to "walk in the Spirit of Christ, in love and fellowship within the church, seeking the things that make for unity, purity, and peace."[31] The same can be said of many faithful churches. They too have made a similar promise during the installation of elders and deacons to "encourage and pray for them, to labor together in obedience to the gospel for the unity, purity, and peace of the church, the welfare of the whole world, and the honor of our Lord Jesus Christ."[32]

Our differences need not tear us asunder. Sailing together as a fleet of ships ("classis") through turbulent waters is something we have a long history of doing. It's what we are called to do with humility and grace. Ronald Wells elucidates this point:

> Knowing the 'author of truth' gives us an advantage in knowing truth over our secular neighbors, but it does not ensure that we know the truth, which surely exists in the mind of God but comes ambiguously to us. Once in a while we experience moments of clarity, and for these we are grateful. But, since the images remain blurred, we should practice the Christian virtue of humility in what we claim to know and to have "right" in our historical perspectives.[33]

Recommendations for Accountability and Permanence

The RCA Archives was formally established for the RCA in May 1978. Prior to that, there were various volunteers working on records. Those records were stored in several locations at the staff office on Riverside Drive and in Sage Library at New Brunswick Theological Seminary. The program began with the hiring of Russell Gasero to be archivist on a part-time trial basis for three years. He transitioned into a full-time staff member during that period as the RCA struggled to find funding for a permanent program.

Originally, the archivist was a direct report to the general secretary and was part of the General Synod Office. With the restructure from the General Synod Executive Committee (GSEC) and General Program Council (GPC) to the General Synod Council (GSC), the archives shifted both in supervision and placement, but always reporting to the Commission on History twice a year. On many occasions, the archivist was instructed to "fly under the radar" in order to keep the program funded. While it was accepted as a vital and essential responsibility for the General Synod, it was always underfunded and understaffed as the

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30 Ronald A. Wells. *History Through the Eyes of Faith: Western Civilization and the Kingdom of God* (New York: HarperCollins, 1989), p. 2.

31 *Book of Church Order*, Appendix: The Formularies, 3, p. 132.

32 *Liturgy of the Reformed Church in America*, p. 49.

33 Wells, p. 3.

workload grew.

With the renovation of Sage Library from 1984–1985, the RCA Archives received increased storage room and better climate control as it began to lease the needed space and pay rent to New Brunswick Theological Seminary. In 1997, further expansion was made in the basement of Sage Library with the installation of nine movable storage units. As the RCA entered the twenty-first century, it leased underground storage space at Information Managers & Associates in Grand Rapids as the Archives began receiving more congregational records from both disbanded and active congregations.

For the last four decades, the Archives has struggled with changing leadership, structural rearrangements, and increased responsibilities. The Archives receives records from around the world: congregations, classes, regional synods, General Synod Council staff, mission areas, and RCA boards and agencies. Its policy and procedures statement from June 1980 require all official RCA records to be reviewed by the Archives prior to disposition. In recent years, this has become more difficult as the Archives is often ignored.

The commission has insisted that all assemblies and current staff assure compliance with the policy and procedures statement to assure the long-term legal, financial, and administrative well-being of the denomination—especially as it enters a period of rapid change and potential litigation and restructuring. To assure compliance and ongoing operation and preservation of our memory, the commission makes the following recommendations:

> H 22-1
> To place supervision and authority for the RCA Archives and its staff directly under an Archives Supervision Subcommittee of the Commission on History consisting of two representatives of the General Synod Council and two representatives of the Commission on History and chaired by the moderator of the Commission on History.

Reasons:

1. The General Synod Council task force exposed a conflict of interest issue between requiring compliance with the records policy and the subordinate-level archival staff enforcement of the responsibilities of the higher-level General Synod Council staff.
2. The difficulty of subordinate staff-level requiring compliance by higher-level staff puts a problematic and undue burden on the subordinate-level staff.
3. The RCA Archives must acquire records from congregations, mission efforts, agencies, and subsidiary boards of the General Synod, including the staff teams of the General Synod Council, and the General Synod Council itself.
4. This proposed new structure provides a remedy by removing the archival staff from the direct staff structure and allowing the RCA Archives to gain compliance for the whole of the RCA.
5. Two bodies directly accountable to the General Synod will supervise as agents of the General Synod.
6. This solves the problem of General Synod Council staff members being assigned archival supervision outside of their natural staffing portfolios.

A motion was made and supported to refer H 22-1 as follows:

H 22-1a

To refer H 22-1 to the Commission on Church Order, working with the Commission on History and any other relevant parties, for report back to General Synod 2023. (ADOPTED)

H 22-2
To authorize the establishment and incorporation of a Reformed Church Historic Trust as a 501(c)(3) organization to support and benefit the RCA Archives, and that the structure will be determined by the Commission on History in consultation with the RCA's general counsel, the RCA's chief financial officer, and others as needed, and reported to the 2023 General Synod.

Reasons:

1. A separate agency will provide for proper supervision and operation of the Archives in accordance with the commission's first recommendation, H 22-1.
2. As a 501(c)(3) organization, the Trust will be eligible for grants and other funding for such projects as a permanent archives building, digitization of records, preservation assistance, and fundraising. (The digitization of the *Christian Intelligencer*, published from August 7, 1830, through June 30, 1920, is one current example.)
3. Currently, the Archives is ineligible for state and federal grants. Incorporating separately, like the Board of Benefits Services (BOBS) and the Church Growth Fund (CGF), makes the Archives less dependent on the annual General Synod Council budget and assessment income.
4. With the Archives holding almost 400 years of our history, heritage, denominational identity, and detailed agency records, it is a good time, approaching our Quatercentenary, to make permanent its foundation and to provide for its growth.

A motion was made and supported to amend H 22-2 as follows (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

To ~~authorize~~explore the establishment and incorporation of a Reformed Church Historic Trust as a 501(c)(3) organization to support and benefit the RCA Archives, and that the structure will be determined by the Commission on History in consultation with the RCA's general counsel, the RCA's chief financial officer, and others as needed, and reported to the 2023 General Synod.

A motion was made and supported to cease debate.

VOTED: To cease debate.

VOTED: To adopt the amendment to H 22-2.

H 22-2 as amended was before the house. A motion was made and supported to cease debate.

VOTED: To cease debate.

VOTED: To adopt H 22-2 as amended.

The final version of H 22-2 as amended and adopted reads as follows:

H 22-2
To explore the establishment and incorporation of a Reformed Church Historic Trust as a 501(c)(3) organization to support and benefit the RCA Archives, and that the structure will be determined by the Commission on History in consultation with the RCA's general counsel, the RCA's chief financial officer, and others as needed, and reported to the 2023 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Respectfully submitted,
Steven D. Pierce, moderator

Report of the Commission on Judicial Business

The General Synod's Commission on Judicial Business (CJB) has eight members, one representing each of the regional synods. Regional synods are required to nominate laypersons and ministers in alternating six-year cycles in order to ensure that the commission's membership includes at least three laypersons and three ministers. A broad knowledge of and background in the structure, government, and function of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) is required of all members, and legal training and experience is required of lay members.

The responsibilities of the CJB are to carry out the responsibilities assigned to it in the RCA's *Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures* (*Book of Church Order* Chapter 2).

The Office of the General Synod received two judicial matters since the 2021 session of the General Synod. One was an appeal by Joanne W. Lansing from a decision by the Regional Synod of Albany (the "Lansing Appeal"). The second was an appeal by the Classis of Brooklyn from a decision by the Regional Synod of New York (the "Brooklyn Classis Appeal"). Each appeal was referred to the CJB for its consideration.

Lansing Appeal

After receiving the Lansing Appeal, the CJB requested and received from the clerk of the lower judicatory "the original record of all the proceedings in the case, including the notice of intent, the evidence, the arguments, and any other documents bearing on the case" (*Book of Church Order* [*BCO*], Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 3 [2021 edition, p. 96]). Thereafter the CJB met by video conference on Monday, January 17, 2022. Commission member Erin Parker (representing the Regional Synod of Albany) did not participate in any discussions of the Lansing Appeal. Commission member Ed Thornton (representing the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics) also did not participate in any discussions of the Lansing Appeal because he was appointed *ad interim* by the General Synod Council on January 26, 2022, which was after the commission's work on the Lansing Appeal had concluded.

During its January 17 meeting, the CJB reviewed and discussed the notice of intent to appeal, the appeal and reasons therefor, and the record of the case. At the conclusion of its discussion, the commission voted to deem the appeal in its entirety to be clearly without merit, and to dismiss the appeal without a hearing (in accordance with *BCO* Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 6 [2021 edition, p. 97]). In a letter dated January 31, 2022, the CJB gave all parties to the appeal (and, where applicable, their respective counsel) written notice of dismissal of the appeal without a hearing.

Brooklyn Classis Appeal

The Parties to the Appeal

The appellant in the Brooklyn Classis Appeal is the Classis of Brooklyn ("Classis"). The respondent is the Regional Synod of New York ("Regional Synod"). The consistory of Canarsie Community Reformed Church ("Canarsie") was an original party to the case and was considered a party respondent in light of *BCO* Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Sections 4 and 5 (2021 edition, p. 97), which provide generally for all parties to be involved.

The opinion and recommendations of the CJB in this matter are stated below.

Statement of Facts

The facts here are largely undisputed. Canarsie is a member of the Classis within the Regional Synod. In the fall of 2020, Canarsie negotiated a contract with Rev. Maudelin Willock for her to serve as their contract minister for a one-year term. Rev. Willock is an ordained minister of Word and sacrament in the RCA and at all times was in good and regular standing in this denomination.

Canarsie and Rev. Willock signed the contract in September 2020. Canarsie's then-supervisor, Rev. Calvin Spann, indicated that Rev. Willock was preaching at the church in a pulpit supply capacity. The Classis held its regular meeting in October, but took no action to either allow or disallow the contract.

By the spring of 2021, the Classis appointed Rev. De Lafayette Awkward as Canarsie's new supervisor.

In Canarsie's March 6, 2021, consistory meeting, Rev. Awkward—presiding as supervisor— informed the Canarsie consistory that he had misgivings about Rev. Willock serving as a contract minister. As the consistory minutes stated, "Awkward stated that he was not in support of [Reverend Willock's] application as he had issues with her integrity." Rev. Awkward was also at that time a member of the Brooklyn Classis Human Support Committee ("BCHSC"). The BCHSC is responsible for reviewing all contracts and calls between churches and pastors.

In a series of email exchanges in mid-March, the BCHSC asked Rev. Willock for a meeting. When Rev. Willock asked for the purpose of the meeting, the BCHSC said there was none; they just wanted to meet. Rev. Willock replied that she was not interested in such a meeting until the BCHSC stated its purpose or gave an agenda.

On April 17, 2021, the BCHSC met with Canarsie's consistory. When asked whether Rev. Willock could preach at Canarsie, Rev. Awkward stated, according to Canarsie's minutes, "to keep her there would create more problems because they [the BCHSC and/or the Classis] are not supporting the contract." The consistory minutes further reflect that Rev. Awkward "firmly stated that the reason is solely [Rev. Willock's] refusal to meet with the committee." The minutes also stated that Rev. Awkward "told the consistory that they [Canarsie] would not have the power to call pulpit supply."

Twelve days later, on April 29, 2021, Canarsie sent a "complaint" to the Regional Synod on the grounds that the BCHSC told them "that the committee would not support the contract and that all association with [Rev. Willock] should be severed." A copy of the letter was sent to the Classis clerk.

At the May 18, 2021, regular classis meeting, the Classis voted to affirm the recommendation of the BCHSC to not allow a contract or a call between Rev. Willock and Canarsie, in essence precluding any relationship between Canarsie and Rev. Willock, either currently or in the future.

Upon receipt of Canarsie's complaint to the Regional Synod, the Classis objected. They stated that the complaint was not proper as it was not preceded by a "notice of intent to complain" as required by the *BCO* and that the complaint was premature because it was submitted before the Classis voted to affirm the BCHSC recommendation.

The Regional Synod conducted a video hearing. The Classis was invited to attend but did

not do so. It also declined to provide its bylaws or the minutes of the BCHSC, despite having been asked to do so by the Regional Synod.

After the hearing, the Regional Synod issued its opinion, finding that the Classis had acted with manifest injustice toward Canarsie, which resulted in prejudice to the church. It then reversed the Classis' disallowance of the contract and further instructed that the original contract would be extended for one year going forward. Finally, it instructed the Classis to appoint a new supervisor who was not a party to this action.

Statement of Appellate Procedure

On December 11, 2021, the Regional Synod rendered its decision on Canarsie's complaint. On December 15, 2021, the Classis filed with the Regional Synod a written notice of intent to appeal. The Classis's undated appeal was filed with the office of the Clerk of the General Synod as an email attachment on December 20, 2021. The CJB deems the filing of the notice of intent and the filing of the appeal to be in compliance with *BCO* Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Sections 1 and 2, respectively.

The CJB received and reviewed the record of the case as well as briefs submitted by the Classis, Canarsie, and the Regional Synod. On April 29, 2022, CJB conducted a video hearing in which all parties appeared and made their arguments.

Discussion of the Issues on Appeal

The Classis raises a series of issues on appeal. The first three issues are procedural. The last two focus on the remedy prescribed by the Regional Synod. They will be addressed in the order presented by the Classis.

A. Lack of a Notice of Intent to Complain

The Classis first argues that the Regional Synod erred in hearing the complaint at all because Canarsie's consistory filed it without first filing a notice of intent to complain.

BCO Chapter 2, Part II, Article 2, Section 1 (2021 edition, p. 92) states that: "Written notice of intent to complain shall be filed with an officer or with the clerk of the assembly which took the action in question. This filing shall be completed not later than twenty days after having received official notification of the action taken. In default of this requirement, the case shall not be heard."

BCO Chapter 2, Part II, Article 2, Section 2 (2021 edition, p. 92) further states: "The complaint and the reasons therefor shall be filed with the clerk of the higher judicatory within twenty days after the filing of notice of intent."

The Classis argues that the notice of intent requirement is designed to allow the parties to try to work out their disagreement before a full complaint is filed. Twenty days is thus a kind of brake mechanism before filing the complaint.

The Regional Synod noted in its ruling that the *BCO* only requires that a complaint be filed no later than 20 days after the notice of intent. Indeed, under a fair reading of the *BCO*, both the notice of intent and the complaint itself can be filed simultaneously.

The Regional Synod concluded that the purpose of the notice of intent is to give the appellant up to 20 more days, if needed, to prepare and file its complaint.

The commission finds the Regional Synod's interpretation more persuasive. If the Classis's interpretation were correct, the *BCO* would mandate a *minimum* waiting period between the filing of the intent and the filing of the complaint. Instead, the *BCO* allows a *maximum* time between the two actions.

Moreover, it should go without saying that parties are ALWAYS encouraged to resolve their differences between themselves; this is, or should be, the very fabric of relationships between Christians.

B. Timing and Scope of the Complaint

1. The timing of the complaint

The Classis argues that the Regional Synod erred in hearing the complaint because it was filed prematurely.

BCO Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 1 (2021 edition, p. 96) states that: "This filing [of the notice of intent] shall be completed not later than twenty days after having received official notification of the action taken. In default of this requirement, the appeal shall not be heard."

The Classis asserts that the BCHSC's April recommendation was not an "action" because it had no force or effect until approved by the full Classis, which didn't happen until May 18, 2021. The complaint was filed April 29, 2021.

The difficulty with the Classis's argument is that it ignores the reason the complaint was filed so early. Namely, the Classis's own representative, Rev. Awkward, told Canarsie that the BCHSC had already decided the matter and, as a result, Rev. Willock could no longer serve their congregation. Rev. Awkward's representations to Canarsie would have appeared all the more authoritative because he was not only their Classis-appointed supervisor but also a member of the BCHSC itself.

It is a generally accepted equitable principle that a person should not be allowed to take advantage of a misrepresentation it made, where it could reasonably expect the other person to rely on it to their disadvantage.

From Canarsie's vantage point, their own Classis-appointed supervisor was telling them that the action had already been decided—that Rev. Willock could not serve at their church. What Rev. Awkward should have told them is that the BCHSC's decision was merely a recommendation, and that it would not become final until, at earliest, it was voted on by the Classis at its next formal meeting. At a minimum, Canarsie might have elected to raise the issue for further debate at the May Classis meeting.

Instead, it appears that this misinformation from Rev. Awkward set in motion Canarsie's filing of the complaint. For these reasons, the commission finds that the Regional Synod was correct in deciding it had authority to entertain Canarsie's complaint.

2. The Regional Synod's reversal of the Classis' vote to disallow the contract

Relatedly, the Classis argues that if the complaint were deemed timely, the issue must be limited to the BCHSC's recommendation, not the decision of the full Classis (which did not happen until about three weeks after the complaint).

Consistent with the reasoning stated in section B.1., the commission concludes that the

Regional Synod was correct in focusing on the Classis action of disallowing the proposed contract. As noted, the Classis's misrepresentation, even if unintentional, together with Canarsie's reasonable reliance upon it, precludes the Classis from arguing otherwise. Canarsie believed it was appealing the disallowance of the contract itself. The Regional Synod did not err in deciding the merits of the Classis's action, not just the BCHSC's recommendation.

C. Manifest Bias or Prejudice against the Classis

The Classis next raises on appeal the argument that it suffered manifest injustice and prejudice because of a claimed conflict of interest within the Regional Synod. Specifically, it asserts that Rev. Willock was president of the Regional Synod at the time Canarsie's complaint was heard and that Rev. Daniel Meeter, the chair of the Regional Synod's Judicial Business Committee, was a friend of Rev. Willock. The Classis asserts that Rev. Meeter therefore had an obligation to recuse himself from the dispute.

An allegation of a conflict of interest is one which can be easily and quickly addressed if raised in a timely fashion. Here, the Classis did not object to Rev. Meeter's involvement at the Regional Synod level. The Classis offers no reason for why it did not, or could not have, known about that relationship at that time. It is patently unfair to raise such a potential issue now, when the Classis sat on their hands and said nothing at the lower proceedings.

Moreover, as a general rule, a conflict of interests requires more than an acquaintance between two people. There must be a showing that the nature of that relationship would likely lead to an unfair or prejudicial outcome.

The Classis offers no evidence in that regard, either in its brief or at oral argument. Accordingly, the commission believes the issue is without merit.

D. The Remedies Imposed

Finally, the Classis objects to the remedies imposed by the Regional Synod. The Classis's objection is in two parts. First, it objects to the Regional Synod's decision to reinstate a contract that had already lapsed. Second, it objects to the Regional Synod's instruction to appoint a new supervisor to serve at Canarsie.

1. Reversal of Classis's vote to disallow the contract

The Classis argues that, even if the Regional Synod believed Canarsie was unfairly treated, its action should have been limited to reversing the Classis's disallowance of the contract. It had no authority to go beyond reversal and actually require that the contract be allowed.

The Classis argues that the Regional Synod should have merely reversed the disallowance and remanded the case back to the Classis with instructions for how to proceed forward. In support, the Classis notes that a fundamental function of a classis is the supervision and oversight of its member churches, and this must include the contracts guiding the relationships between its churches and the pastors who serve them.

For its part, the Regional Synod states that the history of distrust between the Classis and Rev. Willock, together with the prejudice that has resulted to Canarsie, required it to go further than a simple reversal and to actually reinstate the contract.

The commission agrees that the *BCO* allows a classis very broad discretion in deciding whether to approve or disapprove a contract between a member church and a minister serving under contract. Indeed, the *BCO* places no limits on whether a classis need to give any reason in making such a decision.

This must not mean, however, that a classis has *carte blanche* to rule upon church-minister contracts. Of course, there may be times when a decision is so egregious or in obvious bad faith that a higher body must intervene. The facts as laid out by the Regional Synod justified its decision to intervene in this case.

In filing an appeal, the appellant shall have the responsibility to establish that the lower judicatory erred in its decision (*BCO*, Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 10 [2021 edition, p. 97]).

In reviewing this case, the commission must give deference to the Regional Synod's decision and affirm its decision if it is supported by substantial evidence in the record when the record is viewed as a whole (*BCO*, Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 11 [2021 edition, p. 97]).

The Regional Synod concluded that the Classis had harmed Canarsie in the way in which it handled this contract. Although the Classis has not challenged these findings, they are restated briefly here.

Specifically, the Regional Synod noted the lack of cooperation it received by the Classis during the initial stages of the appeal. The Classis refused to hand over the notes and minutes of its BCHSC meetings. The Classis refused to provide a complete record of the case. And it refused to participate in the hearing on the matter.

Moreover, the Regional Synod found that over the course of several years, the Classis acted to delay, redirect, sideline, and finally disapprove the process of finding a pastor for its member church. Indeed, the Regional Synod noted that the Classis went so far as to pre-emptively disallow Canarsie from potentially offering any contract or call to Rev. Willock—an item that was never before either the BCHSC or the Classis at that time.

For these reasons, CJB believes the record, when viewed as a whole and with deference to the Regional Synod, supports their decision to reverse the Classis's disallowance of the contract.

2. Imposing the existing contract upon the Classis

Even so, the question remains whether the Regional Synod acted properly in reinstating the original contract. The Classis states that reversing the disallowance is one thing; imposing the previous contract is quite another.

The Classis argues that the *BCO* limits classes to allowing at most one-year terms for ministers under contract. Even then, these must then be reviewed annually thereafter (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 4 [2021 edition, p. 36]). This, the Classis argues, shows that the Regional Synod usurped its authority by not simply remanding the case, but by imposing what amounted to a new contract.

As noted above, classes have unique and broad authority to oversee the contractual relationships between their member churches and their pastors. Moreover, that authority, in the case of ministers serving under contract, is limited to approving or disapproving contracts at one-year increments.

For its part, the Regional Synod was concerned that the lack of good faith on the part of the Classis in dealing with Rev. Willock would mean that a mere reversal of the disallowance could lead right back to the starting impasse. Namely, that the Classis might again disallow the contract without reasons and Canarsie might again appeal. The Regional Synod seems to have, understandably, seen its remedy as a way of avoiding the inevitable.

The difficulty with the Regional Synod's remedy of simply imposing the earlier contract is several-fold. First, it attempts to resurrect an expired contract upon three entities, one of whom (Rev. Willock) is not a party to the complaint. There's nothing in the record to reflect that Rev. Willock still wants to become a contract minister nor that Canarsie is still in need of her services.

Second, simply imposing the earlier contract with new dates would deprive the Classis from its responsibility to review such contracts annually, notwithstanding the identity of the persons involved. For example, the Classis might have an entirely legitimate reason for disallowing the contract that has nothing to do with the identity of the parties. The Regional Synod's remedy would deprive the Classis of its obligation to ensure that all aspects of the contract protected itself and its member church.

A third difficulty, however, is the most troubling. The Regional Synod's skepticism about the parties' ability to resolve their own differences, while possibly accurate, does nothing to encourage healing.

As the Regional Synod itself noted in its appeal brief, the RCA expects its various governing bodies, at all levels, to work in a spirit of mutual good will and encouragement:

> Reformed governance understands that the greater assemblies care for the ministry that extends beyond the purview of the lesser assemblies without infringing upon the responsibilities of the lesser. Consistories, classes, and synods work together in mission and ministry within their shared boundaries (*BCO* Preamble, 2021 edition, p. 3 [emphasis added]).

CJB believes that the dysfunction and distrust within the Classis here is not remedied by simply imposing a result. Canarsie, the Classis, and Rev. Maudelin Willock will have little chance of finding healing if they can perpetually triangulate their grievances with a third party (the Regional Synod) instead of maturely attempting to resolve them face-to-face, as Christ would desire.

Instead, the commission feels the proper remedy is to remand the action to the Classis with instructions designed to offer them an opportunity, and an incentive, to repair this breach of trust.

Accordingly, the commission recommends that the Classis be instructed to invite and allow Canarsie and Rev. Willock to negotiate terms for a new one-year contract, if they both still choose to do so.

Further, the commission recommends that the Classis be instructed to conduct a good faith review of that contract, if it is presented to them.

Finally, if the Classis or one of its committees recommends any action short of a full allowance of the contract, the commission recommends that the Classis's executive committee be instructed to draft a written statement stating:

a) the reasons for recommending disallowance;
b) the actions taken by the Classis in seeking to address and overcome those reasons;
c) that the Classis representatives met with Canarsie's consistory to explain those reasons and actions; and
d) the Canarsie consistory's response to those reasons and actions.

Only after such a document is created and presented to the Classis may the Classis then vote to allow or disallow that particular contract.

It is hoped such a remedy at least brings the parties to the table to talk with each other—something that was sorely lacking thus far. At a minimum, such a document should provide the Regional Synod with clearer evidence should this case again reach them on an adjudicatory level.

Under ordinary circumstances a classis need not give reasons for allowing or disallowing a contract. But as the record of this case makes abundantly clear, this is not an ordinary circumstance.

3) *Imposing a new supervisor for Canarsie*

The Regional Synod originally instructed the Classis to appoint a new supervisor to Canarsie—one who is not part of this dispute. The Classis objected. During oral arguments it appears that a new supervisor has been appointed to the church and that he seems to be functioning well.

For this reason, the CJB recommends that the General Synod vacate that portion of the Regional Synod's decision as moot.

For the above reasons, this commission makes the following recommendation:

JB 22-1
To affirm the Regional Synod's finding that it had jurisdiction to hear the complaint and that there was prejudice and manifest injustice toward Canarsie; and further,

To affirm the Regional Synod's decision to reverse the Classis's disallowance of the contract; and further,

To reverse the Regional Synod's remedy of imposing the existing contract upon the parties; and further,

To instruct the Classis and Canarsie to abide by the framework outlined in Section D.2., above, in exploring the creation and allowance of a new contract for a minister; and further,

To vacate the Regional Synod's remedy of imposing a new supervisor as moot. (ADOPTED)

Report of the Commission on Nominations

During the 2021–2022 annual cycle, the Commission on Nominations met by Zoom video conference on November 16, 2021, and January 4, January 25, February 22, March 15, April 5, April 26, and May 17, 2022. In addition, three electronic votes were held by email on May 10, 25, and 26, 2022.

The 13 members of the commission include representatives named by the Reformed Church in America's eight regional synods and the three racial/ethnic councils, plus a member representing Native Americans/First Nations and the immediate past president of General Synod. The commission actively promoted the completion of profile forms by all individuals who are members of and wish to serve the Reformed Church in America (RCA) on a General Synod commission, agency, or board. Those profiles were carefully reviewed, and candidates and their references were vetted and discussed thoroughly. In this way, the commission sought to fulfill its responsibilities as stated in the bylaws of the General Synod—namely, "in consultation with the general secretary, [the commission] shall search the denomination for suitable nominees. In making nominations it shall consider the geographic location, occupation, and record of previous service to the denomination of persons suggested by classes, regional synods, and other sources. It shall consider this and other pertinent data in light of each commission's or agency's responsibilities, membership needs, suggested nominees, and place and schedule of meetings" (*Book of Church Order* [*BCO*], Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 8c, 2 [2021 edition, p. 118]). The commission also worked in cooperation with the boards of trustees of the RCA-related institutions to fill openings and vacancies on their respective boards as directed by the various governing documents of those institutions.

The commission seeks to nominate individuals for service on commissions, agencies, and boards on the basis of their spiritual gifts, interests, heart (or passion), abilities, personality, experience, and special leadership abilities. Through its efforts, the commission has proactively fulfilled its responsibility to search the denomination. The commission is pleased to report that it has, to the best of its ability, fulfilled its responsibility for ensuring that the requirements of the *BCO* are upheld.

When the number of qualified candidates from which to choose increases, the commission's work is enhanced, and the work of the General Synod's commissions, agencies, and boards is carried out more effectively. Consequently, the commission encourages anyone interested in serving to submit a completed profile by emailing it to Angela Worthley, staff to the commission, at nominations@rca.org. A blank profile and brief descriptions of each commission, agency, and board can be found at www.rca.org/nominations.

The commission recommends to General Synod that it elect the following nominees for the terms identified, whom the commission believes have those qualities that make them well-suited for the positions to which they are being nominated. (Classes that include a beginning and ending year begin on July 1 and end on June 30. Classes that are noted by an ending year only conclude June 30. An asterisk in front of the name indicates that the new term will be the individual's final term. The *BCO* requires regional synod and/or racial/ethnic council nomination for various RCA bodies. These nominees are indicated by the regional synod or racial/ethnic council acronym in parentheses followed by a # sign.)

General Synod Council (GSC)
Class ending in 2025
*Engel, Rev. Brian
*Sullivan, Rev. Kjersten (Ecumenical – ELCA)

Class of 2022–2026
* Brouwer, Calvin
* Felker, Rev. Barbara (AABC)#
* Karcher, Randy (RSA)#
* Kautz, Rev. Bradley (RSFW)#
* Kim, Rev. Yong Bok (CPAAM)#
* Willock, Rev. Maudelin

Commission on Christian Action (CCA)
Class ending in 2023
Ogden, Rev. Doug (Ecumenical observer – ELCA)
Class of 2022–2025
Haveman, Rev. Rodney
*Lungu, Rev. Edward
Walston, Rev. Mashona

Commission on Christian Discipleship and Education (CCDE)
Class of 2022–2025
Balk, Rev. Ellen
Simmons, Rev. Patricia

Commission on Christian Unity (CCU)
Class of 2022–2025
*Duensing Pearce, Rev. Stacey
Pavlovich, Kim

Commission on Christian Worship (CCW)
Class of 2022–2025
Grimm, Rev. Cory
Rienstra, Rev. Ron
Rivera, Rev. Irving

Commission on Church Order (CCO)
Class of 2022–2025
*Moths, Rev. Howard

Commission on History (CoH)
Class of 2022–2025
DeVries, Rev. Katlyn
*Zomer, Rev. David

Commission on Judicial Business (CJB)
Class of 2022–2025
Marriott, Brianne (RSFW)#
*Parker, Erin (RSA)#
Vogel-Vanderson, Susan (RSGL)#

Commission on Nominations (CoN)
Class of 2022–2025
Gold, Rev. Linda (RSA)#
Moreno, Eric (RSFW)#
*Nelson, Rev. Judith (RSGL)#
*Serrano-Altamirano, Jael (CHM)#

Commission on Race and Ethnicity (CORE)
Class ending in 2024
Shaw Robinson, Rev. Riana
Class of 2022–2025
James, Earl
*Kim, Rev. Stephen (CPAAM)#

Commission on Theology (CoT)
Class of 2022–2025
Aviles, Rev. Fredy
Brumm, Rev. James Hart
Church, William Ruggles
van Maastricht, Rev. Matthew

Commission for Women (CfW)
Class ending in 2023
Brouwer, Rev. Kristin
Class ending in 2024
Spooner, Barbara
Class of 2022–2025
Nelms, Cedric
*Rensink, Rev. Debra
Waterstone, Rev. Mark

Board of Benefits Services (BOBS)—New York
Class of 2022–2025
*Barnes, Lynn
Bough, Leanne
Flavio Rodrigues, Lucio

Board of Benefits Services (BOBS)—Michigan
Class of 2022–2025
*Barnes, Lynn
Bough, Leanne
Flavio Rodrigues, Lucio

Church Growth Fund (CGF) Board
Class of 2022–2025
Arias-Lopez, Elba
Bouwens, Joel
*Rukambe, Ronald

Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA)
Class ending in 2023
Converse, Rev. Susan
Class of 2022–2024
*Cousins, Devonna (GSC representative)
Class of 2022–2025
Baraza, Gerald
*Coleman-James, Norma
*Si, Willie
*Wolff, Rev. Cathleen

Pastoral Formation Oversight Board (PFOB)
Class of 2022–2024
* Van Es, Kimberly (GSC designee)
Class of 2022–2025
*Coleman-James, Norma (MFCA Theological Agent designee)
Folkert, Rev. Victor
*Mutch, Carol (CPAT designee)

New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS) Board of Trustees
Class of 2022–2025
*Arthur, Valerie
Davis III, Rev. Henry Pinckney
*McCarty, Therese
Miller, Rev. Steven
*Norton-Levering, Rev. Abigail (RSA)
Pearce, Rev. Zachary
*Rodriguez, Rev. Wilfredo

Western Theological Seminary (WTS) Board of Trustees
Class of 2022–2025
Bolt, Kate
Renner Anderson, Rebecca (RSGL)
*Van Andel, Carol
*Vander Wal, Lisa (RSA)

N 22-1
To elect the above-named nominees to serve as members of the General Synod commissions, agencies, and boards, and the boards of trustees of RCA-related educational institutions, for the terms identified; and further,

To elect Carol Mutch to serve as moderator of the Commission on Nominations for the annual term beginning July 1, 2022, and ending June 30, 2023. (ADOPTED)

***Ad Interim* Appointments**

The General Synod Council (GSC) appointed two *ad interim* nominees at meetings held in January 2022. An *ad interim* appointment is a temporary appointment made by the GSC of an individual to fill a mid-term vacancy on a commission, agency, or board. He or she typically serves less than one year until the next stated session of the General Synod (*BCO*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 4, Section 3 [2021 edition, p. 112]).

(Classes noted conclude June 30. The *BCO* requires regional synod nomination for various RCA bodies. These nominees are indicated by the regional synod acronym in parentheses followed by a # sign.)

Nominee appointed *ad interim* on January 7, 2022 (GSC 22-01)

General Synod Council (GSC)
Class ending in 2023
Shan, Jidong

Nominee appointed *ad interim* on January 26, 2022 (GSC 22-04)

Commission on Judicial Business (CJB)
Class ending in 2024
Thornton, Edward (RSMAt)#

N 22-2
To elect the above-named appointees, who were appointed *ad interim* by the General Synod Council, to serve as members of the General Synod commissions, agencies, and boards indicated, for the remainder of the terms identified. (ADOPTED)

Nominees for College Boards of Trustees

The Commission on Nominations recommends to General Synod the following trustees for the terms identified.

Central College Board of Trustees
Class of 2022–2023
Mathonnet-VanderWell, Rev. Sophie
Sikkink, Steve
Vogel, Judi

Northwestern College Board of Trustees
Class ending in 2025
Hardeman, Rev. Michael

Class ending in 2026
Alemán, Rev. Eddy

N 22-3
To affirm the election of the above-named Central College nominees to serve as General Synod members of the Central College Board of Trustees for the terms identified; and further,

To approve the election of the above-named Northwestern College nominees to serve as General Synod trustees of the Northwestern College Board of Trustees for the terms identified. (ADOPTED)

Appreciation

The commission wishes to express its appreciation to Jeffrey Allen and EJ de Waard, whose one-year terms of service will conclude on June 30, 2022. We are particularly grateful to Rebecca Hudak, who completes six years on the commission and served this year as secretary. Her diligence, attention to detail, faithful participation, and positive attitude enhanced the work of the commission.

And to Angela Worthley, our staff support and the backbone of the commission, we extend our deep gratitude for the great depth, detail, caring, and commitment she brings to the work of the commission. We would be lost without her.

Respectfully submitted,
Carol L. Mutch, 2021–2022 moderator
Judy Nelson, 2021–2022 vice moderator

Report of the Commission on Race and Ethnicity

"After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb."

–Revelation 7:9

Official Responsibilities of the Commission on Race and Ethnicity

The *Book of Church Order* names the responsibilities of the Commission on Race and Ethnicity (CORE) in Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 7b (2021 edition, p. 117):

1. The commission shall advise the church on policies and initiatives that address issues of institutional racism and the commitment of the Reformed Church in America to become a fully multicultural and multiethnic denomination.
2. The commission shall serve as an advocate for transformation of the Reformed Church in America in regard to its multiracial and multiethnic life.
3. The commission shall recommend policies, objectives, guidelines, and strategies to assist the Reformed Church in America in its effort through all of its agencies, commissions, institutions, and other affiliated bodies to become a fully multiracial and multiethnic church.
4. The commission shall monitor, evaluate, and report on the Reformed Church in America's progress in achieving its multiracial and multiethnic objectives.

Members of CORE are June Denny, Rolfi Elivo Lopez, Stephen Kim, Young Na, Earl James (secretary), Nathan Pyle (vice moderator), and Kelvin Spooner (moderator). Alina Coipel faithfully serves as Reformed Church in America (RCA) support staff to the commission.

The Reformed Church in America and Racism

The Reformed Church in America (RCA) has long addressed and confronted racism, and the RCA has used many concepts to encounter racism such as fully multiracial and multicultural, multiracial future freed from racism, antiracism, multiracial initiatives, white privilege, cultural agility, diversity, equity, inclusion, and family of God.

Under these concepts, and since 1957, the RCA provided a plethora of statements, programs, processes, and measures to signal and mark progress toward becoming an antiracist denomination. From 2006 to 2008 alone, the General Synods adopted 19 such recommendations. The RCA website recounts that history at www.rca.org/synod/statements. Scroll to the "Racism" section.

Those efforts to transform the RCA have either stalled, or were deficient, or both. Our goal of becoming a fully multiracial and multicultural denomination freed from racism remains unfulfilled. CORE desires to encourage our denomination to combat racism in fresh ways and, in this report, CORE offers fresh thinking about racism and antiracism.

Two biblical narratives serve as a foundation for learning to be an antiracist denomination: Mark 12:28-34 (the Great Commandment) and Luke 10:25-37 (the Parable of the Good Samaritan).

The Great Commandment

A scribe observes Jesus in a debate with some religious leaders. He asks Jesus which commandment is first among all the others. Perhaps he imagined that Jesus would choose one commandment and defend his choice. Instead, Jesus provided two conjoined summaries. One summary captured the commandments related to God, indicating we are to completely love God. Jesus's second summary captured the commandments related to human relationships, indicating that the love that one has for self and life must be given in equal measure to one's neighbor.

Love God and love others. The active verb in both summaries is the word "love."

The Good Samaritan

The parable occurs during a conversation between Jesus and a lawyer. The lawyer, seeking to trap Jesus, asks what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus answered: by living out the Great Commandment. The lawyer quickly responded by asking, "Who is my neighbor?" The parable is Jesus's response.

The deepest truth of the parable is not that the Samaritan did something good. Jesus pointed to something deeper. He compared the love not shown by respected Hebrew religious leaders to the love shown by an ethnic Hebrew (a Samaritan), who was considered unclean and inferior. Love made the Samaritan the neighbor.

It was for that lawyer to apply that truth about love, neighbor, and eternal life. It is the same for us today. CORE believes this parable and the Great Commandment are the high mark for us to apply now about love, neighbor, and eternal life.

CORE has explored and discussed people groups we ourselves hold as "not like me" and, therefore, as "not my neighbor." We recognized that all of us, regardless of race or ethnicity, carry biases, prejudices, preferences for people who are even "like me" racially. For "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

CORE recognizes that we need countermeasures to keep our biases from harming our neighbors. Harm involves limiting their freedom to access, resources, and hospitality in the same way that we expect those freedoms for ourselves. To secure these countermeasures, we need to remain accountable to trusted others. In addition, there are times when we need to create policies and enforce them vigorously to fully treat our multiracial and multicultural neighbors as neighbors.

CORE has wrestled with challenges to Jesus's call to love. One such challenge involves freedom. A CORE commissioner recalled a story from one of his undergraduate religion professors. During the 1940s, the story went, a particular world missions conference was held. A young Korean woman spoke on the subject of love. Her entire speech focused on the desire of her beloved Korean people to be free from domination by Japan. The professor said that the woman said no Korean had the right to speak of love without speaking of freedom from the Japanese. Interesting that when she heard "love," she spoke of "freedom," because Japan waged war against Korean culture, language, and history that goes back thousands of years. Strong feelings about that conflict continue today.

Dynamisms between love and freedom do not only exist within the history of Korea and Japan. In the United States and Canada, love and freedom were battered by white people and governments against First Nation people and Native Americans, Black Americans

and others of African descent, Chinese, Latinos, and other people of color. Religious institutions, such as the RCA, benefitted from those atrocities. Further, they supported racism overtly or by silence. Historically, too many religionists underpinned, and still underpin, racist agendas with theological and ecclesiological corruptions. Too many refused to oppose them using Scriptures, such as those cited in this report, as bases for direct advocacy and action.

Racism is sin. Sin limits and perverts love. Limited and perverted love batters and hides freedom. Racism is the antithesis of what God intends for us. It is the rejection of the other, which is contrary to the Word of God. Racism is the continuing lie that says that some are less than others. It is also a lie about God, for it falsely claims that God favors parts of creation over the entirety of creation.

CORE invites delegates and our church to explore the dynamic relationships between love and freedom. Challenge and remove all instances where racism diminishes love and allows freedom to be diminished.

Accountability

Erroneously, there are times when we equate the "kingdom of God" with "the church." The kingdom of God is better understood as encompassing the church, the world, and nature. Taking this kingdom of God view, the Holy Spirit is at work in both the church and the world to reconcile both back to God, which includes God's justice. CORE recommends that accountability recognize what the Spirit is doing in both the church and the world. To ensure accountability for racial diversity, equity, and inclusion, the church and the world use different tools.

The church uses tools that tend to be word-focused. The church relies on sermons, joint worship services, resolutions and statements from assemblies and institutions, and trainings. The church emphasizes that love and heart-change are our means and ends. Yet many people of color remain frustrated with the slowness for achieving denominational or ecclesiological racial equity and justice. Clearly, the church's tools highlight the need for change. However, they do not penetrate status quo practices, systems, and culture to secure and sustain change.

The world uses additional approaches and tools to combat racism. Public advocacy and public policy advocacy are potent tools. Legislation with enforcement capacities has been used. Judicial processes have been used. CORE believes such changes of equity, inclusion, and justice are examples of the Spirit reconciling the world to God and God's justice. CORE also knows that this work is by no means completed in the world. The Holy Spirit continues to reconcile the world to God.

CORE believes that many of our people of color are RCA members and leaders, and that they participate in leading the RCA, at least in part because of the reconciling changes the Holy Spirit is crafting in the world. As we strive for the kingdom of God in the world, the Spirit continues to create racial equity and inclusion work in the world, and the church can benefit from that work and from using some of the biblically based advocacy practices that have helped craft those changes.

Ways Forward

Many churches in the RCA are in locations that are racially homogeneous. Many churches are racially homogenous themselves. In ways we might not be aware of, homogeneity can

shape what we see as "treasures" or define things we value from the heart. Some of those "treasures" bear fruit in culture, polity, and racial preferences. (See Matthew 6:21.) Do people, congregations, and assemblies in such locations not need to oppose racism? No, all need to oppose racism. However, CORE believes that currently, some do and others do not. The Great Commandment and the Good Samaritan parable do not exempt factors like location and homogeneity.

Proximity matters. However, lack of proximity does not inhibit us from growth. People anywhere can contribute to the RCA becoming a fully transformed multiracial, multicultural denomination.

There is a plethora of web-based and virtual capacities available to us. Many congregations have profitably employed virtual worship, fellowship, and teaching.

Antiracist cultures and practices can be nourished virtually. We all can:

- Select blogs and books to read and discuss
- Find influencers to follow
- Study documentaries and videos
- Chat with online groups and communities
- Engage antiracist networks
- Support antiracist and multicultural events
- Visit antiracist churches
- Join or launch advocacy actions

Also, many towns, cities, and rural areas across North America have multiracial pasts. Visits to nearby libraries, colleges and universities, and historical societies can yield treasure troves of information about the influences of race and racism in those locales. Studying histories of some of our congregations can yield similar valuable information. In addition, many towns, cities, and rural areas offer excellent historic exhibits, art displays, cultural events, etc. Observing both how race is presented **and** how it is absent from presentation can yield helpful insights.

The more we ask others who do not look or sound like we do and the more we engage people who have preferences different from ours, the less we fear them, and the more we will stand with them. Our love will support, and not suppress, freedom.

CORE encourages all of us to engage our imaginations and participate in fresh ways to learn about, grow in, and deliver for a multiracial, multicultural world.

Again, there are times when we need to create policies and enforce them vigorously to fully treat our multiracial and multicultural neighbors as neighbors.

RE 22-1
To direct the General Synod Council and the general secretary to strongly urge all entities of the Reformed Church in America (racial/ethnic councils, assemblies, commissions, institutions, boards, and agencies) to adopt the following antiracism policy:

The Reformed Church in America shall:

1. **Build on the 2009 General Synod declaration that "racism is a sin because it is an offense to God" and declare that**

the sin of racism is expressed as a policy, behavior, and/or belief against a person or people based on their identification and/or membership in a particular racial or ethnic group that is considered a minority.

2. **Define antiracism as the practice of confronting and changing policies, behaviors, and beliefs that perpetuate racist ideas and actions.**
3. **Confess that our sin has led us to erect religious, cultural, economic, and political barriers along racial and ethnic lines and that these barriers have separated us from one another and deprived many of us the right to develop our personal and corporate identities.**
4. **Respect the rights and freedom of all people of color regardless of race, ethnicity, or nationality where the cries of people who have become victims of racial injustice and/or discrimination are to be taken seriously and are given full voice and opportunity to make their complaints, without retaliation, to their appropriate judicatories; and inform the Office for Advocacy and Race Relations as well as the Commission on Race and Ethnicity.**
5. **Support allies who speak out against persons and systems that perpetuate racial injustice.**
6. **Commit to dismantling racism in its attitudes and structures in all assemblies (local churches, classes, regional synods, and General Synod). (ADOPTED)**

Intensive Immersive Experiences

CORE recommends that General Synod 2022 provide a strategy of intensive, immersive experiences rather than training events to underpin these antiracism recommendations. We recommend up to three Sankofa journeys a year for three years, and up to three Institute for Healing Racism learning communities a year for three years.

Training provides meaningful methods to disseminate information. This information frequently is disseminated over a couple of hours to a couple of days. Measurable training outcomes oftentimes show clear increases in knowledge and recitable information. Over time, expectedly, retention of the increased knowledge diminishes relatively quickly. Everyday life and its regular demands crowd out utilizing many of the knowledge gains achieved in training.

Instead of traditional training, CORE recommends utilizing intensive experience strategies that challenge mind, memory, self-assessment, spiritual journeying, and emotions. Both recommended experiences will help our RCA at personal, inter-personal, cultural, and institutional levels.

The RCA has years of experience with Sankofa journeys. Over 300 of its leaders and members participated in approximately 12 journeys across a roughly 9-year period. Persons of various races, both genders, different generations, and from various regional synods participated. Those three-and-a-half-day bus trips typically went to the Deep South of the U.S. However, Sankofa journeys can be developed to go to various states, provinces, or regional synods. Participants explore the intersections of race, faith, and their personal life journeys.

The Institute for Healing Racism learning communities aim to "eliminate institutional racism that influences ideas and practices rooted in discrimination. The curriculum raises awareness of and about individual and institutional racism, and possible remedies for their elimination" (www.grcc.edu/about-grcc/office-diversity-equity-inclusion/training-development/institute-healing-racism).

These learning communities can occur over four to six two-hour sessions over a two- to four-month period. People of all races, both genders, any generation, and from various regional synods can participate. Sessions are conducted in a meeting space rather than having a travel component as Sankofa does.

An assessment is requested to support this ministry. The assessment is one part of a funding recipe that includes participant fees, contributions from assemblies and institutions, and grants.

CORE requests assessment funding over a three-year period. We will make the funding request annually rather than funding all three years at once in order to spread the assessment out over the three years. For each subsequent request, we will include a progress report for General Synod delegates to review.

The per-member assessment requested for this first year is $0.36.

RE 22-2
To direct the General Synod Council, working together with the Commission on Race and Ethnicity, to provide up to three Sankofa journeys per year for the next three years and up to three Institute for Healing Racism–type experiences per year for the next three years; and further,

To approve the $0.36 per member assessment to fund the first year of Sankofa journeys and Institute for Healing Racism learning communities. (ADOPTED)

Native American/First Nations

The *Book of Church Order* states, "The General Synod Council shall have racial/ethnic councils which express the collective vision and voice of racial and ethnic congregants and congregations as they develop ministries and advocate for policies of racial and ethnic inclusion, economic, social, and racial justice, both within the Reformed Church in America and ecumenically" (Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 2b [2021 edition, p. 109]).

The Reformed Church in America has established and recognizes three racial/ethnic councils: the African American Black Council, the Council for Hispanic Ministries, and the Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries. At one time, there was a Native American Council in the RCA. However, it was disbanded some years ago, leaving a void with no council to advocate for the needs and concerns of Native American and First Nations people in this denomination. Under these circumstances, the voices of Native American and First Nations members are marginalized at best and, at worst, are not heard at all. CORE believes this travesty must be immediately corrected.

> RE 22-3
> To direct the General Synod Council to reinstate and recognize a fourth racial/ethnic council for Native American and First Nations Ministries as a permanent council in the Reformed Church in America with all rights and privileges hereto according to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 2b (2021 edition, p. 109).

A motion was made and supported to amend RE 22-3 as follows (deletion is stricken):

> To direct the General Synod Council to reinstate and recognize a fourth racial/ethnic council for Native American and First Nations Ministries as a ~~permanent~~ council in the Reformed Church in America with all rights and privileges hereto according to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 2b (2021 edition, p. 109).

VOTED: To amend RE 22-3.

VOTED: To adopt RE 22-3 as amended.

RE 22-3 as amended as adopted reads as follows:

> **RE 22-3**
> **To direct the General Synod Council to reinstate and recognize a fourth racial/ethnic council for Native American and First Nations Ministries as a council in the Reformed Church in America with all rights and privileges hereto according to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 2b (2021 edition, p. 109). (ADOPTED)**

Church Multiplication

Much of the work of the RCA to address racism is focused on established congregations, assemblies, and institutions. The antiracism work in those settings often confronts deeply entrenched assumptions and behaviors, cherished practices, and honored beliefs. CORE is not saying these features are racist *per se*. Rather:

- Racist ideas and actions can be shielded by those features.
- Changing those features might be required to eliminate shielded racist ideas and actions.
- Change theory makes uprooting racism a deep challenge in existing congregations, assemblies, and institutions.

The RCA has a vigorous, fruitful Church Multiplication ministry. New churches do not have years in which to develop time-bound entrenched assumptions, cherished practices, and honored beliefs. The new churches in the RCA can provide the denomination with additional capacities to become more multiracial and multicultural.

CORE urges the RCA to vigorously embed antiracism values and practices in its church planting movement.

RE 22-4
To direct the General Synod Council to ensure that as the RCA multiplies and grows, the work in new church starts:

1. **Embeds core values on antiracism in all of its new congregations and worshiping communities.**
2. **Develops specific points that measure antiracism efforts and results of its new congregations.**
3. **Shares results of antiracism work in the Church Multiplication ministry with RCA assemblies and institutions for learning and potential development opportunities.**
4. **Reports annually to the General Synod on annual and multi-annual impacts of antiracism agendas on our new churches. (ADOPTED)**

Report of the Commission on Theology

The Commission on Theology (COT) met digitally on November 16, November 29, and December 6, 2021, as well as on January 25, January 26, and February 16, 2022.

COT is honored to serve the church through its theological reflections and is humbled by such responsibility and trust. The commission seeks to fulfill its tasks with integrity and faithfulness and prays that its work would be fruitful for the church. The commission's primary task this year was assigned by General Synod 2021. The commission also began to prepare for work that will be reported back to General Synod 2023, as well as responding to requests from Reformed Church in America (RCA) staff.

Referral Regarding Affinity Synods

In response to an overture from Great Lakes City Classis, General Synod 2021 passed ONB 21-10, which included an instruction to the Commission on Theology:

> 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 and the Commission on Theology to study the structure and implications of affinity synods, with a report to General Synod in 2022 (*MGS 2021*, pp. 121-123).

At its fall meetings, the commission discussed the possibilities and challenges presented by "affinity" being used as a structural principle for the RCA, with particular emphasis on the underlying understanding of the church contained in such a proposal. To this end, the commission has written "Blest Be the Tie That Binds" as a resource for congregations and larger assemblies seeking to understand what it means to belong to the RCA, as well as for the Restructuring Team as they do their work. The full text of the paper and the accompanying recommendation are included at the end of this report.

Ongoing Work

At General Synod 2021, an overture from the Classis of New Brunswick led to the adoption of ONB 21-2, which instructed "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" (*MGS 2021*, pp. 112-113). The commission has begun reviewing our previous work related to the Reformed understanding of Scripture and human sexuality in preparation for reviewing "Affirmed and Celebrated."

The commission received a request from the RCA staff to address whether the RCA should have a preferred Bible translation in its publications. The commission is working on a resource on the virtues and vices in Bible translation. COT also received a request from the staff to address the topic of bodily resurrection and is preparing a resource.

The commission always welcomes appropriate inquiries of theological significance from members of the RCA, and it continues to trust that its work serves the church in its mission and gives glory to its head, Jesus Christ.

Acknowledgments

The commission also offers thanks to Dr. David Komline, associate professor of church history at Western Theological Seminary; Dr. James V. Brownson, General Synod professor, James and Jean Cook Professor of New Testament at Western Theological Seminary; and Rev. Stephen Shaffer, pastor of Bethel Reformed Church in Brantford, Ontario, for their faithful and fruitful service. Their membership on the Commission on Theology is ending and the commission is sincerely grateful for their gifts, leadership, and generous and significant contributions to the life of the church, especially the ministry of the RCA. The commission also offers thanks to Rev. Terry DeYoung, staff to the commission, for his consistent and effective guidance of its work.

BLEST BE THE TIE THAT BINDS

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

"Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Corinthians 12:27).

Imagine a brother and sister who live in the same city but refuse to sit in the same room together. The disagreement is deep and has been building for a long time. Because of the mounting tension, the family decides that they are still family but will have separate Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter celebrations. Some of the uncles, aunts, and cousins will meet at the brother's house, while others will meet not far down the road at the sister's home. In this way, the family hopes that they can finally start talking about something other than the conflict between these two siblings. They want to move on from this familial struggle. However, a solution that may seem more peaceful is not always healthier.

For the past several years, particularly through the work of the Vision 2020 Team, the RCA has wrestled with what binds us together as a denomination amidst significant division. "Affinity" (expressed most often in reference to affinity synods or classes) is being considered as a structuring principle for the future of the denomination, particularly as a way of maintaining unity and mission in this conflictual time. General Synod 2021 passed the following recommendation related to the possibility of affinity regional synods:

> 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 and the Commission on Theology to study the structure and implications of affinity synods, with a report to General Synod in 2022 (ONB 21-10, *MGS 2021*, p. 123).

This paper is the Commission on Theology's response to this request.

As the RCA considers reorganization models, including the shift of regional synods to an affinity-based model, we as a denomination must first look at the more fundamental question of mutual belonging. Why are we together as a family? What binds us together in the RCA, and how should those ties affect the way we structure our life together as a denomination? Only once we have answered what unites us can we then think clearly about which forms and structures will deepen that bond and which will, like the family with separate Thanksgivings, only give the appearance of peace while deepening the fractures.

In ONB 21-10, General Synod 2021 tasked the Commission on Theology to report on *one specific way* that the RCA might reorganize, instructing "the Commission on Church Order and the Commission on Theology to study the structure and implications of affinity synods, with a report to General Synod in 2022." With this assignment as our guide, this paper will discuss **mutual belonging in Christ, mutual belonging in the RCA, and the effect affinity assemblies could have on mutual belonging in the RCA**. It is our hope that this review of mutuality within our denomination will present a framework for our conversations around restructuring the RCA.[34]

Mutual Belonging in Christ

What binds us together as the RCA? What unites our many diverse congregations into one church? As our doctrinal standards profess, we belong to Jesus Christ. Christ has claimed his church, and by the Spirit, we have been brought into union with Christ. The opening question of the Heidelberg Catechism asks, "What is your only comfort—in life and in death?" The answer: "That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ."[35] Jesus Christ is where we belong. It is "in him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 16:38); he is our foundation for mission and service.[36] Christ is the one who unites us to himself and binds the church together by the work of his Spirit. As Heidelberg Catechism Question and Answer 54 proclaims, Christ "gathers, protects, and preserves for himself a community chosen for eternal life and united in true faith."[37] Neither as individuals, nor as congregations and classes, do we belong to ourselves. We have all been bought with a price—the blood of Jesus shed on the cross (1 Corinthians 6:20).

Alongside our belonging to Christ comes our belonging to one another. Because we belong to Jesus Christ (body and soul), we as Christians belong to one another. Therefore, we do not own ourselves; we do not need to live as if our life, our future, our identity was something we needed to create, forge, or manufacture. Instead, we have been given an identity. We have already been claimed. The Belgic Confession, Article 28, calls for all believers to be united to the church:

> But all people are obliged
> to join and unite with it,
> keeping the unity of the church
> by submitting to its instruction and discipline,
> by bending their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ,
> and by serving to build up one another,
> according to the gifts God has given them
> *as members of each other*
> *in the same body*. (emphasis added)[38]

The Belgic Confession draws from Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 12: "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one

[34] For a survey of the history of the regional synod, see Howard D. Schipper, "An Essay on the Particular Synod of Michigan (Reformed Church in America): Its History, Present Identity and Program, and Its Future," 1987, https://repository.westernsem.edu/xmlui/handle/1866/1644.

[35] Heidelberg Catechism, Question 1 in *Our Faith: Ecumenical Creeds, Reformed Confessions, and Other Resources* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2013).

[36] Stephen C. Shaffer, *Rooted: Growing in Christ in a Rootless Age* (Brantford, Ontario: Peniel Press, 2022), 49.

[37] Heidelberg Catechism, Question 54.

[38] Belgic Confession, Article 28 in *Our Faith*, 54.

body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). Paul goes on to talk about how the various members of the human body are united and indispensable. Though there is a diversity of gifts, there is a fundamental unity to the body of Christ.

Unity in Christ is not easy. The apostle Paul reminds us through his life and ministry that such unity is not accomplished by us but by God. When people of faith are caught in antagonistic battles over the core of our faith, Paul states that there is only one gospel, which he received not from a human source, but through a revelation of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:11). Some differences in the life of the church do not touch on the core of the gospel, while others do. Throughout the New Testament letters, the gospel (and its implications for life in Christ) was guarded against error and misrepresentation (Galatians 1:6-9). However, at other, less significant issues, Paul cautions compassion and patience for those who believe differently and a trust that God will lead them to the truth (Philippians 3:15).

To belong to Christ is to belong to his body, the church. We cannot belong to Christ apart from his body. This is why division (schism) was viewed so seriously by the Reformers. Schism equates to tearing apart the body of Christ. As John Calvin says, "The church is called 'catholic' or 'universal,' because there cannot be two or three churches unless Christ be torn asunder—which cannot happen!"[39] Because the church is bound to Christ, to tear apart the church is akin to attempting to rip Christ apart. Even in the midst of deep disagreement, believers should recall the New Testament principle: the various members of the body of Christ are joined together because of our mutual belonging in Christ.

The many members of the church are united in Christ as one body and called to live out that unity in visible ways. Like sinews and ligaments hold together the human body, Christ holds together the diverse parts of the body of Christ through 1) our bonds of love and 2) our unity in true faith.

First, Christians belong to one another as we are bound together by the love of Christ, which manifests in our love for one another: "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 5:1-2). "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). As Stephen Shaffer urges us, "We live and move and act because we *already* belong, not in order to belong. Because Jesus lived and died for us, we can now, in gratitude, live and die for him."[40] The love of God in Christ *for us* leads to a life of love *for others*.

This is the unity in true faith—unity seen in the mutual love between members of the church. Christ has given us gifts and a place within his body, the church, and we are called to use those gifts in unity for the building up of the church. According to Question and Answer 55 of the Heidelberg Catechism, "believers one and all, as members of this community, share in Christ and in all his treasures and gifts," and it is our duty to use these gifts "readily and joyfully for the service and enrichment of the other members."[41] We share in Christ's gifts and then share these gifts in love for one another.

Second, Christians belong to one another as we are bound and united together by our

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39 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1559, ed. J.T. McNeill, trans. F.L. Battles, volume 2 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), IV.1.2

40 Shaffer, *Rooted*, 160.

41 Heidelberg Catechism, Question 55

common faith in the Triune God. In explaining what we mean when we confess "the holy catholic church," the Heidelberg Catechism proclaims that the church Christ has gathered is "united in true faith."[42] There is a doctrinal aspect of mutual belonging in Christ. Along with the ecumenical creeds, the RCA confesses four standards of unity: the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort, and the Belhar Confession. These are standards *of unity* because their purpose is to unite the church in true faith in its Lord, Jesus Christ. Christ unifies his church under his Word through the confession of the gospel. One of the visible ways we are bound to one another in the RCA is through our common confession of these standards of unity.

Because Christians belong to Christ, we also belong to one another in the body of Christ. This bond is a gift of the Holy Spirit, but also shows up in visible ways through our mutual love of one another and our common confession of the Christian faith. As Calvin urges, "wherever church unity is commended to us, this is required: that while our minds agree in Christ, our will should also be joined with mutual benevolence in Christ."[43] Mutual love and common confession are visible signs of our belonging to one another because we belong to Jesus Christ.

Our culture is shaped by broad assumptions about relationships. What binds people together in a neighborhood, marriage, or society is our personal choice. We choose to belong to communities and can choose to leave them when it is no longer beneficial. Some of these relationships are lasting, but they can also be very fragile. Even in the church, we often participate in these patterns. We choose what churches to attend, often driving past many others on the way. Even when we choose well, we still *make the choice*.

This human reality of "choosing" can impact how we view belonging to an individual congregation as well as what it means for that congregation to belong to a denomination. Is a denomination merely a voluntary association we belong to for the sake of mutual benefit? Or is it, as the Belgic Confession claims in Article 27, "a holy congregation and gathering of true Christian believers, awaiting their entire salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed in his blood, and sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit"? Is the church something we choose to be a part of or something we are a part of because of God's gracious choice to gather us into it? None of us lives fully into our mutual belonging in Christ. We live in a world of voluntary associations and significant choice, a world in which we participate in many ways. Yet, what truly binds the church together is not our choice but Christ's (1 Peter 1:2). Our struggle to live belonging to one another in Christ does not invalidate this call but only reinforces the need for all of us to hear it again.

Mutual Belonging in the RCA

Having reviewed the foundation of our mutual belonging in Christ, it is now appropriate to think about how this belonging might express itself in our church structures. For the past several years, particularly through the work of the Vision 2020 Team, the RCA has been exploring different ways of organizing its life together as the family of God. It is the task of the RCA to discern well the will of God as it relates to how we live and work together as the church. It is the aim of the Commission on Theology to aid this discernment process through its own theological reflections. Church structures are, after all, theological and practical. To quote Eugene Heideman, "Ecclesiastical structures can never be primarily a means of human government or program; they are gifts of the Spirit, who is preparing the way for the coming presence of Christ; they are the bones of the body, which he has

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42 Heidelberg Catechism, Question 54

43 Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.2.5

elected to minister in this world."[44]

The regional synod has long held an important place in the Dutch Reformed tradition. The second Synod of Dordrecht in 1575 declared that the church ought to structure itself into four levels of assembly: consistory, classis, particular synod, and general synod. (The RCA adopted the name "regional synod" for what it previously called the "particular synod" in 1992.) Whereas the polity established at Dort included particular synods, no particular synods existed in America during the colonial period. They were, however, referenced in the first constitution of the RCA, passed in 1793, and built on the polity of Dort.

One year later, a decision of the RCA General Synod formed the particular synods of Albany and New York, assigning them to meet triennially. Among the duties explicitly enjoined on these particular synods was to send delegates to "the examination of all candidates for the ministry" in order that "uniformity, order, and purity of doctrine may be maintained, and established" (Article 49 of the Constitution of 1793; for a similar clause in the reworked constitution of 1834, see Article III, Section 4). In other words, one of the major functions of these regional synods was to foster unity among the churches.

As the polity of the RCA grew, the role of the particular synod also expanded and, indeed, became more debated. The minutes of the General Synod are littered with such discussion. In 1899, a committee tasked with reporting on the history and possible reformation of particular synods summarized the whole four-fold assembly system: "The keynote was union; and as the Consistory was, in intent, the standing together point and bond and conservator of union, of good and peaceful government, in the congregation, so was the Classis within its sphere of churches, the Particular Synod within its sphere of Classes, and the General or National Synod within the periphery of the whole. In its government and form of union so was the Church of the Netherlands established, welded into one, in 1578" (*MGS 1899*, pp. 497-498).

The RCA continued periodically to discuss the role of the particular synod in the twentieth century, with the subject taking on a major role in the General Synods of 1927, 1961, 1970, and then throughout the 1990s. In the twentieth century, much of the discussion focused around, as William H. S. Demarest put it, "the possible increase of the value and usefulness of the synod through the larger use of it as a conference, for the presenting and discussing of addresses on subjects in the field of church life and work."[45] To the extent that regional synods accepted this new function, their primary role shifted from providing oversight to fostering mission. In the twenty-first century, this new understanding of the regional synod as a body oriented around mission has taken center stage. This emphasis is especially evident in the rise of church structures based on affinity, particularly the structure of the classis.

The Commission on Theology first reported on the possible formation of the first modern non-geographic classis by the Synod of the Far West in 2008 (*MGS 2008*, p. 250). This classis (City Classis) did indeed come into existence, amidst widespread debate (see *MGS 2009*, pp. 120-121, 300). Whereas this first non-geographic classis was focused around mission to the city, several non-geographic classis focused around ministry in a specific language (Classis of the Americas and Classis de las Naciones) formed after. In these instances, the key questions concerned classes, not regional synods. But in each of these

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44 Eugene Heideman, *Reformed Bishops and Catholic Elders* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1970), 261.

45 William H. S. Demarest, *Notes on the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America*, rev. ed. (New Brunswick: New Brunswick Theological Seminary, 1946), 134-135.

instances, a regional synod established an assembly of the church with the key organizing principle being not geography, but rather some kind of missional goal.[46]

Even more recently, General Synod, our highest assembly, has transferred congregations between classes that were members of different regional synods. General Synod 2018 transferred Faith Community Reformed Church of Stickney, Illinois, from the Classis of Chicago, Regional Synod of Mid-America, to City Classis, Regional Synod of the Far West, for the reason "that Faith Community Reformed Church of Stickney [as an urban congregation] can best serve the kingdom as part of City Classis" (*MGS 2018*, p. 115). Two years later, General Synod transferred Addisville Reformed Church, located in Richboro, Pennsylvania, from the Classis of Delaware-Raritan, Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics, to the Classis of Central California, Regional Synod of the Far West. One reason presented was that the consistory of Addisville Reformed felt that there were areas in which it and the Classis of Delaware-Raritan were "not aligned and gradually have grown apart" (*MGS 2021*, p. 43). In both cases, the sending regional synod affirmed the transfer requests in response to churches that did not express any particular duress based on their classes or regional synods, but instead sought to strengthen mission or alignment.

This more recent free and willing movement of churches, supported by classes and regional synods, contrasts with the 2018 General Synod's time-sensitive movement of City Classis (itself an affinity classis) from the Regional Synod of the Far West (RSFW) to the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics (*MGS 2018*, p. 154). The General Synod 2018 Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business undertook this matter in response to a transfer request from delegates from City Classis that was submitted as an item of new business because of existential time restraints (*MGS 2018*, p. 16). Unlike Faith Community and Addisville, the City Classis claimed that the Far West regional synod's executive team had "rebuffed any attempt to discuss supporting the transfer of City Classis to another regional synod and [was] actively attempting to keep the broader RSFW delegates from having that discussion" (*MGS 2018*, p. 16). The dispute centered around the practices of City Classis, which in discord with its regional synod, decided to live together in difference when it came to pastoral ministry to LGBT persons.

General Synod 2018 adopted the transfer after the advisory committee ascertained that both sending and receiving regional synods had reached an understanding that the transfer was in the best interest of the kingdom of God (*MGS 2018*, p. 154). Subsequently, the Commission on Judicial Business reported to General Synod 2019 that the complaint of City Classis was dismissed in accordance with the request of City Classis (*MGS 2019*, p. 278). These three transfers (Faith Community, Addisville, and City Classis), though taking place under different circumstances, indicate that the General Synod has already been willing to transfer churches and classes to other regional synods for reasons other than geography.

The Vision 2020 process highlighted the potential of affinity-based assemblies. General Synod 2021 made three significant decisions in response to Vision 2020 Team recommendations, and two synodical decisions concerned affinity-based assemblies.

First, the synod approved a plan for a "mutually generous separation." This plan supports petitions by churches to transfer to another classis, including doing so across regional synod lines. The logic behind these church moves again consistently points to mission and not to unity. Indeed, this appeal to mission is made explicitly at the expense of unity:

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[46] The Commission on Church Order and the Commission on Theology co-authored a paper on this topic. (See the response to TE 18-1 in *MGS 2019*, pp. 238-246.)

one group is leaving another specifically because the exiting party feels that it cannot adequately pursue its mission where it is. The guidelines specifically call for a regional synod to accept that the church can no longer function effectively in its present relationship (*MGS 2021*, p. 105). Even before any radical restructuring that might eventually flow from the Vision 2020 process, this support for transferring churches effectively opens the way for a grassroots migration toward affinity classes and regional synods.

Additionally, the Vision 2020 Team shared four recommended principles concerning possible restructuring to General Synod. In passing RF 21-1, General Synod tasked a new group with "the specific work of developing a restructuring plan for the denomination." This team "should consider these principles" outlined by the Vision 2020 Team (*MGS 2021*, p. 94). The first of these principles concerns affinity classes: "Classes are reorganized as affinity-based rather than geographically-based, with the ability of any church to choose the classis to which it belongs."[47] No longer would classes be organized around geographical region, but classes would "have the ability to align themselves around shared values, understanding, and practices."[48] Another of these principles calls for considering the long-term need and viability of the regional synods, examining their "viability, responsibility, and effectiveness … in light of the size, scope, and structure of the denomination that remains."[49] In the discussion stemming from Vision 2020, a proposal to immediately rearrange the regional synods in the United States into two affinity-based synods (ONB 21-10) sparked a lengthy and intense discussion. While this proposal did not pass, it did prompt the motion that eventually led to the writing of this paper.[50]

Having first established the fundamental importance of the unity of the church, and then explored how our structure of assemblies, and especially the regional synod, has emphasized sometimes unity and sometimes mission (ideally in concert, but not always), we now turn to consider again the question of assemblies based on affinity, this time from a more theological angle.

Affinity Classis and Mutual Belonging

Article 28 of the Belgic Confession is helpful as we discuss the matter of affinity or non-geographic classes. It can be interpreted to say that the obligations of church members is to gather together and not to withdraw; encourage unity, serve, and build up—via our God-given gifts. We must be cognizant to preserve this unity, duty, and assembly according to God's ordinance (Belgic Confession, Article 32). Additionally, Article 29 of the Belgic Confession appeals for members of the true church to not separate from it. According to Article 32 of the Belgic Confession, church order is established "for maintaining the body of the church," and we should guard against deviating from Christ's command.[51] The body of Christ should be helped and not harmed by how we structure and govern ourselves under the authority of Christ and his word. Being united to and belonging to Christ, we in the church now belong as members of one another. **Any proposed restructuring of**

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47 *MGS 2021*, 91.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 In ONB 21-10, General Synod 2021 tasked the Commission on Theology to report on one specific way that the RCA might reorganize, instructing "the Commission on Church Order and the Commission on Theology to study the structure and implications of affinity synods, with a report to General Synod in 2022."

51 Belgic Confession, Article 32

classes and regional synods should be aimed at deepening our mutual belonging in Christ.

How do these principles relate to the question of affinity? If the RCA chooses to restructure around affinity, then "affinity" will need to be carefully defined in ways that deepen mutual belonging in Christ. Not every way of considering "shared values, understanding, and practices"[52] serves to build up the body of Christ. In this light, the commission will offer three potential dangers of particular forms of affinity as a structuring principle before offering suggestions on what might deepen our mutual belonging in Christ.

First, there is the danger of affinity being a form of self-belonging. As Answer 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism proclaims, we belong not to ourselves, but to Jesus Christ. Consequently, we belong to one another in Christ. When every church can choose for itself how it wants to be aligned and connected to other churches, we must beware of living as if we belong to ourselves. It would be well to ask how affinity promotes and affirms unity. How does affinity strengthen rather than weaken our bond of unity? If affinity groups exist only to serve shared values, interests, and practices, are they a benefit or a danger to our unity? Relationships of affinity can be long-lasting but also fragile. They exist only as long as the shared values, interests, and practices out of which they initially arose continue to exist. If a church changes its values or even its commitment to particular practices, it no longer truly belongs in that "affinity group" and would likely need to leave for another. While some might see this flexibility as a positive trait, it ultimately undermines our mutual belonging in Christ. Any version of affinity must avoid the danger of creating fraction and fragility in search of flexibility. We as a church must strive for stability that encourages mutual belonging in Christ.

Second, there is the danger of affinity being used to rend the bonds of love that are a visible demonstration of our mutual belonging in Christ. Like the family in the opening example, there is the possibility that appeals to shared values and interests could be used as a way of avoiding loving our fellow brothers and sisters (and congregations) in the RCA. We could stay together as a family but no longer have to do the hard work of living together and loving in communion. This result would be just as unhealthy for a denomination as for a family. Particularly when classis realignment will take place without churches physically moving locations, there is the possibility that we could use "affinity" as an excuse to avoid being in relationship with churches in our own town or the next town over. Such division could severely damage our public witness in the world. The RCA is already divided on many issues, but we must beware of how enshrining divisions into our polity could damage the missional work of the RCA. While we might be able to state positively all the benefits of these new classis relationships, we must beware of the sinful human tendency to self-deception.

Additionally, we have been created as embodied creatures. Relationships grow best face-to-face. Not only could certain forms of affinity prevent us from being in functional relationship with our nearest neighbors, they could also leave many congregations feeling isolated when most in need of classical assistance, such as when churches are without a pastor or are being formed. Moreover, the classis gathers for stated sessions, but also for special sessions, such as installations and ordinations. Technology may aid in overcoming physical distance for some meetings, but it may also create limitations for the classis doing its work with local congregations. Insofar as church structures organized around affinity abandon geography as a significant constituting factor, they open themselves up to becoming structures that fail to foster the type of relationships that can flourish only with significant face-to-face contact.

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52 Ibid.

Third, there is the danger of "affinity" being used to break the bonds of true faith. In addition to mutual love, a shared confession of faith is part of the visible unity of the body of Christ. We must beware of defining "affinity" so broadly that classes and congregations could have functionally (or explicitly) different confessions of the Christian faith. Such theological realignment would sacrifice the genuine unity of the church on the altar of peace. If the RCA is to remain as a denomination, the centrality of the Standards of Unity as a unifying confession of faith should be upheld.

How might a restructuring in the RCA deepen the RCA's mutual belonging in Christ? One possibility is to think about mutual belonging among classes and among regional synods. How can classes belong to each other and not simply to their regional synod? How can the regional synods manifest their belonging to each another and not simply to the General Synod? In a healthy family system, brothers and sisters talk to one another, and not only when mom and dad gather them around the table. They can call for mom and dad (or grandma and grandpa) to deal with their problems, but they also communicate well enough with each other to build up one another and to hold each other accountable to living well together as a family and to living faithfully into what it means to be part of this family. In a similar way, fostering and structuring relationships between classes and between regional synods would deepen the bonds of the RCA.

Our Constitution from 1793 noted, "Every synod shall be at liberty to solicit, and hold *correspondence* with its neighboring synod, or synods, in such manner as shall be judged most conducive to general edification" (Article 48). What if regional synods today went beyond correspondence to something deeper? Congregations in Holland Classis belong to congregations in Nassau-Suffolk. Congregations in British Columbia belong to congregations in Wisconsin. What might it look like for these classes to invest more deeply in relationship with each other, to move beyond having delegates sit in the same auditorium at General Synod?

Conclusion

Why is the RCA together as the people of God? Christ has gathered his church. We belong to Christ. As a result, we belong to one another. How we structure our life as a denomination and how we think about affinity as a structuring principle must be aimed toward deepening and making more visible our mutual belonging in Christ. In this paper, the Commission on Theology has put forward several dangers to avoid as well as points for the General Synod and the Restructuring Team to consider as they discern how to move forward in the RCA.

TH 22-1
To commend "Blest Be the Tie That Binds" as a resource for congregations, classes, regional synods, and the Restructuring Team for discussion on what it means to be part of the RCA; and further,

to instruct the general secretary to make available "Blest Be the Tie That Binds" as a resource for congregations, classes, regional synods, and the Restructuring Team. (ADOPTED)

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. (ADOPTED)

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

Report of the Professorate

The office of General Synod professor involves representing "the living tradition of the church in the preparation and certification of candidates for ministry," as well as exercising "the ministry of teaching within the RCA as a whole" (*Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 8 [2021 edition, p. 74]). We fulfill this office both individually and collectively. Elected and installed by the General Synod, we remain amenable to the General Synod in matters of doctrine, striving at all times and in all ways to fulfill our calling faithfully, diligently, and cheerfully. This is the professorate's eighth annual report to the General Synod.

There are presently five General Synod professors: Dr. Jaeseung Cha and Dr. Micah McCreary from New Brunswick Theological Seminary; Dr. Carol Bechtel and Dr. James Brownson from Western Theological Seminary; and Dr. Chad Pierce from the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency. Each professor was nominated by a theological agent of the General Synod and then elected by the General Synod to exercise a substantial and continuing role in preparing candidates for ministry in the RCA under the authority of their nominating agency.

The General Synod professorate is represented on the Pastoral Formation Oversight Board and continues to be in dialogue with that group about matters pertaining to the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. We are also represented on the committees of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency that recommend the granting of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry to students at non-RCA seminaries and candidates pursuing the Approved Alternate Route (AAR) to ordination. We set and evaluate the written examinations for the AAR candidates.

As a body and as individuals we mark with sadness and appreciation the retirement of our friend and colleague, the Rev. Dr. Jim Brownson. Jim served Western Theological Seminary in many capacities including as academic dean and as the James and Jean Cook Professor of New Testament. Jim lived into his calling of shaping generations of pastors and teachers "to preach and teach the good news of salvation in Christ, to build up and equip the church for mission in the world, to free the enslaved, to relieve the oppressed, to comfort the afflicted, and to walk humbly with God" (from the Declaration for Ministers of Word and Sacrament, Formulary 3). We pray that God will continue to bless him and "prosper the work of [his] hands" (Psalm 90:17).

In all of our work, we continue to explore new possibilities for our collective role. We are grateful for having been charged with this call and are deeply sensible of our responsibility to the church. We solicit your prayers and your advice, and we are committed to engaging conversation at all levels of the RCA's life and work.

Respectfully submitted,
Chad Pierce, moderator,
together with the entire professorate, including Carol Bechtel, James Brownson,
Jaeseung Cha, and Micah McCreary

Report of the Pastoral Formation Oversight Board

The 2018 General Synod of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) acted "to constitute the Pastoral Formation Oversight Board ... to coordinate, evaluate, innovate, strategically anticipate, and collaboratively shape theological education that will form pastoral leadership for the RCA that is rooted in the Reformed faith and tradition while engaging in the present and emerging future" (*MGS 2018,* RF 18-1, p. 86). As part of that same action, the 2018 General Synod described one of the purposes of the Pastoral Formation Oversight Board (PFOB) as "serv[ing] the RCA by coordinating the three theological agents of the RCA as they work collaboratively, actively anticipating the needs of the church in an ever-changing world and collaborating to form the pastoral leadership that the world and the church needs."

The Future of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency

As noted in the 2019 and 2021 reports to General Synod, the PFOB has been discussing potential changes both to the nature of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry (CFM) and to the process by which it is granted to qualified candidates. Problems that have arisen with the current nature and process of the CFM include, but are not limited to, what defines a candidate as "fit," inconsistencies among the three agents in granting the certificate, and the reality that, given that the nature of theological education today often includes more online learning, a feeling from some that the educational institutions might not be in the best position to determine fitness.

Additionally, the decision by the General Synod Council (GSC) to defund or reduce funding to the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA), or at least have the MFCA operate using its reserves, created new issues and opportunities to examine how the CFM was granted to candidates from Western Theological Seminary (WTS), New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NTBS), non-RCA seminaries, and those in the Approved Alternate Route (AAR) process. The PFOB was tasked by the GSC with proposing a path forward.

The PFOB met extensively over the past three years and thought through a variety of proposals. The board submitted an informal proposal for feedback from the church in its report to the 2021 General Synod. Based upon that feedback, along with further discussions, PFOB now submits the following recommendations:

TE 22-1
To rename the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry the Certificate of Readiness for Examination by adopting the following amendments to the *Book of Church Order* for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7

***Sec. 7*. The classis may appoint a candidate enrolled in the Certificate of ~~Fitness for Ministry~~Readiness for Examination process to a church without an installed minister or minister under contract, to furnish the service for which the candidate is qualified. Before the appointment is made, the candidate must secure the approval of the General Synod agent supervising the**

candidate's Certificate of ~~Fitness for Ministry~~Readiness for Examination process.

Sec. 8. **A consistory or governing body shall not enter into a contract with a minister, a licensed candidate, or a candidate for the Certificate of ~~Fitness for Ministry~~Readiness for Examination except by approval of the classis. Between sessions of classis the approval may be given by the president and the clerk of classis.**

Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11

Sec. 3. **Immediately following the enrollment of a candidate for ministry, the classis, through its stated clerk, shall petition the General Synod on behalf of the candidate for a Certificate of ~~Fitness for Ministry~~Readiness for Examination....**

Sec. 7. **After the candidate has been granted a Certificate of ~~Fitness for Ministry~~Readiness for Examination, the classis shall examine the candidate for licensure and ordination…**

Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12

Sec. 3. Alternate Means to Satisfying Requirements

A candidate for ministry who is a student enrolled in a Master of Divinity degree program at a theological seminary and who, because of age, lack of necessary academic preparation, or other sufficient reason, finds it too difficult to meet the full requirements for the Certificate of ~~Fitness for Ministry~~Readiness for Examination, shall make application to the classis.

a. If the classis finds the reason sufficient, it shall petition the appropriate agent of the General Synod (the board of trustees of an RCA seminary or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency) on behalf of the applicant for approval of an alternate means to meet any part of the requirements for the Certificate of ~~Fitness for Ministry~~Readiness for Examination.

b. The agent of the General Synod shall consider carefully the reasons submitted by the classis as to why the applicant is unable to meet the full requirements for a Certificate of ~~Fitness for Ministry~~Readiness for Examination. If the agent finds the reason sufficient, it shall provide a means for the applicant to compensate for the inability to meet the requirement. If the application is rejected, the agent shall state its

reasons. If the agent finds that the compensatory steps have been satisfactorily completed, it shall judge that the requirement has been fulfilled.

Sec. 4. The Approved Alternate Route

A candidate for ministry who has not received the degree of Master of Divinity or a degree that is its equivalent from a seminary that is accredited by the Association of Theological Schools or by a theological accrediting agency of comparable standards as determined by the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency may qualify for the Certificate of ~~Fitness for Ministry~~Readiness for Examination provided the following conditions are met:
…

c. The classis shall petition for a Certificate of ~~Fitness for Ministry~~ Readiness for Examination on behalf of the candidate to the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency. If that agency rejects the petition, it shall clearly state its reasons. The classis may reapply.

d. Upon admission, the classis and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency shall together develop a program that will allow the candidate to satisfy the requirements for the Certificate of ~~Fitness for Ministry~~Readiness for Examination.

e. When the candidate has completed the program, the candidate shall be examined for the Certificate of ~~Fitness for Ministry~~ Readiness for Examination by the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency. The method of assessment shall be culturally and linguistically appropriate.

f. When the candidate passes the examination, the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency may award the Certificate of ~~Fitness for Ministry~~Readiness for Examination.

Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 8

***Sec. 3*. The General Synod professor shall be a Minister of Word and Sacrament in good standing, sound in the faith, possessed of a recognized ability to teach, have the confidence of the churches, and shall have made recognized contributions to the church and to scholarship. When a Reformed Church minister who exhibits these qualifications exercises a substantial and continuing role, under the authority of one of the seminaries or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency board, both in preparing RCA candidates**

for ordination and in the process of recommending the Certificate of ~~Fitness for Ministry~~Readiness for Examination, the board of trustees of an RCA seminary or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency board may nominate that minister to the General Synod as candidate for the office of General Synod professor. A General Synod professor shall be elected by the General Synod by a majority vote of the members present.

Sec. 7. **A General Synod professor shall continue in office so long as he or she continues to exercise a substantial role, under the authority of one of the seminaries or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency board, both in preparing RCA candidates for ordination and in the process of granting the Ceertificate of ~~fitness for ministry~~Readiness for Examination, or until death, resignation, dismissal from service by the seminary or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency, declaration by the General Synod as professor emeritus, or removal from office by the General Synod.**

Sec. 8. **When a General Synod professor resigns the office elected to by the General Synod or no longer exercises a substantial role, under the authority of one of the seminaries or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency board, both in preparing candidates for ordination and in the process of granting the Ceertificate of ~~fitness for ministry~~Readiness for Examination, the professor shall either be removed from the office by a declarative act of the synod, or be declared professor emeritus by the synod. The appropriate classis shall be notified of this action. (ADOPTED)**

*Note: there are a few more references to the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry in the *Book of Church Order* (*BCO*) that are not covered by TE 22-1; the name change in those sections are covered as part of the new CRE process that is proposed via the amendments to the *BCO* proposed in TE 22-2 below.

Rationale

This change is helpful in more clearly defining the roles both of the theological agent as well as the classis in a candidate's ordination process. Currently, the theological agents have granted CFMs with no definition of what constitutes "fitness." This has led to confusion and, at times, disagreement among the agents and the church as to the scope of the CFM. Additionally, this has led to inconsistencies among the three agents as to what constitutes fitness and, subsequently, who is eligible to receive a CFM. This change clarifies the role of the agent and will bring more consistency among the agents. In granting the Certificate of Readiness for Examination (CRE), the theological agent will attest that a candidate has been instructed/formed and is entitled to examination for licensure and ordination by the classis. As will be noted in PFOB's subsequent recommendation, readiness for examination will be based upon *BCO* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11, Sections 6 and 7 (2021 edition, pp. 47-48).

Furthermore, the PFOB, following the *BCO*, affirms the primary role of the classis in determining eligibility for ordination in the RCA. Given the rise of distance learning, seminaries are less aware of or involved in the daily lives of many candidates. The PFOB believes that the classis is better prepared to examine and engage candidates in their calls and fitness for ordination in the RCA. Of course, the theological agents will continue to work with classes should questions from a classis arise or if the agent becomes aware of concerns, but the classis will be responsible for ordination.

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance was to vote in favor of TE 22-1.

TE 22-2
To establish the following process for a candidate to receive a Certificate of Readiness for Examination by adopting the following changes to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part II, for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

Article 12. Certificates of ~~Fitness for Ministry~~Readiness for Examination

Sec. 1. Candidates at Reformed Church Seminaries

A candidate for ministry who has received the degree of Master of Divinity ~~from a seminary of the Reformed Church in America, upon the successful completion of the prescribed course of theological studies, is found to be qualified and is adjudged to be a fit candidate for ministry of Word and sacrament in the Reformed Church in America, shall receive from the General Synod through the board of trustees of an RCA seminary a Certificate of Fitness for Ministry, which is entitlement to an examination for licensure and ordination.~~, with the courses that satisfy the requirements for ministry of Word and sacrament as defined in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11, Sections 6 and 7, as documented on the candidate's transcript from one of the two historic seminaries of the Reformed Church in America, is entitled to an examination for licensure and ordination by a classis.

Sec. 2. Candidates at Other Seminaries

a. A candidate for ministry who has received the degree of Master of Divinity or an academically equivalent degree from a seminary not ~~officially~~ historically related to the Reformed Church in America upon the successful completion of the prescribed course of theological studies~~, is found to be qualified, and is adjudged to be a fit candidate for ministry of Word and sacrament in the Reformed Church in America~~, and who satisfies the requirements for ministry of Word and Sacrament as defined by Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11, Sections 6 and 7,~~ shall receive from the General Synod through the board of trustees

of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency a Certificate of ~~Fitness for Ministry~~Readiness for Examination, which is entitlement to an examination for licensure and ordination.

b. The General Synod through the board of trustees of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency shall require the applicant to furnish, at the conclusion of seminary studies, the following: a Master of Divinity degree or its equivalent from a seminary accredited by the Association of Theological Schools or a theological accrediting agency of comparable standards as determined by the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency; a transcript of the applicant's academic record at this seminary; and evidence of confessing membership in a Reformed church of the classis making petition.

c. ~~The General Synod through the board of trustees of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency shall determine that the candidate meets minimum competencies as determined by the standards established by the General Synod and designated as indispensable for the proper exercise of the ministerial office of the church. If a candidate comes under the jurisdiction of a new agent of the General Synod, the classis in which the candidate is enrolled shall apply to the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency on behalf of the candidate. If the candidate has completed less than half the process toward reception of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry, the relevant agents of the General Synod shall effect the transfer. If the candidate has completed half the process or more, the original agent shall award the Certificate. If the applicant has previously been asked to terminate studies, has withdrawn under duress, or has been denied the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry at a Reformed Church in America seminary or the MFCA, further supervision and/or examination of the applicant shall only be carried out by or with the consent of the seminary or agent within whose program the candidate had previously been enrolled.~~If a candidate desires to come under the jurisdiction of a new agent of the General Synod during the process, or if the applicant has previously been asked to terminate studies, has withdrawn under duress, or has been denied the Certificate of Readiness for Examination at an official seminary of the RCA or the MFCA, the classis in which the candidate is enrolled shall notify both parties on behalf of the candidate. Further supervision and/or examination of the applicant shall only be carried out by or with the consent of the seminary or agent

within whose program the candidate had previously been enrolled.

Rationale for Section 1: Candidates at Reformed Church Seminaries

This demonstrates the trust that we have in the seminaries that have been historically related to the RCA while, at the same time, ensuring the primary role of the classis in the ordination process. Candidates who receive masters of divinity (MDiv) from these institutions will be judged to have been formed in the Reformed tradition and deemed ready for examination for licensure and ordination by classes. The MDiv itself will serve as the Certificate of Readiness for Examination.

It should be noted that it is possible to receive an MDiv from either NBTS or WTS without fulfilling *BCO* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11, Sections 6 and 7. Therefore, each seminary will assign a liaison between a candidate and the candidate's respective classis. This liaison will work with each candidate to ensure that courses necessary to fulfill the *BCO* requirements are taken. Additionally, transcripts, upon the candidate's request, will be provided to the appropriate members of a classis for their review to determine whether all of the appropriate requirements are met. Once the classis approves the course of study that fulfills the *BCO* requirements, the candidate will be ready for examination and licensure upon receiving the MDiv from the agent.

Rationale for Section 2: Candidates at Other Seminaries

In this scenario, very little change will occur for candidates from non-RCA seminaries. Candidates under supervision of a classis will continue to take courses required for fulfilling *BCO* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11, Sections 6 and 7 as determined by the MFCA board. One change is that the MFCA will no longer be offering courses. Candidates will be directed to the appropriate courses at NBTS and/or WTS for fulfilling their respective requirements. Both seminaries are offering opportunities to fulfill these courses for no credit at reduced costs, so candidates should not feel an extra burden.

Candidates will still be interviewed by the Reformed Candidates' Supervision and Care Committee (RCSC) of the MFCA, who will oversee each candidate's course of studies and recommend or not recommend a candidate for a Certificate of Readiness for Examination to the MFCA Board. The final decision regarding granting or not granting the certificate will still be made by the MFCA Board.

The elimination of the MFCA teaching courses as well as the use of more technology should reduce the cost of the MFCA to the denomination while still providing the necessary framework and process for guiding our candidates from other seminaries to their Certificate of Readiness for Examination.

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance was to amend TE 22-2 as follows (additions are double underlined; deletions are double stricken).

> To establish the following process for a candidate to receive a Certificate of Readiness for Examination by adopting the following changes to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part II, for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):
>
> *Article 12. Certificates of ~~Fitness for Ministry~~Readiness for Examination*

Sec. 1. Candidates at Seminaries Officially Related to the Reformed Church in America~~Reformed Church Seminaries~~

A Master of Divinity degree from a seminary officially related to the Reformed Church in America will serve as a Certificate of Readiness for Examination. A candidate for ministry who has received ~~the~~such a degree ~~of Master of Divinity from a seminary of the Reformed Church in America, upon the successful completion of the prescribed course of theological studies, is found to be qualified and is adjudged to be a fit candidate for ministry of Word and sacrament in the Reformed Church in America, shall receive from the General Synod through the board of trustees of an RCA seminary a Certificate of Fitness for Ministry, which is entitlement to an examination for licensure and ordination.; with the courses that~~that includes course work satisfying~~addressing~~ the requirements for ministry of Word and sacrament as defined in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11, Section~~s 6 and~~ 7, as documented on the candidate's transcript~~, from one of the two historic seminaries of the Reformed Church in America,~~ is entitled to an examination for licensure and ordination ~~by a classis~~.

Sec. 2. Candidates at ~~Other~~ Seminaries Not Officially Related to the Reformed Church in America

a. A candidate for ministry who has received the degree of Master of Divinity or ~~an academically~~ equivalent degree from a seminary not officially ~~historically~~ related to the Reformed Church in America upon the successful completion of the prescribed course of theological studies~~, is found to be qualified, and is adjudged to be a fit candidate for ministry of Word and sacrament in the Reformed Church in America, and who satisfies~~ addressing the requirements for ministry of Word and Sacrament as defined by Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11, Section~~s 6 and~~ 7, shall receive from the General Synod through the board of trustees of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency a Certificate of ~~Fitness for Ministry~~ Readiness for Examination~~, which is entitlement to an examination for licensure and ordination~~.

a. The General Synod through the board of trustees of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency shall require the applicant to furnish, at the conclusion of seminary studies, the following: a Master of Divinity degree or its equivalent from a seminary accredited by the Association of Theological Schools or a theological accrediting agency of comparable standards as determined by

the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency; a transcript of the applicant's academic record at this seminary; and evidence of confessing membership in a Reformed church of the classis making petition.

b. ~~The General Synod through the board of trustees of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency shall determine that the candidate meets minimum competencies as determined by the standards established by the General Synod and designated as indispensable for the proper exercise of the ministerial office of the church. If a candidate comes under the jurisdiction of a new agent of the General Synod, the classis in which the candidate is enrolled shall apply to the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency on behalf of the candidate. If the candidate has completed less than half the process toward reception of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry, the relevant agents of the General Synod shall effect the transfer. If the candidate has completed half the process or more, the original agent shall award the Certificate. If the applicant has previously been asked to terminate studies, has withdrawn under duress, or has been denied the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry at a Reformed Church in America seminary or the MFCA, further supervision and/or examination of the applicant shall only be carried out by or with the consent of the seminary or agent within whose program the candidate had previously been enrolled.~~

Sec. 3. Transfer Between Agents

If a candidate desires to come under the jurisdiction of a ~~new~~ different theological agent of the General Synod during the process, ~~or if the applicant has previously been asked to terminate studies, has withdrawn under duress, or has been denied the Certificate of Readiness for Examination at an official seminary of the RCA or the MFCA,~~ the classis in which the candidate is enrolled shall notify both parties on behalf of the candidate. Further supervision and/or examination of the applicant shall only be carried out by or with the consent of the ~~seminary or~~ theological agent ~~with~~in whose program the candidate had previously been enrolled.

Subsequent sections will be renumbered.

Reason:
The proposed revisions reflect consultation among the PFOB, the Commission on Church Order, and the advisory committee, and clarify the intention of the amendments as originally proposed.

VOTED: To adopt the amendment to TE 22-2.

VOTED: To adopt TE 22-2 as amended.

The final version TE 22-2 as amended and adopted reads as follows:

TE 22-2
To establish the following process for a candidate to receive a Certificate of Readiness for Examination by adopting the following changes to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part II, for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

Article 12. Certificates of ~~Fitness for Ministry~~Readiness for Examination

Sec. 1. Candidates at ~~Reformed Church Seminaries~~Seminaries Officially Related to the Reformed Church in America

A Master of Divinity degree from a seminary officially related to the Reformed Church in America will serve as a Certificate of Readiness for Examination. A candidate for ministry who has received ~~the~~such a degree ~~of Master of Divinity from a seminary of the Reformed Church in America, upon the successful completion of the prescribed course of theological studies, is found to be qualified and is adjudged to be a fit candidate for ministry of Word and sacrament in the Reformed Church in America, shall receive from the General Synod through the board of trustees of an RCA seminary a Certificate of Fitness for Ministry, which is entitlement to an examination for licensure and ordination.~~that includes course work satisfying the requirements for ministry of Word and sacrament as defined in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11, Section 7, as documented on the candidate's transcript, is entitled to an examination for licensure and ordination.

Sec. 2. Candidates at ~~Other~~ Seminaries Not Officially Related to the Reformed Church in America

a. A candidate for ministry who has received the degree of Master of Divinity or ~~an academically~~ equivalent degree from a seminary not officially related to the Reformed Church in America upon the successful completion of the prescribed course of theological studies, ~~is found to be qualified, and is adjudged to be a fit candidate for ministry of Word and sacrament in the Reformed Church in America,~~ addressing the requirements for

ministry of Word and Sacrament as defined by Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11, Section 7, shall receive from the General Synod through the board of trustees of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency a Certificate of ~~Fitness for Ministry~~ Readiness for Examination~~, which is entitlement to an examination for licensure and ordination~~.

b. The General Synod through the board of trustees of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency shall require the applicant to furnish, at the conclusion of seminary studies, the following: a Master of Divinity degree or its equivalent from a seminary accredited by the Association of Theological Schools or a theological accrediting agency of comparable standards as determined by the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency; a transcript of the applicant's academic record at this seminary; and evidence of confessing membership in a Reformed church of the classis making petition.

c. ~~The General Synod through the board of trustees of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency shall determine that the candidate meets minimum competencies as determined by the standards established by the General Synod and designated as indispensable for the proper exercise of the ministerial office of the church. If a candidate comes under the jurisdiction of a new agent of the General Synod, the classis in which the candidate is enrolled shall apply to the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency on behalf of the candidate. If the candidate has completed less than half the process toward reception of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry, the relevant agents of the General Synod shall effect the transfer. If the candidate has completed half the process or more, the original agent shall award the Certificate. If the applicant has previously been asked to terminate studies, has withdrawn under duress, or has been denied the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry at a Reformed Church in America seminary or the MFCA, further supervision and/or examination of the applicant shall only be carried out by or with the consent of the seminary or agent within whose program the candidate had previously been enrolled.~~

Sec. 3. Transfer Between Agents

If a candidate desires to come under the jurisdiction of a different theological agent of the General Synod during the process, the classis in which the candidate is enrolled shall notify both parties on behalf of the candidate. Further supervision and/or examination of the applicant shall only be carried out by or with the consent of the theological agent in whose program the candidate had previously been enrolled.

Subsequent sections will be renumbered. **(ADOPTED)**

The Nature and Scope of the MFCA Moving Forward

In addition to the above discussions regarding the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry/ Certificate of Readiness for Examination, the PFOB has been involved with the MFCA Board on the nature, scope, and funding of the MFCA moving forward.

The MFCA has articulated that it will be able to handle this transition as well as function in its new capacity. The MFCA is close to being able to make that transition from its own courses to courses offered through the seminaries now. The MFCA will offer its faculty to the seminaries as adjuncts if needed. Given the current nature of the RCA, the MFCA expects to see a decrease in enrollments in the near term. The PFOB also made informal recommendations to the MFCA Board as well as to the GSC through the general secretary regarding appropriate staffing that will be needed going forward.

The PFOB is thankful to Dave Schutt and the rest of the MFCA faculty and staff, as well as the faculty and staff at our seminaries, who continue to prepare our candidates for ordination in the RCA during these turbulent times, which have caused a great deal of anxiety among our candidates. We are committed to helping each candidate complete his or her process toward ordination.

Assessment for Theological Education

In order to fulfill its mandate to assist the GSC in setting the budget and division of the assessment for theological education, the PFOB has made the following recommendations to the GSC:

Scenario 1 (*a portion of the theological education assessment is no longer allocated to WTS; applies if BOTH of the following conditions are true: Western's bylaws and articles of incorporation changes are approved AND Western is not subsequently designated as an agent of the General Synod*):

The Pastoral Formation Oversight Board (PFOB) recommends a General Synod assessment for theological education of $4.00 per member, allocated in the following manner:

- $20,000 to cover the cost of the meeting of the PFOB, the General Synod professors, and collaborative efforts among the respective agents.
- The remainder will be split as follows:
  - 80 percent of the funds are to be split evenly among the two agents for theological education (MFCA and NBTS).

- 20 percent distributed per capita of students within each agency (MFCA and NBTS) who are formally in the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process.

Scenario 2 (*WTS continues to receive a portion of the theological education assessment; applies if EITHER of the following conditions are true: Western's bylaws changes are not approved OR Western's bylaws changes are approved and it is also subsequently designated an agent of the General Synod*):

The Pastoral Formation Oversight Board (PFOB) recommends a General Synod assessment for theological education of $6.12 per-member, allocated in the following manner:

- $20,000 to cover the cost of the meeting of the PFOB, the General Synod professors, and collaborative efforts among the respective agents.
- The remainder will be split as follows:
  - 80 percent of the funds are to be split evenly among the three agents for theological education (WTS, MFCA, and NBTS).
  - 20 percent distributed per capita of students within each agency (WTS, MFCA, and NBTS) who are formally in the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process.

We are grateful for the opportunity to continue to serve the church in this area of leadership preparation and care.

Respectfully submitted,
Chad Pierce (moderator) on behalf of the PFOB

Report of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency

For years, the General Synod has exercised oversight of ministerial formation through its two seminaries and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA). Like the Reformed Church in America (RCA) seminaries, the MFCA has possessed a deep commitment to developing faithful, educated, and Reformed leaders. Its purpose is the preparation of men and women for the ministries of Christ and his church, most specifically those called to the office of minister of Word and sacrament.

From its inception 23 years ago, the MFCA has been tasked with and has embraced a mandate to expand opportunities for RCA ordination to groups not previously served. This is clearly stated in the MFCA Board of Trustees' mission statement:

> The Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA) exists to strengthen the ministry of Word and sacrament in the Reformed Church in America by awarding Certificates of Fitness for Ministry to specific groups of candidates and working cooperatively with partners inside and outside the RCA to broaden opportunities for diverse ministerial formation.

Given the authority delegated to it by General Synod, the MFCA board, its certification committee members, and its staff continue to accomplish this mission by:

- Awarding the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry to RCA candidates graduating from non-RCA seminaries (via Reformed Candidates Supervision and Care, RCSC) or pursuing an approved alternate route (AAR).
- Through the certification committee and staff, evaluating the progress of candidates and their continuation in and completion of the process leading to the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry, as their achievements dictate.
- Periodically ensuring that the RCA Standards for Preparation for Ministry are upheld in the oversight of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry and are reviewed, with recommendations made to the appropriate RCA body if the MFCA board believes changes would be appropriate.
- Providing graduate level courses designed to meet the standards for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry.
- Collaborating with and providing counsel to congregations and classes in the care and nurture of candidates for the ministry who are seeking the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry through the MFCA.
- Interpreting and advocating for the work of the MFCA to the larger church.

As of March 2022, there were 55 candidates enrolled in the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process; 11 of these are pursuing the Certificate of Fitness through the Approved Alternate Route (AAR), which did not exist until MFCA was officially established in 1999.

Over 25 percent (25.4 percent) of the candidates are female, with 2 women enrolled in the AAR and 12 enrolled in the RCSC.

Thirty-eight percent (38.1 percent) of the total candidates represent racial/ethnic minorities.

How the MFCA Board Operates

By permission and approval of the General Synod Council (GSC), the MFCA Board of Trustees operates under Policy Governance. In accordance with the tenets of Policy

Governance, the board intentionally focuses on visioning and policy development. It sets clear goals for the agency by delegating the means of achieving them to the executive director and staff, subject only to explicit executive limitations. The board stays abreast of the MFCA program through the monitoring reports of the director.

Budgets and Finances

Following the October 2021 meeting of General Synod, MFCA was no longer required to operate off its reserves and began to receive assessment funds again. MFCA staff have continued to operate at a reduced budget.

The staff, board, and certification committee utilize Zoom, which reduces if not eliminates the cost of travel in the budget.

All MFCA courses are offered via distance learning, which reduces the cost of in-person intensive courses.

In January 2022, the chief financial officer requested that the MFCA consider the option of working remotely in order to eliminate the cost of office space from the budget. Steps are being taken to make this an operational possibility for the staff.

The MFCA operates under the leadership of an interim executive director, the Rev. David Schutt, on a part-time basis. MFCA staff utilize Zoom to meet one on one for the care and direction of candidates and offer group Zoom meetings as another option for maintaining connection with candidates and to answer questions.

Certificates of Fitness Awarded

The Board of Trustees awarded seven Certificates of Fitness for Ministry since the last reporting in October 2021, all seven through the RCSC process.

Reformed Candidates Supervision and Care (RCSC)

Jane Isabelle Carlson	Classis of Wisconsin
Richard M. Downey	Classis of Mid-Hudson
Andrew Michael Garbarino	Classis of the City
Peter Lawrence Kolb	Classis of West Sioux
Ryan Matthew McCormick	Classis of the City
Evan Paul Meester	Classis of Pleasant Prairie
Tara Ann Woodward	Classis of East Sioux

Alternate Means and Petitions

Reduction in 24-Month Requirement: The Classis of Holland request, on behalf of Anna Lynn Langholz, to reduce the length of enrollment was approved by the MFCA Board of Trustees at its October 2021 meeting. The board was able to identify a sufficient period of supervised ministry experience to substitute for deficiencies, thus determining the candidate is qualified to earn the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry (*Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11, Section 3 [2021 edition, p. 47]).

Report of New Brunswick Theological Seminary

Recognizing New Brunswick Theological Seminary's 238-year relationship with the Reformed Church in America, the seminary welcomes the opportunity to update the General Synod on the status of our institution and our partnership with the denomination.

Mission Statement

New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS) continues to execute its mission: to educate persons and strengthen communities for transformational, public ministries in church and society. We fulfill this mission through creative, contextual, and critical engagement with texts, traditions, and practices.

Governance

The seminary's 22-member board of trustees is second to none. The board maintains a close and positive relationship with administration, faculty, students, and community. As president, I am grateful for the board's work to improve governance, specifically around onboarding trustees, charitable giving, efficient processes in committee meetings, and the evaluation and support of the NBTS president. In this past year, the board participated enthusiastically in our accreditation processes. Forthcoming, the board of trustees will collaborate with seminary leadership to update the NBTS mission statement, strategic plan, and constitution.

NBTS board members include representatives from the eight RCA regional synods and RCA coordinator for Women's Transformation and Leadership Rev. Elizabeth (Liz) Testa. The RCA's general secretary, Rev. Eddy Alemán, and the NBTS president, Rev. Dr. Micah McCreary, serve as *ex officio* members of the NBTS board.

Administration

Administratively, we have focused on institutional analysis and planning during this 2021–2022 academic year. With monies from the Lilly Endowment "Pathways for Tomorrow Initiative" (Phase One) grant, we hired Ministry Architects to conduct a situation analysis focused mainly on operations and to help us plan how we would implement the suggested changes.

This analysis by Ministry Architects focused on the organizational structure and operational efficiencies in the following areas: student services, strategic plan execution, financial processes, and admissions. Ministry Architects met one-on-one with staff from these areas, as well as with members of the administration. Assets and challenges were identified, recommendations were given, and a 12-month timeline for implementation was created.

During the assessment, the following strengths (opportunities) were identified: poised to pivot, inspiring leadership, commitment to confront power and privilege (antiracism), dynamic faculty and staff, a collaborative spirit, a caring community, and a campus designed with innovation in mind. At the same time, the following challenges (obstacles) were identified: staffing vacancies, infrastructure needs, financial fragility, institutional capacity, lack of shared vision and strategy, crisis of clarity, and communication.

Through this assessment work with Ministry Architects, we were able to take a larger view of our institution. This process allowed us to see assets as well as areas for improvement.

Our next step has been to develop one-year operational goals and longer-range goals that will inform the new NBTS strategic plan (the current plan ends in 2022).

We believe these activities are helping us achieve our mission, which can be achieved only with efficient, sustainable operations throughout the seminary.

Advancement

NBTS sustains itself financially through our endowment, tuition, RCA assessments, property rental (office space and meeting space to outside groups and persons), fundraising, and grants. Our advancement office activities are spearheaded by Cathy D. Proctor, the vice president of advancement and recruiting. Ms. Proctor served as the advancement officer with NBTS president emeritus Gregg Mast and helped to develop relationships with donors. She is deeply involved with the current president, Micah McCreary, in cultivating relationships with supporters and giving strategy leadership to our advancement efforts. NBTS respects our donors and our donors' intentions, making sure that all gifts and grants are used as directed.

The mission of NBTS would not be possible without the support of all donors. Our endowments, major gifts, and the annual seminary fund allow us to provide our students with quality academic programs, as well as resources and scholarship support that help them fulfill their call. We celebrate the generosity and efforts of our donors to help our students think critically, act justly, and lead faithfully.

NBTS recently completed our $1.784 million "A Light In God's Cities" campaign where we honored our past and seized the present. NBTS is now embarking on a new goal to position ourselves for the future. Later this year, we will launch the Legacy Campaign, where we will look to endow two chairs: the presidential chair and one faculty chair. This campaign will also enhance the Gardner A. Sage Library, including adding an elevator for broader accessibility. We intend to conclude the Gardner A. Sage Library component of the campaign in 2025, the 150th anniversary of the opening of the library.

Admissions and Recruitment

Given the changing landscape of theological education, our admissions department is continuing to shift outreach efforts. We hold both online and in-person recruiting events. Zoom information sessions highlight our various programs. Staff members reach out to potential students and inform them of the online and hybrid options available. Many of our students come to us via referrals, so the admissions department works closely with alumni and church pastors to keep them abreast of seminary offerings.

This year, the doctor of ministry and certificate programs have grown while we continue to be challenged by the enrollment in the master's programs. This year, we witnessed a positive trend in the number of certificate students applying to the master's programs.

Currently, NBTS is searching for a director of admissions, which has proven difficult in the current market. In February, we contracted with a search firm to aid us in the search. The job description can be found on the website at https://nbts.edu/employ-opps/director-of-admissions.

Alumni relations activity is critical to the mission and success of the advancement and admissions departments and to the vitality of the seminary as a whole. The office is dedicated to engaging and serving our alumni. This year, the NBTS Alumni Association

was launched. These alumni provide a base of annual philanthropic support, serve as relations advocates, open doors for potential partnerships, and serve as recruitment ambassadors for the seminary.

Academics

NBTS is proud of the excellent programs we offer, all of which can be found at https://nbts.edu/academics. This report will focus on our recent accreditation visits. President McCreary commends vice president of academic affairs and dean of the seminary Beth Tanner, associate dean of institutional assessment Terry Smith, and our entire NBTS community for the indefatigable efforts during our very first accreditation visit from Middle States Commission on High Education (MSCHE) and a full reaccreditation visit from the Association of Theological Schools (ATS).

MSCHE Accreditation Visit Hosted October 25–28, 2021

Upon the conclusion of the visit, the accrediting team commended NBTS institutional leaders for keeping the institutional mission at the forefront of their strategic implementations, with special recognition of faculty efforts to center their research and course development on main aspects of the mission, particularly in the areas of transformational public ministry and critical engagement with traditional fields of theological knowledge. The team further recognized the efforts of the administration, faculty, staff, and students for our innovation, for pivoting to a different delivery modality during the pandemic, and for establishing practices that will facilitate growth and sustainability into the future.

The accrediting team further commended the seminary for recognizing the importance of providing students with advice regarding the costs of seminary education and developing the Financial Stewardship Coaching project to assist students in understanding this aspect of their education. The team also noted that NBTS departments do not work in a silo to service the student population but instead embrace an "all-hands-on-deck" culture that fosters faculty involvement and student organizational involvement.

ATS Reaccreditation Visit Hosted February 7–11, 2022

The ATS reaccreditation committee interviewed administrators, trustees, members of the core faculty, current students, alumni, the director of the library, and most staff members. The committee agreed that all were well engaged and candid in their responses, which were consistent with the self-study report. Each person with whom the committee met seemed committed to the mission of NBTS and expressed appreciation for the school and its administration.

The committee affirmed two distinct NBTS strengths:

1. A mature and exemplary commitment to identifying and dismantling structures of racism, privilege, and unjust power, a value that has guided the school for more than a decade and is amply evident in a richly diverse community of students, staff, faculty, trustees, and alumni. This commitment reveals itself in a well-designed curriculum, in how the school talks to itself in places as mundane and important as board workbooks, and in a vibrant community life that continues amid a two-year global health crisis.
2. Admirable attention to the needs of students evidenced in services that embody care, competence, and collaboration in multiple ways; in a physical plant that enables, embodies, and energizes in-person learning and community; and in the

ways the school is deploying new technology.

The committee highlighted the following issues needing special attention during the next period of accreditation:

1. Developing a comprehensive marketing and communication strategy that supports enrollment and institutional advancement goals.
2. Strengthening the board's practices of self-evaluation and attending to succession planning (both for itself and for the institution and its leadership).
3. Developing educational policies that require and ensure regular and substantive interaction between faculty and students, including students in online education.

New Student Information System

A change that affects academics as well as other areas is that a committee of faculty and staff members approved the selection of Campus Café as our new student information system. As this system is being implemented, NBTS is looking for a new learning management system to be installed this summer. These new systems will enhance the online experience for our students.

Enrollment

NBTS continues to grow its student body. Current we have 171 students enrolled. Fifty-four percent of our students are female. Eighty-five percent of our students are people of color, and seventy-seven percent of our students are ages 40–64.

	Dmin	MDIV/MA	Certificate	RCA Students	Total
2017	48	126	52*	34*	226
2018	31	111	13	17	172
2019	26	95	17	14	138
2020	38	88	28	27	154
2021	50	87	29	32	166

*Note that in 2017 we had a Certificate in Spanish Language with 24 RCA students.

Finances

NBTS' overall income for this fiscal year (July 2021–June 2022) is behind budget because of limited donor gatherings due to pandemic concerns and less than expected tuition and fee revenue from our master's degree programs. Fortunately, other programs have seen increases, and permitted drawdowns from existing accounts have met our needs. Though our plant operations and maintenance expenses are slightly above budget, departmental expenses are lower than expected as we have followed pandemic restrictions.

Power and Privilege Workshops

As the reaccreditation committee observed, NBTS' exemplary commitment to identifying and dismantling structures of racism, privilege, and unjust power has become part of our institutional identity. We see this national struggle as a way for NBTS to serve God's church. Many programs on power and privilege leave audiences feeling blamed and

shamed. Our Power and Privilege workshops offer a safe and supportive space to consider these issues from a biblical and theological perspective. Congregations, students, and others are challenged to think critically, act justly, and lead faithfully around matters of power and privilege.

Closing

With God's help, Dr. McCreary has just completed his fifth year as president of NBTS. One joy of this position is nurturing the seminary's relationship with the RCA. For example, NBTS is planning a course and pilgrimage to the RCA-supported Al Amana Centre in Oman in January 2023. Dr. McCreary has also had the opportunity to serve the RCA in the following ways:

1. Principal investigator of a $1,000,000 Lilly Endowment Inc. Thriving in Ministry Grant designed to serve RCA Latino and Black American pastors
2. Member of the Pastoral Formation Oversight Board (PFOB)
3. Member of the Commission on Theology (COT)
4. Member of the newly formed RCA Restructuring Team
5. Guest pastor at RCA churches
6. General Synod Professor

On behalf of NBTS, thank you, RCA, for your partnership in the gospel.

Faithfully submitted,

Micah L. McCreary, MDiv, PhD, LCP
President, New Brunswick Theological Seminary
NBTS John Henry Livingston Professor of Theology
RCA General Synod Professor

Report of Western Theological Seminary

Mission Statement

By God's grace, Western Theological Seminary forms women and men for faithful Christian ministry and participation in the Triune God's ongoing redemptive work in the world.

Overview

The 2021–2022 academic year has been a fruitful one for Western Theological Seminary (WTS). Certainly, dealing with COVID-19 and strengthening the seminary's finances during a pandemic were not easy. Yet, one of our faculty members, Rev. Dr. Winn Collier, noted, "I sense growing hopefulness and anticipation about the direction we're heading. With new faculty and staff joining us and increasingly honest conversations about our life together, we seem to be experiencing signs of life that suggest to me that the Spirit is at work. I've also had an increasing number of breakthrough conversations with students, as they open their heart and their pain and their hopes. It's been a genuine gift. I've had to go find tissues to have on hand in my study, for when the tears flow. I take that as another sign of the Holy Spirit at work, mending and healing. Amen."

Rev. Dr. Han-luen Kantzer Komline remarked in her report to the Board of Trustees, "It is our fervent prayer that the Holy Spirit of Christ will, in this season of change and growth, go before us, making the way straight; go with us and in us, filling our journey with peace and joy; and go behind us, to purify and renew what we have done and left undone and to water the seeds we plant."

Enrollment

Western Theological Seminary began the fall 2021 semester with a total of 386 students, the highest enrollment in the seminary's history. The enrollment number places Western in the top 15 percent of seminaries in the U.S. and Canada in terms of head count. It also represents a third straight year of enrollment growth for the seminary, a growth that is fueled primarily by a growing Hispanic Ministry program, a blossoming doctor of ministry program, and a renewed attention to the In-Residence Master's program as the COVID-19 vaccine became more readily available.

The enrollment growth over the past three years has resulted in a significant boost to the overall tuition revenue of the seminary. At the same time, net tuition revenue needs to continue to be a larger part of the seminary's overall financial profile. Increasing the seminary's net tuition revenue through offering new degree programs and becoming more adaptable to the scheduling and pedagogical needs of adult learners and second career students will be a major focus for the seminary in the coming years.

$1 Million Grant from the Lilly Foundation

In November 2021, Western Theological Seminary was selected to be the recipient of a $1 million grant from the Lilly Foundation as a part of their Pathways for Tomorrow initiative, an initiative that "is designed to help theological schools strengthen and sustain their capacities to prepare and support pastoral leaders for Christian churches."

The grant has two parts. The first part of the grant will be used to fund initiatives related to the Eugene Peterson Center for Christian Imagination. The center, which was established

in February 2020, exists to promote the pastoral theology of Eugene Peterson for future scholarship, the health of pastors, and the church's renewed imagination. The center will steward the Peterson papers and archives, promote robust learning, create generative models for pastoral formation, and provide resources to encourage pastors for sustainable, joyful, and courageous ministry. The center launched three Doctor of Ministry cohorts over this past year. The first two were fully subscribed with 20 students per cohort. The third one will begin in October 2022 and will be taught by Drs. Jeff and Karen Barker (emeritus professors, Northwestern College).

The second part of the grant will be used to grow the burgeoning Hispanic Ministry Program at Western. The grant will enable Western to hire another bilingual Spanish-English faculty member so that the seminary can offer a Master of Arts in Christian Studies program in the Spanish language, as well as support the highly subscribed Graduate Certificate in Pastoral Studies program and the doctor of ministry cohorts in Spanish. Beginning in the summer of 2023, the seminary will also host a weeklong Hispanic Summer Institute program in Holland, Michigan.

Founders' Day

The seminary launched the inaugural Founders' Day lecture. The lecture is designed to reflect on specific time periods over the course of the institution's history in order to draw wisdom for the present and strength for the future. The inaugural lecture will be given by Dr. David Komline, associate professor of church history, and is titled, "On Being Reformed: The Theological Vision of I. John Hesselink."

New Master's Programs

According to the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), while enrollment in master of divinity programs has declined by 17 percent over the last 15 years, the decline has also been balanced by the accelerating enrollment growth of 18 percent over just the last 5 years in various MA programs. For the first time in the history of ATS, MDiv credit hours represent less than 50 percent of total credit hours across all seminaries.

In response to this trend, the faculty of Western Theological Seminary unanimously and enthusiastically approved four new master of arts programs in the following areas:

- Master of Arts in Biblical Studies
- Master of Arts in Disability and Ministry
- Master of Arts in Ministry
- Master of Arts in Theology

The faculty also authorized a Spanish-language master of arts in Christian Ministry, which means that the seminary now has full degree Spanish-language offerings at the certificate level, master's level, and doctoral level.

Strategic Plan

Over the past 18 months, the seminary has intentionally engaged a strategic plan process that will guide the focus of the seminary for the next three years. We anticipate that the strategic plan will be approved by the Board of Trustees at the May board meeting. The four themes of the strategic plan are as follows:

1. By June 2025, WTS will have developed and launched new degree programs and initiatives that equip students and churches to faithfully and innovatively engage the cultural and ecclesial challenges of ministry and leadership in our time.

2. By June 2025, WTS will be a vibrant learning community marked by the intentional integration of rigorous theological education with holistic spiritual formation.

3. By June 2025, WTS will increase its capacity and capability to support and sustain programs through investment in technology, institutional processes, and endowment for student scholarships, academic chairs, and institutional operations.

4. By June 2025, WTS will have solidified its commitment to a biblically rooted vision of racial/ethnic diversity and to practices of reconciliation and will have grown its institutional capacity for intercultural competency.

Trustee Changes

Trustees Gail Ebersole (chair), Chris Crawford, and Kerm Campbell will conclude their terms of service on June 30, 2022. No new trustees were elected to the board this academic year.

Faculty News

On April 11, 2022, dean and vice president of academic affairs Dr. Kristen Deede Johnson was installed to the G.W. and Edna Haworth Chair of Educational Ministries and Leadership.

The G.W. and Edna Haworth Chair of Educational Ministries and Leadership was originally established in 1999 during the presidency of Rev. Dr. Dennis Voskuil. Rev. Dr. George Brown occupied the chair until his retirement in 2012. The chair was redirected in 2021 to support the work and office of the dean of the seminary, allowing much needed financial resources to be rechanneled toward other core teaching functions of the seminary while still providing the necessary resources for the dean to conduct research, writing, and publication, three primary responsibilities that are often sacrificed when a faculty member moves into administration and gives oneself to the task of adminis-trivia.

The inaugural lecture, delivered by Dr. Kristen Johnson, was titled "Cultivating Kingdom Imagination: A Vision of Discipleship and Institutional Engagement." Responses to the lecture were given by Dr. James Davison Hunter, LaBrosse-Levinson Distinguished Professor of Religion, Culture, and Social Theory at the University of Virginia; Dr. John Inazu, Sally D. Danforth Distinguished Professor of Law and Religion and Professor of Political Science at Washington University in St. Louis; and Rev. Fleming Rutledge, Episcopalian priest, distinguished theologian, and accomplished author.

Below please find a non-exhaustive sampling of faculty engagement and activities with the church and with the academy throughout the course of the year.

- **Dr. Carol Bechtel** is entering a season of travel to introduce her Bible study curriculum, *Celebrating Sabbath: Accepting God's Gift of Rest and Delight*, which she wrote as the national Bible study for Presbyterian Women, the

women's organization of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). In March 2022, she traveled to Phoenix, Arizona, to speak for the Presbytery of the Grand Canyon. In April, she will head to Montreat, North Carolina, for the Presbytery of Western North Carolina. In late April, she will be leading a Sabbath retreat for RCA women at Warwick Conference Center in Warwick, New York. She is also preaching on Palm Sunday at the Waldensian Presbyterian Church in Valdese, North Carolina. She would appreciate your prayers for traveling mercies!

- **Dr. Chuck DeGroat** has continued a full schedule of speaking and of leading retreats. He writes, "In January, I led a three-day intensive retreat in my ongoing work as a faculty member for the Soul Care Institute." He has also traveled out to Silicon Valley to do a retreat for alumni pastors and leaders of the Bay Area's Wellspring Soul Care program, done some training and soul care from a distance with the faculty of the John Brown University clinical mental health program, and offered an online seminar for Gravity Leadership in March on mental health for leaders in the church today. He also shares, "Beyond this, I'm involved in a number of conversations right now about the current state of the church and the trauma of spiritual abuse. One of these conversations has been an ongoing one with Mike Cosper at CT [*Christianity Today*], consulting for the podcast *The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill*. I'm also involved in a conversation with other leaders around how to help churches rethink their use of NDAs [non-disclosure agreements]. And I continue to counsel a number of pastors."

- **Dr. David Komline** led a three-week adult education course at Thornapple Community Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and attended the final meetings of the Commission on Theology before his term expires at the end of June 2022. He also helped to author the commission's report to General Synod 2022. He is scheduled to attend the Conference on Faith and History in his capacity as book review editor for their journal *Fides et Historia* in late March and to deliver the inaugural WTS Founders' Day Lecture, "On Being Reformed: The Theological Vision of I. John Hesselink" in April.

- On January 27, **Dr. Han-luen Kantzer Komline** gave a lecture in this year's Scripture and Ministry series at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School entitled "The Art of Willing." During the same visit, she also delivered an evening address entitled "Augustine in the Pulpit" and participated in the Stott Award Consultation, which brings together pastors, parishioners, and professors to discuss theological topics of relevance to the contemporary life of the church. Her essay "Calvin and Przywara's *Analogia Entis:* A New Start for an Old Debate" was published in *Pro Ecclesia* in March. She is grateful for the feedback on this piece from colleague Dr. Todd Billings! She also recently completed an essay on Augustine's preaching on grace and human willing for the *Cambridge Companion to Augustine's Sermons*. She is learning the ropes of serving as a co-editor of the *International Journal of Systematic Theology* and has been serving on the search committee for the new executive director of the Foundation for Theological Education in Southeast Asia.

- **Dr. Suzanne McDonald** writes, "It was a joy to be the Teacher-in-Residence at Central Reformed Church in Grand Rapids over the month of March. The theme was 'Walking with the Spirit.' I preached and led worship, and we explored aspects of the person and work of the Holy Spirit through adult education sessions, a weekly evening reading group over Zoom, and informal discussion times. On the weekend of the 2nd and 3rd of April, I will be at Granite Springs

Church in California, leading a Saturday morning seminar on 'Dealing Faithfully With Dementia,' and preaching on the Sunday morning." Dr. McDonald will also be teaching a three-part adult education series at Third Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan, on May 8, 15, and 22 titled "In the End, What?: Thinking Well About Eschatology."

- **Dr. David Stubbs's** article "Visiting Prisoners in Jesus' Day," to be printed in *Christianity Today* 66/3 (April 2022), has just been released (www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2022/april/prison-ministry-history-visiting-prisoners-in-jesus-day.html). Also, he has given presentations on "Visiting the Prisoner ... in a Classroom," to two classes at Hope College and at Rose Park Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan, this last month. The Hope-Western Prison Education Program is busy recruiting its second cohort—and they will be transferred to the Muskegon Correctional Facility and start orientation in July.

- **Dr. Travis West** is grateful and excited to report that he recently signed a contract with Tyndale Publishers to publish the book on Sabbath he began working on during his sabbatical in the spring of 2021! It is likely going to be part of their new Refresh Series, which focuses on practices for embodied faith that lead to health, wellness, and shalom. The tentative title is *The Art of the Sabbath*. He has also been a co-editor (along with Rev. April Fiet, WTS alum '07) for the Women of the Bible study series produced by the RCA, celebrating the stories of female characters in the Bible on behalf of the whole church. The first volume was released at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the second volume was released this spring. The third volume is currently being edited.

- Finally, this year we also said farewell to two important lives in the history of the institution. Mrs. Lenora Ridder, wife of former president Dr. Herman "Bud" Ridder, passed away on March 19. Dr. Bill Brownson, former professor of preaching and president emeritus of Words of Hope, passed away on April 1.

New Faculty

Western Theological Seminary is pleased to announce the hiring of three new faculty members to join its core faculty. These faculty members are:

- Dr. Tim Basselin, director of student formation and community life (Fuller Theological Seminary)
- Dr. Ruth Padilla DeBorst, Richard C. Oudersluys Associate Professor of World Christianity (Boston University)
- Dr. Madison Pierce, associate professor of New Testament (University of Durham)

Staff Retirement

Norm Donkersloot, vice president of finance, concluded 35 years of faithful and committed service to the seminary on March 20, 2022. Norm is a man of integrity and always had the best interests of the seminary at heart. He served under four different presidents, beginning with Marv Hoff, then Dennis Voskuil, Tim Brown, and concluding with the current administration. Jon Dockery has been named as chief financial officer and vice president of finance.

Resolution

Declaring James V. Brownson General Synod Professor Emeritus

Rev. Dr. James V. Brownson, professor of New Testament, retired from Western Theological Seminary effective August 27, 2021. In honor of his faithful service, President Theonugraha and Dean Johnson, together with the Board of Trustees and faculty of Western Theological Seminary, therefore recommend that he be declared retired and that a resolution be brought to the 2022 General Synod to declare him a General Synod professor emeritus.

TE 22-3
WHEREAS Dr. James V. Brownson, James and Jean Cook Professor of New Testament, was a student at Western from 1977 to 1980, and was selected by the faculty to be the recipient of the Henry J. Pietenpol Senior Excellence Award; and

WHEREAS Dr. Brownson was then ordained in the Reformed Church in America in 1980 and served as an associate pastor at Faith Reformed Church in Traverse City, Michigan; and

WHEREAS Dr. Brownson then went on to earn a Doctor of Philosophy degree from Princeton Theological Seminary; and

WHEREAS Dr. Brownson then returned to serve as assistant professor of New Testament in 1989 until his retirement in 2021; and

WHEREAS Dr. Brownson also served as the academic dean of the seminary from 1996 to 2004, and then again as interim academic dean from 2015 to 2016; and

WHEREAS throughout his time at WTS, Prof. Brownson has distinguished himself as a teacher, scholar, author, and administrator, forming generations of students through his teaching, the Reformed Church in America through his consistent denominational service, the wider church through his writings, and the ongoing shape of WTS curricula and academic programs through his administration, Dr. Brownson's legacy will long endure;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the 215th regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting at Central College in Pella, Iowa, on June 9–14, 2022, expresses its deepest gratitude to Dr. Brownson for his years of service, and offers its prayers for a fulfilling retirement;

AND BE IT ALSO RESOLVED that the Rev. Dr. Jim Brownson be declared a General Synod professor emeritus as of June 15, 2022. (ADOPTED)

Request to the General Synod for Western to be an "Officially Related" Institution

The Board of Trustees of Western Theological Seminary requests permission from the General Synod to permit the seminary to become an officially related institution of the RCA like Hope College, Northwestern College, and Central College. We believe that moving to an officially related status will result in many mutually beneficial outcomes for both the denomination and the institution.

According to the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), we are in the middle of a significant sea of change in theological education. ATS is projecting that sometime in this decade, the total number of racial/ethnic minority students enrolled in ATS schools will exceed that of white students. Western Theological Seminary is experiencing some aspects of this change as well. Seven out of fourteen admitted in-residence students for fall 2022 are students of color, including five African American students; eight out of fourteen admitted distance-learning students for fall 2022 are students of color, including five Latino students from the Los Angeles area.

Altogether, theological education is in the midst of a demographic transition that will continue to accelerate through the end of the decade. According to ATS, 25 years ago, the most common student in ATS schools would have been a white male student from a mainline tradition, studying in-residence in the MDiv program, attending a seminary that belongs to the same denomination as their parents, funded by the denomination, and preparing for ministry in that same denomination.

By the end of this decade, the most common student in theological education will be a racial/ethnic minority student from a broadly Protestant tradition, equally likely to be male or female, equally likely to enroll in an MA program as an MDiv program, studying part-time as a commuter/distance-learning student, attending a seminary that does not belong to the same denomination as their parents, or altogether non-denominational, not funded by a denomination, and not pursuing ministry in a denomination. Geographical proximity will, by far, become the single most important factor in the seminary selection process, followed by theological alignment.

Responding to these trends is the foundational motivation for Western's request to the General Synod. We seek to place the seminary in a position that will allow us to respond with agility and creativity to meet the changing demands for theological education so that Western can be increasingly sustainable for the future. We live in a time of increasing naiveté and unfamiliarity toward denominations and, by extension, denominational seminaries. The perception of denominational seminaries is that they primarily employ faculty who are ordained in that denomination and are focused primarily on training students for that denomination. Moving to an "officially related" status will allow Western to better recruit and foster relationships with a broader prospective student pool, including students from other denominations and church networks.

Delegates may recall that the seminary's original request, submitted to General Synod 2021, was to become an "affiliated" institution of the RCA. This request was referred to the General Synod Council (GSC) in consultation with the Commission on Church Order (CCO) for further consideration. In January, the CCO made its advisory response available. The commission's response focused on four areas:

1. Instead of being "affiliated" with the RCA, the provision given by the *Book of Church Order* (*BCO*) is for Western to become an "officially related" institution of the RCA.

2. The *BCO* outlines two criteria for an institution to become an "officially related" institution:
    a. The institution's organizing documents must be approved by the General Synod.
    b. The institution's governing board must include three General Synod–appointed trustees at all times.
3. The CCO recommends that a reversion clause of the seminary's assets be included so that if the seminary ever ceases operation, the assets will revert to the RCA.
4. Any amendments to the bylaws regarding the three General Synod–appointed trustees as well as the reversion of assets clause would require approval by the General Synod.

The Board of Trustees of Western Theological Seminary has reviewed these recommendations and has unanimously affirmed the acceptance of these four recommendations. Western therefore presented to the GSC in March 2022 an updated set of amendments to its bylaws and articles of incorporation that took these four recommendations into account. As directed by the General Synod in TE 21-5, the updated proposed amendments to WTS's bylaws and articles of incorporation are included in the GSC's report on referrals from General Synod 2021; please see pages 74-102.

The CCO also recommended to the GSC that, should the General Synod approve the proposed amendments to WTS's bylaws and articles of incorporation, the GSC consider bringing a recommendation to the General Synod to designate Western Theological Seminary as an agent of the General Synod in order to best serve students who are currently seeking their Certificate of Fitness for Ministry at the seminary. The seminary is amenable to this recommendation as well, while also noting that the three theological agents have requested further review of the necessity of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry (CFM) for the theological agents.

Should the General Synod choose to approve the proposed amendments to Western's bylaws and articles of incorporation (RF 22-1; see pages 81-91) but not to subsequently designate Western as a theological agent (RF 22-2; see page 92), the board of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency has agreed to grant CFMs to students at Western who have submitted their Form V to the seminary by June 30, 2022, and who have satisfied the seminary's institutional requirements for receiving the CFM.

In conclusion, the Board of Trustees of Western Theological Seminary formally requests approval from the General Synod for WTS to become an officially related institution of the RCA.

Report of Central College

Central College of Pella, Iowa, is a private, four-year, liberal arts college. Central is known for its academic rigor and leadership formation and for cultivating diversity of thought and culture through the arts and sciences, professional fields of study, and experiential learning.

For more than 100 years, Central has valued its covenant with the Reformed Church in America (RCA). Central's connection with the RCA is invaluable to students learning to live out their faith through service to God and humanity. RCA members serve on Central's board of trustees, and Reformed churches support students through Central's Journey Scholarship Fund. RCA students also can receive the Heritage Award. Many Central graduates go on to serve as leaders in RCA congregations worldwide.

Central's mission integrates career preparation with developing values essential to responsible citizenship. Central empowers graduates to serve in local, national, and international communities. A Central education prepares students for civic responsibility, to "learn to do good; seek justice" (Isaiah 1:17). Through activities, courses, service opportunities, and Central's relationship with the RCA, students learn to take their place in the world as justice seekers.

Campus Ministries

Campus Ministries students plan and lead a variety of activities and events on campus.

The Calm

An average of 100 students participate in The Calm, a weekly worship service.

Fundraisers

Campus Ministries holds several fundraisers annually for organizations including World Vision, Water to Thrive, Freedom House, and Many Hands for Haiti. In fall 2021, students sponsored drives for Crisis Intervention Services and Love Packages and began working on fundraising efforts toward a third well for Water to Thrive.

Outreach

Campus Ministries is involved with Urban Bike Ministry in Des Moines. This outreach serves the homeless population of Des Moines. Students ride bikes to homeless camps throughout the city to deliver meals and blankets to people in need.

Mission Trips

Mission trips allow students to serve others while growing their faith. Campus Ministries is dedicated to global missions and has traveled to Haiti, Tanzania, Mississippi, and a variety of other locations over the years. Two international trips—one to London, England, and one to Honduras—and one domestic trip to Kentucky took place in spring 2022. In London, students learned how to better minister within Muslim populations; in Honduras, students served older adults in a senior citizen center; and in Kentucky, students worked with a pre-existing ministry to bless and encourage people in economically vulnerable areas of Appalachia.

Services and Discipleship

Many students are involved with local churches, including assisting with worship services and youth and children's ministries. In addition to connections with local churches, about 40 students have been paired with faculty, upperclassmen, and staff mentors in a discipleship program designed to help grow their faith and relationship with God.

Leadership Teams

More than 40 students participated in 6 weekly leadership team meetings to plan worship, organize campus and community outreach, participate in hands-on ministry with local organizations, fight issues of global injustice, and play music and run both sound systems and media at worship services. Events that resulted from these groups include the Global Care Fair, Angel Tree nights, pop-up Bible studies, service opportunities at Pella Food Shelf, and more.

Small Groups and Bible Studies

Nearly 20 groups—some led by staff, some by students—address a variety of topics ranging from the basics of the Christian faith to various book, Bible, and music. In addition, Campus Ministries has been writing and emailing a daily Lenten devotional to the campus community as a way of sharing faith within the community and to encourage one another in our Christian walks.

Community Service

Service plays a major role on Central's campus. It is expressed through student organizations, classes with service-learning components, and independent projects by students, faculty, and staff. In 2021, more than 200 students participated in service learning, much of it facilitated by the college's Center for Community-Based Learning, which manages reciprocal partnerships with more than 150 nonprofit organizations and agencies in the Pella and Des Moines regions.

Community service teaches civic engagement. By engaging with the community, students practice treating others with care and respect. Living a servant-hearted life means understanding one's responsibility to others and the pursuit of justice for all. Central is committed to teaching civic responsibility through multiple activities.

Service Learning

Service learning strengthens cognitive, vocational, social, emotional, behavioral, and moral competencies. Students are placed in settings in which they can provide direct service to community members, such as teaching English-language learners, leading fitness activities with seniors, assisting with after-school programs, and serving food to families who are food insecure.

Service learning continued to feel the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic through 2021 with fewer in-person opportunities for service. However, our community partners forged ahead and continue their crucial work with vulnerable populations. We are thankful to be able to support that work through service learning at Central.

One example is a service-learning student, Abigail Malecha '22, who helped develop a curriculum focusing on teaching skills for how to navigate the public transportation

system in Des Moines. This curriculum will be used to equip and empower victims of human trafficking through the work of Dorothy's House in Des Moines. Malecha says that her work at Dorothy's House helped her understand the various processes that go into creating a program for vulnerable populations. Malecha is now working as a full-time staff member at Dorothy's House.

All Campus Service Day

Central's 2021 Service Day took place on October 5, 2021. Each year on Service Day, the college makes it possible for everyone to participate so all members of the Central family can collaborate on projects that address a community need. More than 630 students, faculty, and staff served at 50 locations in Central Iowa—many at faith-based organizations. In total, there were 1,975.5 hours donated with an economic impact in the community of more than $49,000.

Coursework

Many courses at Central include a service component. Despite continued restrictions because of the COVID-19 pandemic, students continued to safely serve the community, both in person and virtually, through service links to individual courses during the spring 2021 semester. In fact, many students were conducting Zoom-based English language–learning lessons with students at Des Moines Public Schools, who themselves were engaged in remote learning. Others were safely assisting with in-person pod-type learning at Des Moines Public Schools or Mahaska County Head Start.

In fall 2021, the college resumed in-person service learning. The majority of Central's community partners began accepting in-person volunteers, and Central students were able to serve face-to-face. This not only enhances learning outcomes, it also responds to community partners' needs more effectively.

As a result, in fall 2021, 79 percent of students developed a greater sense of personal responsibility, while 93 percent of students reported their service experience helped them to "appreciate the diversity of cultures present in the United States." Eighty-six percent reported becoming "more sensitive to the hardships and needs of others."

Food Security Projects

The college annually participates in a Crop Hunger Walk, an initiative of Church World Service that raises funds to end hunger in the U.S. and around the world, in collaboration with several local churches and community members. In 2021, the walk returned to an in-person event—after being held virtually in 2020 due to the pandemic—and was held on September 26. The event raised $8,026 in contributions. The college also raised $1,994 in contributions to Pella Food Shelf.

Season of Gratitude

In fall 2021, several college departments and community partners collaborated for Season of Gratitude. Activities included writing letters to veterans, first responders, and older adults; a coat drive for refugees; two food drives; crocheting homeless mats made of used plastic grocery bags; observing World Kindness Day with friendship and a gratitude board; and celebrating Giving Tuesday to encourage giving to nonprofits.

Individual Service Commitments

Students and faculty individually pursue a number of service commitments. Students often initiate their own service or social justice–oriented groups.

Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Classes were not in session on Martin Luther King Jr. Day as they have been in years past. The day was instead filled with educational opportunities for students and faculty. Students participated in service projects, trained to become mentors in violence prevention, and/or chose from many different academic seminars on racial justice, bias, inequality, and more.

Mike Regan Jr. delivered a keynote address titled "The Journey Continues: Athlete Activism and the Fight for Social Justice." The day concluded with a vigil at the Peace Pole located on south Geisler lawn on Central's campus. The pole, installed in 2006, is a hand-crafted monument that displays the message "May Peace Prevail on Earth."

School Visits

Central's community-based learning program collaborates with the admission department to offer college visits to students served by Central's community partners. These visits are different from typical college visits primarily because these groups of students all represent underserved, first-generation families who have never been on a college campus before. This strengthens the college's goal of increasing college access to students with diverse socioeconomic and cultural perspectives. It also strengthens the college's partnership with the community.

The college partners annually with Des Moines' Findley Elementary and Harding Middle Schools and North High School to provide outreach and educational programming and college visits for underserved youth.

In 2021, Central's Community-Based Learning Department hosted two visits: one from Genesis Youth Foundation and one from North High School in Des Moines. Students learned about bees and examined them under a microscope, made slime in a science lab, ate lunch in Central Market, and participated in a college prep activities exercise.

Financial Aid

In the 2021–2022 academic year, 94 students are receiving a total of $110,440 in Community Service Awards. These scholarships are based on prospective students' past community engagement and their future plans for engagement in and after college. Students also enjoy a tuition price of $19,800 in addition to generous scholarships and awards.

Conclusion

Central takes seriously its mission of preparing students to lead. Part of this preparation is learning what it means to serve and how to change the world for the better. These lessons are integral to the life of a Christian and central to the college's mission, and the college's relationship with the RCA is essential to this mission. Central values its relationship with the RCA and the support—through gifts, guidance, and prayer—that the RCA offers this vital undertaking.

Report of Hope College

Affiliated with the Reformed Church in America since its founding in 1866, Hope College is known for our invitational, ecumenical, Christian atmosphere, vibrant campus community, and outstanding academic and co-curricular offerings. We are intentional about our mission to educate students for lives of leadership and service in the context of the historic Christian faith.

Hope is a recognized leader in undergraduate research, scholarship, and preparation for graduate school and the workplace. Hope faculty members offer an academically rigorous, co-educational, and residential education to approximately 3,000 undergraduate students from more than 40 states and 45 countries. Our teachers and talented researchers engage students in small classes and one-on-one collaborative research opportunities for an 11:1 student to faculty ratio. Hope offers over 1,800 internships and 300 study abroad opportunities in over 60 countries to provide a global perspective and experience that equips our graduates to excel in a global society. Ninety-four percent of our graduates join the workforce or enroll in graduate school within six months of graduation. The college's 80-plus student groups are marked by tradition, service, and enthusiasm, through which students are encouraged to explore their interests, build their leadership skills, and give back to the community.

Hope Forward

Under the leadership of President Matthew A. Scogin, Hope College is pursuing a vision to fully fund the tuition of all students who come through Hope's doors. Called "Hope Forward," this vision is for an entirely new funding model for higher education: instead of charging tuition up front, which often burdens students with decades of debt, Hope will ask students to commit to donating to Hope after they graduate. Based on the biblical principles of generosity and gratitude, this model is rooted in our Christian mission and worldview. Hope has embarked on a $1 billion fundraising campaign to grow the endowment so that it can fund tuition for all students. Hope is enthusiastic about the early momentum, with over $40 million raised so far.

While Hope Forward is in some ways an entirely new way of thinking about funding college, it's also deeply rooted in the college's DNA. When Hope was founded, and for over 50 years afterwards, Hope didn't charge tuition. A course catalog in 1907 states, "the aim constantly kept in mind is to provide at Hope College everything necessary to a broad, liberal education at the lowest possible cost." Our hope is to make Hope's transformative Christian education accessible to even more students, just like our founders envisioned.

Academic Excellence and Collaborative Research

Grounded in a general liberal arts education, Hope offers specialized study in more than 90 majors, minors, and pre-professional programs. Our students are presented with a rigorous intellectual experience, and their engagement with faculty often leads to the life-changing discovery of an academic passion or a professional calling.

Our faculty are active teacher-scholars, committed to their students. We are a recognized leader in undergraduate research with our students and faculty carrying out high-quality research projects that are challenging and meaningful and contribute to exciting new knowledge in a broad range of disciplines. For decades, our students have benefited from this "graduate-level undergraduate experience." This experience is transformational, giving students the opportunity to conduct research, publish their findings in peer-reviewed

journals (sometimes as the primary author), present their work at conferences, and perform in front of audiences around the world. Amid challenging circumstances for learning and teaching as the COVID-19 pandemic persists, Hope faculty and staff continue to publish, design, and submit proposals and publications profusely.

Creative Performance

Hope College was the first private liberal arts college to hold national accreditation in art, dance, music, and theatre, and the only liberal arts school in Michigan with an accredited art program.

- In addition to superior art facilities, our art students have the benefit of an extensive exhibition program that regularly crosses cultural and historical boundaries.
- We believe in the transformative power of dance, and our dance program is a place where our students grow artistically, intellectually, physically, and spiritually.
- A student's passion for music speaks to the world, and we believe music is the language that communicates to everyone. Music students at Hope practice in state-of-the-art facilities and perform in acoustically superior spaces.
- The Hope College theatre program is one of recognized excellence, which develops students as practicing theatre artists and engaged audience members. Both theatre majors and non-majors participate in all aspects of theatre work.

There is a strong interdivisional collaboration among our art, dance, music, and theatre programs, which contributes to the success of each. Hope students work with nationally known writers, musicians, performers, and artists on stage, in the gallery, in the concert hall, and in the classroom.

Athletics

In addition to excelling in scholarship, research, and artistic performance, our students also excel in athletics. We believe that intercollegiate sport is a powerful vehicle for education as well as for personal development. Our athletics program is part of our Kinesiology Department and is guided by a community of coaches, scholars, and leaders who prioritize excellence and the student-athlete experience. The members of our athletics program are committed to the utmost integrity in competition and engagement in Christian faith formation and are dedicated to excelling in sports, academics, and life. Our athletics teams have seen recent successes, including a men's hockey ACHA national championship, women's basketball NCAA national championship, and men and women's swim and dive MIAA championship.

Calling and Career

Hope's Boerigter Center for Calling and Career (BCCC) is a college-wide initiative engaging our students and alumni in lifelong practices for career development beginning in a student's freshman year. The BCCC is more than a resource for reaching career goals; it is a process, a plan, and a guided journey over four-plus years. Interests, strengths, and values are assessed, and students become part of the Hope network. Integrated into the academic program of the college, the BCCC includes and expands upon the work of our former Career Development office. Staff members from Academic Advising, Career Development, and Alumni and Family Engagement combine to help students ascertain clear next steps and prepare for graduate school and the workplace.

Campus Health

Over the last two years, Hope College has navigated unprecedented disruption to higher education with characteristic excellence. The college took the pandemic as not just a challenge but as an opportunity, investing in streaming technology and innovative strategies to engage students as well as their families and the broader Hope community in arts performances, research presentations, chapel services, and more. We've been in-person ever since fall of 2020, and fewer and fewer classes are being held online each semester. As of this writing, campus is mask-optional and current COVID-19 case levels have been consistently low. We're optimistic as the pandemic slowly loosens its grip on our way of life and community.

Campus Ministries

Hope College is a Christian community that invites all its members into a holistic and robust engagement with the historic Christian faith and a personal encounter with the living Christ through the Holy Spirit. Our Christian identity is described by these three aspirations: Hope aspires to be faithful, welcoming, and transformational. Hope is committed to the historical Christian faith as expressed in the ecumenical creeds of the ancient church, and the variety of expressions of the Christian faith we hold contributes to the vitality of the life of the college. Hope seeks to affirm the dignity of all persons as bearers of God's image and welcome those of different faiths or of no faith at all. We are committed to freedom of inquiry, yet also to the centrality of Scripture and the renewal of our minds according to the will of God. The whole Hope community is encouraged in a lifelong commitment to grow in God's grace and to pursue vocations through which the world so loved by God is renewed.

The Hope–Western Prison Education Program

An extension of our mission beyond Holland, Michigan, the Hope–Western Prison Education Program (HWPEP) is a partnership between Hope College and Western Theological Seminary that began in March 2019. Twelve students in the program's first cohort began credit-bearing courses leading to the bachelor of arts degree in the fall of 2021. The second cohort is being recruited and will begin courses in summer 2022. The program is designed to accommodate 80 students when fully subscribed. Ten Western Theological Seminary and Hope College students have served as teaching assistants and peer group leaders. HWPEP received a $120,000 grant from the Ascendium Education Group/Jobs for the Future to build institutional capacity for the Federal Department of Education's reinstitution of the Pell Grant for incarcerated students in July 2023.

College education programs in prisons can lower violence by up to 80 percent, lower recidivism by 45 percent, lower costs to taxpayers, improve education for traditional students, engage hard-to-reach donors, transform prisoners' hearts and minds, and unify faculty, staff, students, and friends across different perspectives.

Conclusion

Hope College is a Christian community offering a liberal arts curriculum, graduate school–style research, hands-on opportunities, creative performance opportunities, competitive athletics, and challenging collaborations. Our students learn through experience in more than 300 study abroad programs and countless internships available locally and throughout the U.S. Ours is an environment of the highest standards where students have a sense of belonging and can explore and become all that God intends them to be.

Report of Northwestern College

Northwestern College is pleased to report another standout year of graduate outcomes with the class of 2021. First destination data shows that 99 percent of the class was gainfully employed or continuing their education within six months of graduation. Graduates have landed in 22 states and 3 countries, with 52 percent of graduates choosing to live and work in Iowa. They are employed by over 140 companies and organizations, including Mayo Clinic, Ernst & Young, Principal, General Motors, and the U.S. Air Force.

New Vogel Welcome Center and Renovations to the Bultman Athletic Center

At the north entrance to Northwestern, the new Vogel Welcome Center provides an immediate sense of Northwestern's brand and heart for hospitality. The college's "Raiders Stand Out" promise is displayed on the wall behind the reception desk, and a reflective glass wall in eye-catching red serves as a backdrop to the building's reception area.

The $3.1 million, 9,300-square-foot facility houses the admissions, financial aid, and marketing and communications offices, as well as four conference rooms, communal work areas, and a photo/video recording studio.

At the south entrance to campus, the Bultman Center for Intercollegiate Athletics received a $2.25 million makeover. The facility, built in 1995, now features a new gymnasium floor, bleachers, lighting, and a scorers' table. The athletic department's new branding is highlighted throughout the gym as well as in the lobby and front entrance. A new roof and air conditioning were also installed.

Fundraising is underway for a second phase of Bultman Athletic Center renovations that will include the addition and renovations of locker rooms and remodeling of coaches' offices and the athletic training area.

Master's Programs in Clinical Mental Health Counseling and School Counseling Launched in May 2022

Northwestern College launched its master's degree programs in clinical mental health counseling and school counseling in May. Both feature 100 percent online coursework and extensive hands-on learning. The clinical mental health counseling program is designed to be completed in two years by taking two eight-week courses at a time. The school counseling program is set up to be completed by working professionals in three years.

The programs are directed by Dr. Gregory Elliott, who served as the 2020–2021 president of the Colorado Counseling Association and has extensive clinical practice experience. He joined Northwestern's administration after teaching in the graduate counseling program at Colorado Christian University.

Elliott says there's a desperate need for more counselors. For example, the American School Counseling Association recommends a 250:1 ratio of students to counselors, while the national ratio is 450:1. Elliott's clinical specialization and research interests have been focused on working with suicidal clients and in training mental health clinicians to do the same. He notes that suicide rates have been increasing for 15 years. "God is calling people into the counseling profession to help bring hope into people's lives," he says.

Northwestern's counseling programs are aligned with the standards and competencies of the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, from

which the college will apply for accreditation after the first cohorts graduate.

New Online Early Childhood Program Leading to Teaching Licensure

In January 2022, Northwestern launched an online bachelor's degree in early childhood that leads to teaching licensure, preparing graduates to teach pre-kindergarten through third grade. The only Iowa program of its kind, Northwestern's is designed for students who have already earned an associate's or bachelor's degree. It can be completed in three years or less. All coursework will be online, with field experience hours and student teaching arranged in schools near the student.

The bachelor's in early childhood–licensure program is designed for working adults, with eight-week courses and a flexible pace. Students will explore how their faith interacts with their role as an early childhood educator, and they will be guided by professors with extensive classroom experience.

The new licensure program is part of Northwestern's growing Graduate School and Adult Learning division. A total of 483 students were enrolled this spring in the division's programs, which include an online master's degree program in education, an on-campus master's degree in physician assistant studies program that will graduate its first cohort in August, and an online RN-BSN nursing program. Those numbers and a 92.2 percent retention rate for freshmen contributed to a record overall spring enrollment of 1,525.

Northwestern Begins Offering Micro-Credentials

Northwestern is offering micro-credentials to help a wide variety of constituents differentiate themselves in the workplace. The micro-credentialing program is a joint effort between Northwestern's Center for Innovation and Leadership and its Graduate School and Adult Learning division.

Smaller than a minor, certificate, or major, micro-credentials allow individuals to meet their personalized learning needs by gaining knowledge and skills in areas relevant to their academic or professional goals. The micro-credential programs are themed around twenty-first-century competencies and skills identified as essential by national associations and regional employers. Skills include critical thinking and problem-solving, teamwork and collaboration, leadership, professionalism, oral and written communication, diversity and bias, and content more directly tied to technical or performance-based standards such as project management.

Studies have shown that employees who have micro-credentials are viewed as more competitive not only while trying to land a job but also after they are employed. In addition, in a recent survey of human resource managers across different industries, 95 percent were interested in the micro-credentials of potential hires.

Upon completion of a micro-credential, learners will receive a digital badge—a clickable, verifiable credential that showcases their mastery of a skill or knowledge in an area of interest. Digital badges include information such as the date earned, issuing institution, program criteria, and work samples. The digital badge and data can be displayed on social media sites such as LinkedIn, added as a link on résumés, or embedded in e-portfolios and email signatures for visible recognition.

Psychology Graduates Score in Top Four Percent on National Exams

Northwestern College's latest psychology graduates scored in the top 4 percent on the ETS Major Field Test in Psychology, a national standardized test that assesses mastery of key concepts and principles. Beyond factual knowledge, the test—developed by professors from universities across the country—evaluates students' analytical and problem-solving skills.

"We have a curriculum that emphasizes the material information involved in psychology across many different areas, but we also teach our graduates to think well about psychology and faith, and to apply what they learn to their lives," says Dr. Laird Edman, professor of psychology. "The scores on these tests indicate we are accomplishing a number of these essential goals."

Recent Northwestern psychology graduates are pursuing doctoral or master's degrees in areas such as medicine, psychotherapy, mental health counseling, and child development. Graduates are also performing research for institutions like The Iowa Adverse Childhood Experiences Coalition in Des Moines, Iowa; Boys Town National Research Hospital in Boys Town, Nebraska; and Sanford Medical Center in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Alumni who become clinical psychologists work in private practices and the public sector, including the Veterans Affairs system.

First Year of Legal Interpreting Certificate Program Complete

This summer, Northwestern's first student cohort will complete their certification training program for legal interpreting. The program is designed for students who are completely bilingual in Spanish and English, enabling them to attain the needed skills to pass the legal interpreting certification exam after only two semesters.

The legal interpreting certificate and a medical interpreting certificate will be offered in alternate years. Both programs can be completed by traditional undergraduate students, who can combine them and other courses to earn a bachelor's degree in translation and interpretation, as well as by adult learners pursuing only the certificate. The certificates will serve those bilingual adults who have been interested in interpreting. Certification leads to well-paying, flexible, and meaningful job opportunities in a rapidly growing field.

Leading the certificate programs is Piet Koene, professor of Spanish, translation, and interpreting. Koene is a certified translator and interpreter who has earned two master's degrees: one in interpretation and translation and the other in Latin American history. He is a federally certified court interpreter, a nationally certified medical interpreter, and a state-certified court interpreter for Iowa and Minnesota. He has also served as president of the Iowa Interpreters and Translators Association.

Barker Finished Trilogy of Books about Missionary Nurse

Jeff Barker, professor emeritus of theatre, has completed his third book about a Sioux Center woman who spent 33 years as a missionary nurse in Africa. *Zambia Home: A Missionary Nurse Endures* tells the story of Arlene Schuiteman's final decade of service in the Republic of Zambia, where she taught health care workers in two rural hospitals. It then follows her as she returns to Iowa, faces a major health crisis, and experiences the death of a dear friend and colleague.

In 2014, when Schuiteman turned 90 years old, she entrusted Barker with complete access to her journals, in which she's recorded—nearly daily—the events, relationships, and spiritual questions and insights she'd experienced. Barker began work on her biography in 2016, publishing the first book of the trilogy in 2018 and the second in 2019.

"We've been on this journey for a long time," Barker says. "I've become like a son to her, and she is a spiritual mother to my wife and me."

Barker marvels at the sacrifices Schuiteman made, living so far from home at a time when there was no regular access to telephones, and computers hadn't yet been invented. "She would go for as much as four years before she saw her mother or sisters," Barker explains. "She knew she was living in dangerous circumstances. She kept the journals so if she suddenly died, her family would have a record of her life."

Schuiteman, now 97, received an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree from Northwestern College in 2020.

CLOSING

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Rev. Dwayne Jackson, General Synod vice president, was elected General Synod president. Rev. Judith Nelson, minister delegate from the Classis of Holland, was elected General Synod vice president.

CLOSE OF GENERAL SYNOD WORSHIP SERVICE AND ADJOURNMENT

The closing worship service concluded at 11:54 a.m. Central time. Thus, the 215th General Synod of the Reformed Church in America adjourned at 11:54 a.m. on Tuesday, June 14, 2022.

SUPPLEMENT A: CHANGES IN CHURCH STATUS/NAME JANUARY 2021 THROUGH JUNE 2022

1/21, organized	Iglesia Lugar Alto Duluth, Georgia	nac
4/21, organized	Regalo de Dios Oviedo, Florida	nac
1/22, adopted	Renacer Church Doral, Florida	nac
3/22, organized	Chosen Generation Fellowship Church Long Beach, California	cal

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1/21, transferred to Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	Trinity Reformed Church Schenectady, New York	sncy
1/21, disbanded	United Church Spring Valley, New York	r-w
2/21, disbanded	LifeQuest Church Zeeland, Michigan	hol
3/21, disbanded	Lyall Memorial Federated Church Millbrook, New York	m-h
6/21, disbanded	Ebenezer Reformed Church Holland, Michigan	zee
7/21, disbanded	First Reformed of Secaucus Secaucus, New Jersey	gpal
7/21, disbanded	Aberdeen Reformed Church Grand Rapids, Michigan	ngr
8/21, transferred to The Kingdom Network	Calgary Reformed Church Orland Park, Illinois	nt
8/21, transferred to The Kingdom Network	The Cornerstone Church Bourbonnais, Illinois	nt
8/21, transferred to The Kingdom Network	Faith Reformed Church Dyer, Indiana	nt
8/21, transferred to The Kingdom Network	First Reformed Church Wheatfield, Indiana	nt
8/21, transferred to The Kingdom Network	Living Springs Community Church Glenwood, Illinois	nt

9/21, transferred to Evangelical Free Church of America	Second Reformed Church Marion, New York	roch
10/21, disbanded	Faith Community Church Riverside, California	cal
11/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	American Reformed Church Luverne, Minnesota	minn
11/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Reformed Church of Steen Steen, Minnesota	minn
11/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	River Rock Community Sheboygan, Wisconsin	wis
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Alto Reformed Church Waupun, Wisconsin	wis
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	American Reformed Church Woodstock, Minnesota	dak
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Antelope Valley Reformed Church Revillo, South Dakota	dak
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Arise Church Sioux Falls, South Dakota	dak
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Aurora Reformed Church Stickney, South Dakota	dak
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Bethany Reformed Church Canton, South Dakota	dak
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Bethel Reformed Church Canton, South Dakota	dak
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Bethel Reformed Church Brandon, Wisconsin	wis
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Bismarck Community Church Bismarck, North Dakota	dak

12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Calvary Reformed Church Monroe, South Dakota	dak
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Chancellor Reformed Church Chancellor, South Dakota	dak
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Delaware Reformed Church Lennox, South Dakota	dak
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Emmanuel Reformed Church Waupun, Wisconsin	wis
12/21, transferred to The Kingdom Network	Emmanuel Reformed Church Paramount, California	amer
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Emmanuel Reformed Church Springfield, South Dakota	dak
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Faith Community Church Wishek, North Dakota	dak
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Faith Reformed Church Brookings, South Dakota	dak
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Faith Reformed Church Rock Valley, Iowa	ws
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Fellowship Reformed Church Hudsonville, Michigan	zee
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	First Reformed Church Waupun, Wisconsin	wis
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	First Reformed Church Colton, South Dakota	dak
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	First Reformed Church Litchville, North Dakota	dak
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	First Reformed Church Mitchell, South Dakota	dak

12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	First Reformed Church Platte, South Dakota	dak
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	First Reformed Church Sioux Falls, South Dakota	dak
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	First Reformed Church Volga, South Dakota	dak
12/21, transferred to Evangelical Free Church in America	First Reformed Church Friesland, Wisconsin	wis
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	First Reformed Church Sioux Center, Iowa	ws
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Good News Reformed Church Sioux Falls, South Dakota	dak
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Grace Reformed Church Corsica, South Dakota	dak
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Hamlin Reformed Church Castlewood, South Dakota	dak
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Hope Reformed Church Westfield Hague, North Dakota	dak
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	New Life Reformed Church Sioux Center, Iowa	ws
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	North Marion Reformed Church Marion, North Dakota	dak
12/21, disbanded	Our Lord's Community Church Oklahoma City, Oklahoma	cp
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Overisel Reformed Church Holland, Michigan	zee
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Red River Reformed Church West Fargo, North Dakota	dak

12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Riverview Reformed Church Yankton, South Dakota	dak
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Second Reformed Church Lennox, South Dakota	dak
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Strasburg Reformed Church Strasburg, North Dakota	dak
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	The Reformed Church Dell Rapids, North Dakota	dak
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Valley Springs Reformed Church Valley Springs, South Dakota	dak
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Zion Reformed Church Amherst, South Dakota	dak
12/21, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Hamlin Reformed Church Castlewood, South Dakota	dak
1/22, disbanded	Beverly Reformed Church Wyoming, Michigan	glc
3/22, disbanded	Faith Harvest Church Warren, Michigan	ngr
3/22, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Life Tree Community Church West Olive, Michigan	hol
3/22 transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Ottawa Reformed Church West Olive, Michigan	zee
3/22, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Reformed Church of Bentheim Hamilton, Michigan	zee
3/22, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	South Blendon Reformed Church Hudsonville, Michigan	zee
3/22, transferred to Christian Union	St Paul's Church Ohio City, Ohio	Illna
4/22, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Christ's Family Church Davenport, Iowa	ill

4/22, transferred to Christian Missionary Alliance	Fordham Manor Reformed Church Bronx, New York	ny
4/22, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Springs Community Church Colorado Springs, Colorado	rm
5/22, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Community Reformed Church Zeeland, Michigan	zee
5/22, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Harlem Reformed Church Holland, Michigan	zee
5/22, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Remembrance Reformed Church Grand Rapids, Michigan	ngr
5/22, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Spring Valley Church Allendale, Michigan	zee
5/22, transferred to The Kingdom Network	Centerpoint Church Kalamazoo, Michigan	swm
5/22, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Haven Reformed Church Kalamazoo, Michigan	swm
5/22, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Hopkins Community Reformed Church Hopkins, Michigan	swm
5/22, transferred to The Kingdom Network	Martin Reformed Church Martin, Michigan	swm
5/22, transferred to The Kingdom Network	North Point Church Plainwell, Michigan	swm
5/22, transferred to The Kingdom Network	The Bridge Ministries Portage, Michigan	swm
5/22, transferred to The Sending Network	Celebrate Community Church Knoxville, Iowa	ci
5/22, transferred to The Sending Network	Central Church Oskaloosa, Iowa	ci
5/22, transferred to The Sending Network	First Reformed Church Pella, Iowa	ci
5/22, transferred to The Sending Network	Newton Church of the Way Newton, Iowa	ci

5/22, transferred to The Sending Network	Third Reformed Church Pella, Iowa	ci

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8/21, classis disbanded	Classis of New Thing	RSMAm
10/21, classis transfer	Addisville Reformed Church Richboro, Pennsylvania	cc (from d-r)
5/22, classis transfer	Reformed Church of Fort Plain Fort Plain, New York	scny (from mont)
5/22, classis transfer	Sprakers Reformed Church Sprakers, New York	scny (from mont)

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1/21, name change	Resurrection Philadelphia Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Formerly Liberti Church	city
5/22, name change	Central Church Oskaloosa, Iowa Formerly Central Reformed Church	ci

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1/21, merged	City Church, Philadelphia, merged with Liberti Church, Center City, becoming: Resurrection Philadelphia	city
1/21, merged	Good News Community, Okoboji merged with Crossroads Community, Estherville becoming: Good News Community Church Estherville Campus	es
5/21, merged	CenterPoint Church, Westerville, merged with CenterPoint Church, Lewis Center, becoming: CenterPoint Church, Lewis Center	glc
4/22, merged	Harbor Churches, Hudsonville, Organized Walker Harbor, Grand Rapids (previously a new start), and Jamestown Harbor, Hudsonville (previously a new start), as collegiate sites of Harbor Churches	glc

FINANCIAL REPORTS

Recent audited financial statements for the General Synod Council, Church Growth Fund, Board of Benefits Services Insurance Fund, Board of Benefits Services General Fund, and Board of Benefits Services Retirement Fund are available at www.rca.org/finance. For questions about the statements, please contact the treasurer at 616-698-7071; 4500 60th St. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49512; or jteitsma@rca.org. The financial statements and audited reports from New Brunswick Theological Seminary and Western Theological Seminary are available from the seminaries. Copies are also housed in the RCA Archives.

As a matter of public record, copies of audited financial reports are always available by calling the treasurer's office at 616-698-7071 between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. (Eastern Time), Monday through Friday.

2021 STATISTICAL TABLES

Statistical tables containing data from the Consistorial Report Form from 2000 to 2021 are available online at crf.rca.org/public.

The index is two parts. Part one is the typical index of biblical citations, arranged in the order of the books of the Bible. This index includes citations included in the numerous reports made to synod by agencies, assemblies, and commissions. It does not include citations in reprinted reference and informational sources submitted in the overtures.

Part two is the subject index. The major report divisions are included, as are all names mentioned in the many reports, including those listed as submitting the report or listed as members of a body in the report. Not included are the names of delegates, nominees appointed to bodies, or members of bodies listed in the front pages of the minutes. The *Book of Church Order* (*BCO*) citations index the various citations of the *BCO* throughout the reports and actions.

The desire is to provide access to the vast range of information available in the minutes in an efficient manner. Your comments on the accessibility of this style and suggestions for future improvements will be appreciated.

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