

**General Synod Council
Reformed Church in America
Minutes of October 21-22, 2022 Meeting
Michigan Regional Center, DeWitt Ministry Center, Grand Rapids, MI
Or Zoom Video Conference**

Welcome and Prayer

Philip Assink, moderator, called the October 21-22, 2022 meeting of the General Synod Council (GSC) to order at 9:05 a.m. (eastern). GSC members, staff, and guests were asked to share briefly about an object that symbolized something spiritual, relational, or vocational that is currently happening in their lives. Each person then placed that object on a table in the gathering space or kept the symbol in their presence if attending by Zoom. The moderator offered prayer.

Members Present

The following members of the GSC were present in-person or by Zoom for all or part of the meeting. No GSC members were absent.

Pedro Agudelo	Yong Bok Kim
Eddy Alemán, ex-officio	Michael Meyer-Veen
Philip Assink	Sheila Moses
Carole Barber	Judith Nelson
Calvin Brouwer	Eric Nichols
Michelle Chahine	Albert Plat
Linda Cline	Neale Roller
Devonna Cousins	Jidong Shan
Susan Davis	Kjersten Sullivan (ELCA)
Bruce Deckinga	Kimberly Van Es
Brian Engel	Leigh Van Kempen
Barbara Felker	Harris Van Oort
Dwayne Jackson	Patricia Varga
Randy Karcher	Maudelin Willock
Bradley Kautz	

Staff and Guests

The following staff members and guests were present for all or part of the meeting:

Terri Boven, *Recorder*
Elizabeth Brand, *Director of General Synod Operations*
Sung Kim, *Associate General Secretary and Chief Operating Officer*
Susan Radwan, *Policy Governance Trainer, Leading Edge Mentoring*
Thomas Smith, *Regional Synod Observer from Council of Synod Executives*
Christina Tazelaar, *Chief Communications Officer*

Jillisa Teitsma, *Chief Financial Officer*
Angela Worthley, *Recorder*

Opening Business

The moderator appointed Michelle Chahine and Kim Van Es to serve as governance monitors for the current meeting.

GSC 22-50

A motion was made, supported, and adopted to approve the 2022 GSC minutes from March 22-23, May 2, June 9, June 14, August 30, October 3, and October 10.

It was noted that:

- Two GSC members will need to be appointed by the moderator to the Relationship and Review Committee to replace Pedro Agudelo and Al Plat whose terms on GSC will conclude June 30, 2023 (GP-12.2).
- A Policy Exploration and Review Committee will need to be appointed by the moderator (GP-12.3).
- A Nominations Committee will need to be appointed by the moderator (GP-12.1).
- Any members who are interested in serving on these committees or who would like to recommend someone were asked to reach out to the moderator.
- A Covenant Shares Review Committee is being formed to evaluate the first 3 years of the new model (EC 19-10, *MGS* 2019, pp. 52-53) and a female member of the committee needs to be identified. Members were asked to give suggested names to Jillisa Teitsma.

The moderator also noted that the agenda package included correspondence received from Rev. Peter de Jong and that no action is required.

Permanent Committees (GP 10.1 and GP 10.2)

Sheila Moses presented the report of the Investment Advisory Committee (IAC), which included two recommendations.

GSC 22-51

A motion was made, supported, and adopted as follows:

To maintain the endowment spending rate at 5.5% of a 20-quarter rolling average for fiscal year 2023.

The GSC discussed and took action at its March 23-24, 2021 (GSC 21-14), June 22, 2021 (GSC 21-21), and November 5, 2021 (GSC 21-39) meetings that led to restricting investment in companies whose principal business involved the production or distribution of firearms and military weapons and to divest of any holdings in such companies. The IAC had an in-depth discussion at its August 19, 2022 meeting about whether excluding these

categories was prudent. IAC members commented that we do not want to be anti-defense or anti-military. Divesting from these types of investments hurt the growth of the GSC endowment funds this past year. The consensus of the IAC was to recommend that the GSC amend its investment policy statements to allow for investing in defense and aerospace companies while continuing to restrict investments in companies whose primary business is the production or distribution of firearms.

GSC 22-52

A motion was made, supported, and adopted as follows:

To amend the GSC Planned Giving, Endowment Fund, Fixed Income Fund Tier 1, and Fixed Income Fund Tier 2 Investment Policy Statements to remove the words “and military weapons” from the section on “Social Screening Constraints.”

Brian Engel presented the report of the Audit and Risk Management Committee.

Assessment Relief

A request was received from the Classis of Muskegon for assessment relief for 2022, 2023, and 2024 for the amount billed to the classis for the membership of a church whose building was destroyed by fire in April 2022. The process for assessment relief approved by the General Synod (*MGS* 1991, R-5, p. 344) specifies that relief may be requested and approved for the current year only. Therefore, the classis may request relief for 2023 and 2024 in upcoming years.

GSC 22-53

A motion was made, supported, and adopted as follows:

To approve General Synod assessment relief for calendar year 2022 for Muskegon Classis in the amount of \$6,759.24.

Request for Redirection of Five-Fold Test Funds

General Synod 2014 adopted R-15 and R-16, which approved an assessment to fund a task force to study RCA governance through the lens of the Five-Fold Test. The task force reported in 2018 that for various reasons it was unable to complete the work (*MGS* 2018, pp. 98-100) and recommended that funds be made available to the Commission on Race and Ethnicity (CORE) for work with the Five-Fold Test. CORE has sought ways to work with the Five-Fold Test in the RCA and has concluded, due to polity differences, that using it within the RCA is challenging and not well supported by various assemblies that were asked to implement it. Therefore, CORE is requesting that funds be redirected to fund work approved by the 2022 General Synod in RE 22-2.

GSC 22-54

A motion was made, supported, and adopted as follows:

To redesignate the remainder of the funds collected for use with the Five-Fold Test (R-15 and R-16, 2014; a total of \$38,135.80) to the work of RE 22-2, funding Sankofa journeys and Institute for Healing Racism experiences.

Antiracism Policy

In its 2022 report to General Synod, the Commission on Race and Ethnicity (CORE) presented an antiracism policy to the General Synod, and asked synod to direct the general secretary and GSC 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...” (*MGS 2022*, RE 22-1, pp. 235-236). RE 22-1 was adopted by the synod.

In August, the general secretary and GSC moderator sent a communication to the leadership of a number of Reformed Church in America (RCA) entities, including executive committee members of the racial/ethnic councils; stated clerks; commission moderators; and board moderators and directors/presidents of Western Theological Seminary, New Brunswick Theological Seminary, Ministerial Formation Certification Agency, Board of Benefits Service, Church Growth Fund, Hope College, Central College, Northwestern College, and the Pastoral Formation Oversight Board, sharing the language of RE 22-1 and encouraging each entity to implement the antiracism policy therein.

The GSC is one of the entities of the RCA mentioned in RE 22-1, and so is encouraged by the synod to adopt the antiracism policy developed by CORE.

GSC 22-55

A motion was made, supported, and adopted as follows:

As an agent of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, the General Synod Council commits to support the Reformed Church in America to:

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).

It was noted that the beginning of the antiracism policy that the GSC adopted differed slightly from the policy in RE 22-1 which read “The Reformed Church in America shall ...”. The GSC has authority to commit to something on behalf of itself and its work, but not of other agents of the RCA. The GSC is committing itself to support the RCA in making the six items listed come to fruition in the RCA.

Executive Limitations

Eddy Alemán, general secretary, presented a monitoring report for EL-1 Global Executive Constraint and reported compliance.

GSC 22-56

A motion was made, supported, and adopted to accept the general secretary’s interpretation of EL-1 and the compliance data presented.

The general secretary presented a monitoring report for EL-2 Treatment of Staff and reported compliance.

As part of the discussion around EL-2, it was shared that a concern for GSC staff is that as the overall number of GSC staff has grown smaller, staff workloads are an increasing challenge. Many recommendations to the General Synod have a hidden cost in terms of staff time that is sometimes not recognized until the recommendation is passed and needs to be implemented. A motion was made and supported as follows:

To recommend that each commission discuss recommendations with relevant GSC staff before they bring their report and recommendations to the General Synod floor.

The GSC discussed the motion.

GSC 22-57 A motion was made, supported, and adopted to lay the motion on the table until the GSC's discussion regarding the General Synod 2022 evaluation later in the meeting.

GSC 22-58 A motion was made, supported, and adopted to accept the general secretary's interpretation of EL-2 and the compliance data presented.

Recess

The moderator recessed the morning session of the October 21, 2022 GSC meeting at 12:22 p.m. (eastern), following prayer by Neale Roller.

FRIDAY AFTERNOON

Call to Order

The moderator called the afternoon session of the October 21, 2022 GSC meeting to order at 1:33 p.m. (eastern).

Ends Monitoring Reports

In response to GSC 22-16 that was adopted at the GSC's March 22-23, 2022 meeting, the general secretary presented a special monitoring report on ends policy E-2, Transformed & Transforming.

Sung Kim addressed the GSC regarding growing plans for The Center for Church Ministry and Multiplication. The GSC was given an opportunity to ask questions and give feedback.

GSC 22-59 A motion was made, supported, and adopted to accept the general secretary's special report on E-2.

Executive Limitations, continued

The general secretary presented a monitoring report for EL-5 Financial Recording and Reporting and reported compliance.

GSC 22-60 A motion was made, supported, and adopted to accept the general secretary's interpretation of EL-5 and the compliance data presented.

The general secretary presented a monitoring report for EL-8 Compensation and Benefits and reported compliance.

GSC 22-61 A motion was made, supported, and adopted to accept the general secretary's interpretation of EL-8 and the compliance data presented.

The general secretary presented a monitoring report for EL-12 Ecumenical Responsibilities and reported compliance.

GSC 22-62 A motion was made, supported, and adopted to accept the general secretary's interpretation of EL-12 and the compliance data presented.

General Synod 2022 Evaluation

The GSC reviewed the results of General Synod 2022 delegate survey and provided feedback intended to assist the General Synod 2023 planning team.

GSC 22-63 A motion was made, supported, and adopted to take the motion that was tabled in GSC 22-57 off the table. The motion reads as follows:

To recommend that each commission discuss recommendations with relevant GSC staff before they bring their report and recommendations to the General Synod floor.

GSC 22-64 A motion was made, supported, and adopted to approve the motion.

Commission Review Process

The *Book of Church Order* gives GSC responsibility for reviewing each of the General Synod's commissions once every five years and recommending continuation, reconstitution, or discontinuation of that commission to the General Synod (Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6g [2022 ed. p. 111]). Pedro Agudelo, Al Plat, and Leigh Van Kempen presented a proposal to update the commission review process that was put into effect in 2017.

GSC 22-65 A motion was made, supported, and adopted to approve the updated commission review process as proposed.

See Schedule GSC 22-65 for the updated commission review process.

Restructuring Team

The GSC heard an update from restructuring team members, Michelle Chahine and the general secretary, about the current work of the restructuring team that was created by the adoption of RF 21-1 by the 2021 General Synod.

Recess

The moderator recessed the afternoon session of the October 21, 2022 GSC meeting at 4:59 p.m. (eastern), following prayer be Maudelin Willock.

The GSC did not meet in executive session during the evening because it was not needed. The Relationship and Review Committee gave its report in executive session during the GSC's October 3, 2022 meeting.

SATURDAY MORNING

Call to Order

The moderator called the morning session of the October 22, 2022 GSC meeting to order at 9:01 a.m. (eastern), followed by devotions and prayer by Leigh Van Kempen.

Policy Governance Training

The GSC functions under a system of organizational governance known as Policy Governance that it adopted in 2006. The GSC's current governance policies can be found on the GSC private members page in the resources section, as well as on the public GSC page at www.rca.org/gsc. Policy Governance is a registered trademark of John Carver. The authoritative website can be found at www.carvergovernance.com.

Liz Brand introduced Susan Radwan from Leading Edge Mentoring who provided a Policy Governance training.

Recess

The moderator recessed the morning session of the October 22, 2022 GSC meeting at 1:09 p.m. (eastern), following prayer by Eric Nichols.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON

Call to Order

The moderator called the afternoon session of the October 22, 2022 GSC meeting to order at 2:06 p.m. (eastern).

Classis Meeting Visits

GSC members reported orally on visits made to classis meetings.

Leadership Reports

The following GSC members addressed the GSC:

- Dwayne Jackson, General Synod president
- Judy Nelson, General Synod vice president
- Phil Assink, GSC moderator

The moderator requested a time of silence. Each attendee was then asked to briefly share what God had placed on their heart.

Adjournment

GSC 22-66

A motion was made, supported, and adopted to adjourn the October 21-22, 2022 meeting of the GSC following communion and prayer led by Phil Assink. The GSC adjourned at 3:43 p.m. (eastern).

Terri Boven, Recorder
Angela Worthley, Recorder

Schedule GSC 22-65

The General Synod Council (GSC) is grateful for our commissions and the work that they do on behalf of the General Synod. In order to encourage open channels of communication between the commissions and GSC and to help the GSC support the commissions in their work, the GSC will utilize the following process:

1. The GSC will request permission to send a representative to one meeting of each commission per year. If possible, the GSC member will join the commission in person, but due to budget limitations that will only be possible if the commission is meeting within driving distance of the GSC representative; GSC does not have budget for travel or lodging for a GSC representative to travel to a commission meeting. Most likely, the GSC representative will join the commission via Zoom.
2. When the GSC representative joins the commission, they will ask for 20 minutes within the agenda of the commission. The GSC representative will verbally survey the commission members with the four questions from the Annual Review document. (See addendum.) The GSC representatives will then report to the March GSC meeting on their commission visits.
3. Every five years (on a rotating basis, two commissions per year), each member of a commission will be asked to individually complete a longer written survey. This survey will be sent out on October 1, and the members of the two identified commissions will be asked to complete it by the end of the calendar year. (See addendum.)

The rotating schedule for commission review will begin as follows:

- Year A: Christian Worship, Race and Ethnicity
 - Year B: Christian Action, Christian Unity
 - Year C: Women, History
 - Year D: Christian Discipleship and Education, Church Order
 - Year E: Theology, Nominations
4. At its fall stated meeting, in preparation for the five-year review, the GSC will assign two GSC members to each of the two commissions that will be reviewed. (Ideally, one of the two GSC members assigned will have served as the GSC representative to that commission (as described in points 1 and 2) within the past several years.) Those two GSC members will be given the completed survey responses when they have been received from that commission.
 5. The two GSC members will then meet with the commission being reviewed via Zoom to discuss the survey responses, prior to the March GSC meeting.
 6. The GSC members who meet with the commission will report back to the GSC at the March meeting.
 7. The GSC will decide whether to recommend to the General Synod a continuation, a reconstitution, or a discontinuation of the commission. (*BCO* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6g).

Addendum

Questions for the Annual Review: *The designated GSC member will ask the following questions of the commission annually:*

1. What has your commission done in the past year to support the mission of the RCA as outlined in the goals of Transformed & Transforming concerning spiritual transformation, the equipping of leaders, and the call to God's mission in the world?
2. How has working on the commission this past year helped you to experience personal transformation, equipped you to be a better leader, or helped you fulfill your calling to God's mission in the world?
3. What other work has your commission done this past year that doesn't quite fit the goals of Transformed & Transforming, and why was that work still important for you to do?
4. Is there anything the GSC can do to assist you in your work?

Questions for the Five-Year Review: *The five-year review will be distributed via electronic survey on or close to October 1 and filled out individually by each member of the commission being reviewed and will include the name of the commission. Commissioners may choose to include their own name. The commissioners will be asked to complete the survey by the end of the calendar year.*

Your commission's work in the recent past

1. What has your commission done in the past five years to support the mission of the RCA as outlined in the goals of Transformed & Transforming concerning spiritual transformation, the equipping of leaders, and the call to God's mission in the world?
2. How has working on this commission helped you to experience personal transformation, equipped you to be a better leader, or helped you fulfill your calling to God's mission in the world?
3. Over the past five years, how has your commission fulfilled the specific responsibilities assigned to it in BCO Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5?

Your commission's work as it relates to current denominational structure

4. How well is your commission working with the RCA staff, especially your assigned staff person? What can be done to improve your commission's relationship to the staff?
5. How could the General Synod Council help you with your commission's work? Are you able to fulfill your commission's work as described in the BCO?

The future work of your commission

6. What work do you expect to be doing in the next three years that will contribute toward the mission of the RCA as outlined in the goals of Transformed & Transforming?
7. Do you think your commission is serving the purposes outlined for it in BCO Chapter 3, Part I, Section 5? Does the BCO wording describing your commission's responsibilities still "fit," or should it be adjusted or changed in response to new ways of working and doing ministry together?
8. Have you been encouraging other RCA members to fill out a profile for possible service on your commission (or other commissions)?