

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 [2022 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 (*Minutes of General Synod [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 [2022 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. In this report, 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.

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 fellowship 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. The 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches was held in Karlsruhe, Germany, from August 31 to September 8, 2022, under the theme “Christ’s love moves the world to reconciliation and unity.” Over 4,000 participants from around the world gathered at the Assembly for fellowship, learning, and worship together. RCA delegates to the 11th Assembly included Rev. Eddy Alemán, Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, Rev. Laura Osborne, and Rev. Stacey Duensing Pearce. The Commission on Christian Unity commends to everyone the message of the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches entitled “A Call to Act Together.” The WCC 11th Assembly also published many public statements, including “War in Ukraine, Peace and Justice in the European Region,” “Seeking Justice and Peace for All in the Middle East,” “Statement on Confronting Racism and Xenophobia, Overcoming Discrimination, Ensuring Belonging,” and “The Living Planet: Seeking a Just and Sustainable Global Community.” For a full list of publications from the 11th Assembly including public statements, Bible studies, and messages, visit the WCC website: www.oikoumene.org.

The World Council of Churches convened several themed Pre-Assemblies before its 11th Assembly. One of these Pre-Assemblies, the Ecumenical Youth Gathering (EYG), convened in Karlsruhe from August 27-30 and gathered 400 ecumenical young leaders around the world for worship, prayer, and learning. RCA minister Rev. Stacey Duensing Pearce served on the design team for the gathering as the team’s Chair for

Spiritual Life. Rev. Duensing Pearce served in her role on behalf of the Global Christian Forum.

The Central Committee of the WCC serves as the governing body of the WCC between Assemblies. The Central Committee implements WCC policies enacted at the assemblies, reviews and approves programs, establishes the budget, secures financial support, and generally oversees the work of the WCC between assemblies. Central Committee members are nominated and elected at each Assembly. During the 11th Assembly, a need was expressed for more diverse voices on the Central Committee, including young people, women, people with disabilities, and indigenous peoples. Responding to this, Rev. Eddy Alemán nominated Rev. Stacey Duensing Pearce to serve on the Central Committee. A previous RCA general secretary has also made a similar decision to create greater representation on the Central Committee. General secretary Eddy Alemán continues to stay connected to the work of the World Council of Churches and still has the option to attend Central Committee meetings.

Rev. Prof. Dr. Jerry Pillay was installed as the general secretary of the World Council of Churches on February 17, 2023.

For more information on the work and mission of the WCC, go to www.oikoumene.org.

Letter to the World Council of Churches Regarding War in Ukraine

The 2022 General Synod adopted 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.

General secretary Eddy Alemán addressed this mandate from General Synod verbally at the meeting of the WCC Central Committee on June 15-18, 2022. Afterward, Rev.

Alemán worked with the Commission on Christian Unity and others to draft a formal letter to the World Council of Churches addressing motion ONB 22-9. The letter was sent to the World Council of Churches on November 16, 2022, and a response was received from the World Council of Churches' general secretary Rev. Dr. Jerry Pillay on January 13, 2023. The Commission on Christian Unity continues to be in conversation and prayer about ways to continue this conversation with the World Council of Churches regarding the war in Ukraine. Both Rev. Alemán's letter and Rev. Dr. Pillay's response are included below. The Commission on Christian Unity would like to extend thanks to those outside the commission who gave significant wisdom and help writing the letter: Rev. George Montanari, Christina Tazelaar, Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, and Rev. Dr. Jim Payton.

Dr. Jerry Pillay
General secretary
World Council of Churches
P.O. Box 2100
CH-1211 Geneva 2
Switzerland

November 15, 2022

World Council of Churches Central Committee and Dr. Jerry Pillay,

With a heavy heart, the Reformed Church in America as a founding member of the World Council of Churches, writes to you, our ecumenical sisters and brothers in Christ, because of Russia's war against Ukraine, and the way that our common Christian faith has been used to justify this war.

We share with all of you the grief and horror of the loss of life in Ukraine, the destruction of its historic and beautiful cities, the devastation of its farmland and other environmental treasures, the attempted decimation of its language and cultural heritage, the forced displacement of nearly one-third of its population, as well as the wasteful, tragic loss of life of Russian soldiers and the resultant grief among Russian families, not to mention the global impact of this war and the current threat of nuclear catastrophe, whether intended or accidental. Yet this grief and horror is multiplied because of the language used by leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church seeking to give religious justification to this violence. Our own denomination's initial impulse, voted on by our General Synod, is to call for the suspension of the Russian Orthodox Church from membership in the WCC until such support for the war is retracted and reversed.

We understand the WCC's preference to remain in dialogue in times of disagreement. To work for peace in this way is a good and Christ-like example for the nations of the world who are otherwise not so inclined. We were grateful to hear about the WCC's pilgrimage journey to Kyiv, and the fruitful relationship building

work begun there which continued at the 11th Assembly. We share in the WCC's frustration that ROC leaders in Moscow have not been open to a similar dialogue.

We share the WCC's value that, at a minimum, dialogue is important. In Christian unity, we ought not be afraid to say or hear even the most difficult things from one another. We urge the Moscow Patriarchate to open their doors for dialogue with WCC leadership.

Dialogue also helps understand that issues are often more nuanced than appear at first. We ourselves are learning more of the long, deep roots of this conflict between those of Russian and Ukrainian heritage. We have learned that others in the Russian Orthodox Church have spoken against the war. We have learned that the Russian Orthodox Church representatives to the General Assembly did not allow this conflict to influence the reception of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine into WCC membership. For such learnings through the dialogues we have had, we are grateful.

Yet, a core conviction crosses all lines of Christian tradition, that violence is never the answer to resolve our conflicts. We recall and affirm again the declaration of the first WCC Assembly in 1948, that "war is contrary to the will of God." Jesus always calls us to be people of peace. And while the worldwide Church raises its voice to call the nations of the world to peace, we have particular responsibility within the Church of Jesus Christ to ensure that our faith is never used to justify war, that our faith is never co-opted by the kingdoms of this world to sanction violence and oppression. We find such religious justification of this war to be an egregious and lamentable breach of our common Christian faith. This is not right, and we speak against it, consistent with the history of the WCC's witness against war, and its ongoing pilgrimage for justice and peace.

We grieve and lament this brokenness within the Church. We grieve and lament that Christ's glorious name suffers indignity by being attached to the violence and suffering of this war. Our heart is not only heavy, but broken.

We are left to wonder why the global Church would not formally acknowledge the division in the Church that our hearts are experiencing and that our world is witnessing. The separation in the Church, predating this war, yet torn all the further because of this war, is real. Due to the misuse of the Christian faith to support the war in Ukraine by leading figures within the Russian Orthodox Church, we call for appropriate action to be taken by the WCC for this member in our communion, up to and including temporary suspension of the rights of membership. We urge our beloved brothers and sisters in the Russian Orthodox Church to withdraw their public and religious support of this war. Consequently, we petition the World Council of Churches through its appropriate mechanisms to implement a process leading toward suspension of the Russian Orthodox Church's membership, unless, by the gracious work of the Holy Spirit, such a reversal of its present position and action become evident.

With prayers for Peace,

Rev. Eddy Alemán, General Secretary of the Reformed Church in America
The Reformed Church in America Commission on Christian Unity

WCC Response Letter



**World Council
of Churches**

General Secretariat

150 route de Ferney, PO Box 2100
CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland
Phone: +41 22 791 6111 Fax: +41 22 791 0361
Email: infowcc@wcc-coe.org www.oikoumene.org

Direct phone: +41 22 791 6285
Direct e-mail: Beth.Godfrey@wcc-coe.org

Rev. Eddy Alemán
General Secretary
Reformed Church in America
4500 60th St SE
Grand Rapids
MI 49512 – 9670
United States of America

Geneva, 12 January 2023

Dear Eddy,

New Year's greetings from World Council of Churches. I am responding to your letter dated 15 November 2022 addressed to the WCC central committee and myself, requesting that the WCC "implement a process leading toward the suspension of the Russian Orthodox Church" from membership in the WCC.

We remain grateful for the witness of the Reformed Church in America – for its expressions of grief about the impacts of the war in Ukraine and its concern about the role of the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church.


As you are aware, the central committee, meeting in June 2022 in Geneva, discussed the possibility of suspension, including the concerns expressed by the general assembly of the Reformed Church in America. At that time, the central committee agreed by consensus not to initiate suspension, but to pursue dialogue, recognizing the WCC as a unique platform, not only for the pursuit of justice, reconciliation and unity, but mutual accountability between members of the fellowship.

These efforts continued at the WCC 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, where the delegates responded to the war and challenged the Russian Orthodox Church in a statement on "War in Ukraine, Peace and Justice in the European Region". My predecessor, Ref. Prof Dr Ioan Sauca, provided significant leadership in promoting dialogue through his pilgrimage to Kyiv in August 2022, his efforts during the assembly in Karlsruhe and his pilgrimage to Moscow to meet directly with and challenge the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Your letter is poignant reminder that “for just as the body is one and has many members ... if one member suffers, all suffer together with it” (1 Cor. 12.26). Our efforts for dialogue and peace - building will continue. I will share your letter with the leadership of the central committee, as the appropriate mechanism for our ongoing discernment and response to the war and the role of the WCC member churches.

Together with the RCA, we pray for peace and reconciliation, for the end of this conflict and for the unity of the body of Christ.

Yours in Christ,



Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay
General Secretary
World Council of Churches

World Communion of Reformed Churches

The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) comprises over 100 million Christians in Congregational, Presbyterian, Reformed, United, Uniting, and Waldensian churches. The WCRC, working with its 233 member churches, is active in supporting theology, justice, church unity, and mission in over 105 countries.

The WCRC is called to communion and is 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 our diversity, we seek to be a living expression of “unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). As a global koinonia, with all the partners God provides, we work 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).

Discerning, confessing, witnessing, and being Reformed together. These are verbs in the present tense, verbs that incarnate what we are called to do as a global family, as regional groups, and as member churches. This we do together; our koinonia is God’s gift to be received and nurtured. A reformed community is always reforming according to the Word of God.

Some highlights of the WCRC’s work in the past year include the inauguration of a WCRC ecumenical office in Rome, Italy, where we join several other ecumenical bodies. This will allow greater opportunity for ecumenical engagement, dialogue, and joint justice work. Additionally, in 2022, the search for an executive secretary for Mission and Advocacy culminated in the selection of Ms. Muna Nassar from Palestine. Finally, planning for the next General Council, scheduled for 2025 in Thailand, is underway, with many groups working at various components of preparation.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the annual executive committee meetings have been held via Zoom, which makes global conversations logistically

challenging. Thus it is with joy that we will return to an in-person meeting from May 19-24 in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Since mid-2021, the WCRC has been functioning with a “Collegial General Secretariat” model, which includes the executive secretary for communications, Philip Tanis of the Reformed Church in America. Phil is nearing the completion of his second and final term, and we gratefully acknowledge his work on behalf of the WCRC and the RCA. The Rev. Dr. Lisa Vander Wal continues as WCRC vice president from the Caribbean and North America region.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Dr. Lisa Vander Wal

Global Christian Forum

The Global Christian Forum (GCF) creates space for a new methodology of worldwide ecumenical dialogue based on relational fellowship. The GCF seeks to widen the ecumenical table, drawing together world leaders from Evangelical, historic Protestant, Orthodox, Pentecostal, Catholic, and African-Instituted churches.

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.”

The Global Christian Forum is planning its fourth Global Gathering on April 14-19, 2024, in Ghana. The theme of the gathering is “That the World May Know” from John 17:23b.

Rev. Wes Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary emeritus of the RCA, serves on the International Committee of the Global Christian Forum and on a task force planning the next Global Gathering. Rev. Stacey Duensing Pearce serves as a youth delegate to the International Committee.

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 30 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.

Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie was appointed to a two-year term as interim president and general secretary in 2022. She is the first African American woman to serve in the role of general secretary, having previously served as a presiding bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Southern Africa, as well as in the states of Tennessee, Kentucky, and Texas.

The current priorities of the NCC are ending racism, combating mass incarceration, and working toward peace in interreligious relations. In the NCC's annual Christian Unity Gathering in October 2022, presenters focused on "The Challenge of Change: Serving a Never-Changing Christ in an Ever-Changing World." A recent partnership between the NCC and the Harvard Kennedy School is seeking to develop a faith-based campaign for reparations. Furthermore, the NCC has petitioned President Biden to establish a commission to study reparations in pursuit of racial healing and transformation. "The National Council of Churches historically has stood on the frontlines in advancing a vision of racial justice in America to build a beloved community," Bishop McKenzie stated. "This historic letter to President Biden from a diverse coalition of faith leaders speaks to the fierce urgency to preserve American democracy through reparative justice."

For more information about the NCC, visit <https://nationalcouncilofchurches.us>.

Christian Churches Together

Formed in 2007, Christian Churches Together (CCT) is the broadest Christian fellowship in the United States. It represents members from five families: the 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, Evangelicals for Social Action, Habitat for Humanity, Sojourners, and World Vision. It is this mix of 34 communions representing churches and religious organizations that makes CCT unique among North American ecumenical organizations. CCT calls itself and its member churches "to bring together the diversity of Christian churches and organizations in the U.S. to foster loving relationships, witness to the reconciling power of Jesus" (www.christianchurchestogether.org/about-us).

In 2023, Christian Churches Together held its forum in October in Indianapolis, Indiana, with the theme “Who Does Jesus Call Our Christian Churches to be in a Polarized Society?” Speakers and participants engaged in dialogue on the church’s role in our polarized society. Speakers were from five families of CCT meeting in various churches around the city. Events included fellowship over meals, small groups, and an evening to lament and lean into our unity. The RCA delegation consisted of RCA ministers Dale Buettner and Kim Pavlovich.

Among the many benefits of participating in CCT, RCA delegates applaud the annual convocations as opportunities to build personal relationships with people across the church in the U.S., to come to explore and understand 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.

Monica Schaap Pierce is the executive director of CCT. Their website (www.christianchurchestogether.org) provides additional information about the organization’s mission and activity. There you will also find common statements on poverty, immigration reform, racism, and evangelism.

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 of Agreement 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 of Agreement churches.

Reformed-Catholic Dialogue

The partners involved in this dialogue are the Roman Catholic Church, the Christian Reformed Church in North America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the United Church of Christ, and the Reformed Church in America. This dialogue represents the ninth round of Roman Catholic-Reformed dialogue in the United States. Although we have been engaged in deep dialogue for nearly 50 years, reconciliation remains an unfinished project and an urgent matter. This round of dialogue is looking at justification, sanctification, and justice.

Anabaptist Rapprochement

In 2019, the CCU was instructed by General Synod to “explore possibilities for repentance and reconciliation, being particularly attentive to the ways in which our ecumenical partners have pursued rapprochement with Anabaptists, and report back to General Synod 2021” (*MGS 2019*, H 19-2, p. 276). Pandemic realities meant that the commission lost this instruction for a time, but it has now begun work on it. The commission has begun to explore what other ecumenical partners have done in terms of rapprochement and what possibilities there may be, particularly around tables we share in common with Anabaptist denominations such as at Christian Churches Together, for “repentance and reconciliation.” The commission hopes to have more to report either by the time of General Synod in June or in the following year.

Interreligious Relations

The 2022 year brought a little more normalcy since COVID began. The work of interreligious relations is done through many people. In conjunction with the Commission on Christian Unity’s Interreligious Sub-Committee, the coordinator for interreligious relations works to connect churches and individuals to their neighbor of another faith. This takes shape in many ways: through partnerships, the rich history of interfaith work, and new initiatives.

Here are some highlights from 2022:

Interreligious Sub-Committee: The Interreligious Sub-Committee (of four people) of the Commission on Christian Unity works in different parts of North America and the world to help share their faith and connect to their neighbors of another faith through chaplaincy, counseling, teaching, preaching, bridge building, and so much more. This team met with the Interfaith Sub-committee of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) and will continue to do so two to three times a

year since our values and mission are quite similar. The Interreligious Sub-Committee will be looking for a few more people to join the team.

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 where there have been a few intercultural trips. A group of CRCNA and RCA college chaplains traveled to the Al Amana Centre in 2022, and a group from New Brunswick Theological Seminary traveled there in early 2023. Also, there has been much collaboration with the refugee ministries coordinator to encourage churches to connect to their neighbors in powerful and tangible ways.

Religions for Peace-USA (RFPUSA): RFPUSA is a new partnership that has been formed to help with awareness of other faiths and also, at times, related justice issues. The partnership has monthly gatherings to get people involved in the work.

National Council of Churches: The RCA has a spot on the NCC's Interreligious Convening Table. This table coordinates and participates in dialogues with other faiths to raise awareness. The Interreligious Convening Table has volunteers involved in three of the dialogues now: the Muslim-Christian, Hindu-Christian, and Jewish-Christian dialogues.

Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign: This campaign works to stop bias against our Muslim neighbors. The RCA has been a longstanding member of the Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign and has a seat on the steering committee. In 2022, two in-person Faith over Fear trainings were conducted in Grand Rapids and Iowa. Two Resetting the Table Workshops were also conducted; these workshops help individuals and groups have better conversations around hard or polarizing topics.

Journey into Friendships: This is a collaborative network with the CRCNA and has been since its inception almost five years ago. This network invites people to walk together with others who work with diaspora 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. Journey into Friendships has monthly network meetings on different topics and a larger consultation in the summer. The focus for 2022 was on sharing stories in the Heartland area.

Learning Communities: Three learning communities around diaspora are taking place in the RCA. One learning community is focused on campus pastors and interfaith work, one is Journey into Friendships, and the third is specifically for Michigan campus pastors who work with international students. These networks help share resources, build community, and create connections.

In Conclusion

In 1996, the General Synod adopted "An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America." This powerful and visionary document continues to provide a poignant message 27 years later in the face of a fragmented world and denomination:

Jesus Christ's prayer for unity within his church (John 17) was to the end that the world might know that the Father had sent him. The reality and power of God's kingdom in Jesus flow through our ecumenical efforts. These efforts proclaim that we have been called out of fragmentation into unity, that we are a reconciling community, and that as Christians our diversity will not prevent us from working toward an authentic experience of oneness in Christ. Christian unity can offer a visible witness to the power and purpose of God who reconciles our broken and divided world.

In this time of political, social, and religious polarization, the Commission on Christian Unity and its ecumenical appointees continue to find ways of reconciliation with those from other Christian traditions. This work is happening globally, nationally, and locally in formal ways through the various agencies mentioned earlier in this report. It is also happening informally in local contexts. For instance, some local churches are working together to run a community food pantry. In another place, members from a Lutheran church and a Reformed church have joined together to form an ecumenical bell choir. In yet another area, members of different denominations witness baptisms in churches other than their own.

There are many other stories to tell, so the CCU invites congregations to share their ecumenical work with the commission so that others may be inspired and encouraged to engage in their own ecumenical endeavors in their local context.

In this time when the local church is facing tremendous challenges, we hope it will be the impetus to explore ecumenical work within the community. The Ecumenical Mandate states, "One of the purposes of ecumenism, therefore, is to incorporate into our own faith and practice the full inheritance of the church catholic. It is entered into with the conviction that, individually and corporately, we need one another in order to grow up into Christ." This is both the gift and the challenge of ecumenism.

Respectfully submitted,
Carlos Corro, moderator