

REFERRALS FROM GENERAL SYNOD 2022

Response to MGS 2022, H 22-1a, pp. 216-217

In response to a recommendation from the Commission on History that would place supervision for the RCA Archives and its staff under an Archives Supervision Subcommittee, the 2022 General Synod voted:

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.

See the relevant portion of the report of the Commission on Church Order on pp. 183-191 of this workbook.

Response to MGS 2022, H 22-2, p. 218

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.

See the relevant portion of the report of the Commission on History on pp. 192-216 of this workbook.

Response to MGS 2022, RE 22-3, p. 238

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).

General Synod Council (GSC) staff consulted with the Commission on Church Order (CCO) for guidance regarding the steps needed to “reinstate and recognize” the Native American Indigenous Ministries (NAIM) Council. The CCO advised staff and the GSC that it believed certain actions should be taken in order to officially reconstitute NAIM:

Given the wording, the commission agreed that the council likely is not “officially constituted” until any necessary actions to “reinstate” and “recognize” the council are taken by GSC. The commission believes that the nature of those actions should probably include:

1. a declaration that the council is reconstituted;
2. a designation and approval of any initial governing documents (bylaws) for the council—which are first the prerogative of GSC, although GSC

- could largely delegate the drafting of more permanent bylaws to the council itself;
3. and a designation of the initial members of the council or its executive board.

A challenge lay in the fact that, without a defined executive committee, it was unclear who should most properly be tasked with drafting bylaws, and yet without bylaws that define the executive committee and how it is selected, there could be no official executive committee. The CCO noted in its initial response that the GSC could choose to do the initial drafting of bylaws itself, but upon further discussion, the GSC felt that option would remove the agency of NAIM constituents to have primary input into their own council's structure. The GSC wanted to ensure that NAIM itself would be the primary drafter of its own bylaws (though final bylaws will need to be approved by the GSC, as is the case for all racial and ethnic council bylaws).

The director of General Synod operations and the staff coordinator for Native American and Indigenous Ministries, along with his executive assistant, consulted further with the moderator of the Commission on Church Order and came up with a potential way forward, which was recommended to the GSC at its March 2023 stated meeting.

The GSC received this recommendation favorably, and at its March 2023 stated meeting it appointed a small group of five NAIM leaders (Jeffrey Botella, Nancy Gillis, Nathan Gullion, George Montanari, and Vincea Nez) to draft bylaws for the council, with the intention that they would begin this work at NAIM's April 2023 retreat.

Once bylaws are drafted, the GSC will meet to approve them as well as take an action to officially declare NAIM reconstituted. Once the bylaws are approved, NAIM can elect its executive committee according to the process laid out in its new bylaws.

Response to MGS 2022, ONB 22-5, p. 108

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.

See the relevant portion of the report of the Commission on Church Order on pp. 183-191 of this workbook.

Response to MGS 2022, ONB 22-7, p. 109

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.

See the relevant portion of the report of the Commission on Christian Action on pp. 155-163 of this workbook.

Response to MGS 2022, ONB 22-9, p. 111-112

...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...

There were four parts to ONB 22-9, one of which requested a specific report to the 2023 General Synod. (The remaining three parts were addressed throughout this past year in the manner directed in the original recommendation.) For the response to the above portion of the synod action, see the relevant portion of the report of the Commission on Theology on pp. 222-241 of this workbook.

REFERRALS FROM GENERAL SYNOD 2021

Response to MGS 2021, RF 21-1, p. 94

To direct the General Synod Council to appoint a team of at least 10 but no more than 15 people tasked with the specific work of developing a restructuring plan for the denomination with a view to optimizing the RCA's sustained spiritual and organizational health, in consultation with the Commission on Church Order and any other bodies it finds necessary. This team should be composed of several executive RCA staff members, and of representatives from around the RCA drawn from regional or local assemblies that have expressed an intention to remain in the Reformed Church in America, and should be representative of the racial, ethnic, gender, age, socio-economic, geographic, and other forms of diversity present in the RCA. This team should consider the four principles stated above as it does its work and should bring any recommendations for restructuring that require General Synod approval, including any proposed changes to the *Book of Church Order*, to General Synod 2024; and further,

To approve the \$0.29 per member assessment to fund the work of this team.

INTERIM REPORT OF THE RCA RESTRUCTURING TEAM

Overview

As a result of the RCA's Vision 2020 Team report, the restructuring team was created by General Synod in October 2021 to propose updated structures for the denomination to "optimize the RCA's sustained spiritual and organizational health" (MGS 2021, RF 21-1, p. 94). The General Synod in 2022 approved a recommendation

for the restructuring team to provide an interim report to General Synod 2023, for “the purpose of lessening the sense of uncertainty and to build upon the vision going forward” (*MGS 2022*, ONB 22-2a, p. 105). The restructuring team will present its final report and recommendations to General Synod 2024 for consideration.

General Synod had charged the General Synod Council (GSC) with appointing a team of between 10 and 15 people, including “several executive RCA staff members, and representatives from around the RCA drawn from regional or local assemblies that have expressed an intention to remain in the Reformed Church in America, and should be representative of the racial, ethnic, gender, age, socio-economic, geographic, and other forms of diversity present in the RCA.” They took into account research and guidance from the Vision 2020 Team as well as feedback from General Synod 2021.

Additional resource people include representatives from the Commission on Church Order and Tim TenClay, pastor of Community Reformed Church in Manhasset, New York. Bob Logan acts as a facilitator for the team. Resource people have no vote. Marijke Strong and Brian Keepers from the Vision 2020 Team are available for consultation with the Restructuring Team as needed.

The restructuring team members include:

- Eddy Alemán, general secretary of the Reformed Church in America
- Dale Assink, regional executive for the Regional Synod of the Heartland
- Greg Brower, classis leader for the Great Lakes City Classis
- Michelle Chahine, General Synod Council member, Regional Synod of the Great Lakes president, former GSC moderator, and elder at Immanuel Community Reformed Church in Lansing, Michigan
- Chad Farrand, director of the Center for Church Multiplication and Ministry for the Reformed Church in America, Regional Synod of Mid-America vice president, classis executive consultant for Classis de las Naciones
- Andrea Godwin-Stremler, trustee at Western Theological Seminary, executive director of New Revelations Collegiate Mission in Krum, Texas
- Sung Kim, lead pastor of Grace Churches in Ann Arbor, Michigan, associate general secretary and chief operating officer of the Reformed Church in America
- Micah McCreary, president of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, General Synod professor of theology
- Sherri Meyer-Veen, co-pastor of Niskayuna Reformed Church in Schenectady, New York, minister for renewal for the Regional Synod of Albany
- Ina Montoya, elder at Jicarilla Apache Reformed Church in Dulce, New Mexico
- Young Na, pastor of Forest Park Church in Woodhaven, New York
- Andres Serrano, pastor of Iglesia La Senda in Corona, California, and coordinator for Hispanic Ministries of the Reformed Church in America
- Gildo Vieira, church multiplication leader for the classis of Ontario, elder at Igreja Vida Nova in Toronto, Ontario

Summary of Progress

The restructuring team has been meeting since March 2022, in a series of Zoom calls and in-person meetings.

Spiritual Discernment

For the first year, the team's work focused on spiritual discernment to faithfully discern how we believe God is calling us to restructure our denomination for the future. As we engaged in a process of group discernment using the work of Ruth Haley Barton in her book *Pursuing God's Will Together*, we realized that in order to restructure, we must first know what outcomes that structure needs to produce.

Throughout this discernment process, we have focused on Scripture, using two key passages to guide us to these outcomes:

The Great Commission - Matthew 28:18-20

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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."

Revelation 7:9-10

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, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God, who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb."

The restructuring team, through our discernment process, has sensed God calling the RCA to re-examine and refresh our individual and denominational commitment and faithfulness to the gospel of Jesus Christ, while maintaining alignment with our Reformed theology, including our creeds and confessions, and honoring our history and traditions while reshaping our structures for effective ministry in the twenty-first century. We are discerning that God is reminding the RCA to return to basic biblical principles of discipleship in preparation for the expanding ways in which God wants to impact the world through us.

The focus statement that we believe God is calling the RCA to produce is "growing disciples who participate in God's reign throughout the world." This focus statement has already been refined through feedback received from around the denomination via the roundtable meetings that will be discussed below. We recognize that this focus statement still needs more definition, yet we know that God is calling us to focus on transformation through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ that leads

to deepening our love of God, others, and the world. This will form the foundation on which our proposed future denominational structure will be built.

Zoom Meetings and In-Person Roundtable Meetings

From October to December 2022, the restructuring team conducted ten Zoom meetings with classis and regional leaders. We are pleased to share that there was a high level of interest and participation from leaders in nearly all RCA classes and regional synods.

From January through April 2023, the restructuring team held a series of 13 in-person gatherings around the U.S. and Canada. In May, one Zoom event will be held for those unable to attend an in-person gathering. These gatherings were open to anyone in the denomination who was interested in attending, especially young people with a heart for the RCA's future.

The purpose of both the Zoom meetings and in-person roundtable gatherings was to open up dialogue with as many in the RCA as possible and to be transparent about the work we have done as a team thus far. The team's goal in these meetings was to introduce the focus statement we have discerned, engage in dialogue, and gather feedback, which our team will consider as we continue to refine the outcomes.

Overall, the discussion at the Zoom meetings felt positive, with a sense of curiosity, a desire to express concerns openly, and a willingness to contribute to the future of the RCA. For a summary of the themes in the feedback received from classis and regional leaders, please read the team's February 2023 update at www.rca.org/update-from-the-rca-restructuring-team-february-2023.

The team looks forward to sharing the summary of the themes in the feedback from the in-person roundtable gatherings once the analysis has been completed. The team greatly appreciates the feedback and engagement we have received as a team from these meetings. It has been a great encouragement to see how these conversations have gone, and to be able to refine our work with input from hundreds of people who are part of the RCA as members, deacons, elders, pastors, commissioned pastors, chaplains, church planters, children's ministry leaders, young people, and more. This is the work of spiritual discernment, of discerning the mind of Christ together. We're in this discernment work together, not just as a restructuring team, but as a covenantal family of the RCA.

The restructuring team is intentionally listening to the feedback and listening to God's voice in the midst. We are diligently striving to put systems in place to engage the denomination, to build momentum, and prepare the RCA for a new envisioned future.

The Framework of a New Structure

At the restructuring team's March 2023 in-person meeting, we spent a lot of time discussing the framework for a new structure. A sub-team had done significant

research and exploration around structure, and that sub-team brought their ideas to this meeting. Those ideas were discussed at length, leading to strong consensus on an outline of a structural framework to begin sharing with the denomination for reflection, prayer, and feedback as the team works toward its final report and recommendations to General Synod 2024.

Out of this meeting, the team also sent a formal request to the Commission on Church Order to begin to explore the possible size and shape of the church order and of judicial bodies within the framework that the team discerned. A representative from the commission has attended each of the restructuring team meetings thus far to offer advice to the team, and now the full commission is being asked to do more extensive work. The commission will report back to the restructuring team at the team's next in-person meeting in fall 2023.

At this General Synod 2023, the restructuring team will present a rough draft of the new structure proposal. Following the presentation in plenary, a copy of this rough draft will be shared with delegates. Delegates will have the opportunity to discuss the draft in small groups the following day. This will provide delegates time to read and consider the information from the presentation and written proposal before providing their feedback. Feedback provided by delegates at General Synod 2023 will be analyzed by the restructuring team and used as the team continues to refine its rough draft.

Next Steps

The restructuring team has agreed upon a timeline for the remainder of its work, which will incorporate multiple rounds of connection with and feedback from the denomination.

- June 2023: The team will share a rough draft of the restructuring proposal at General Synod and seek feedback from General Synod delegates.
- September 2023: The restructuring team will meet in person, incorporating feedback from General Synod as well as the work of the Commission on Church Order. The team will refine and add detail to the framework for a more detailed second draft.
- October to November 2023 (possibly into early January 2024): A second round of roundtable discussions will be held in-person around the denomination to explain the second draft, answer questions, and seek feedback.
- January 2024: The restructuring team will meet in person, and, utilizing input from the fall roundtable meetings, will develop the third and final draft of the team's report and proposals.
- February to April 2024: A third round of in-person roundtable discussions will be held across the RCA in order to share and explain the final proposal and to answer questions, hoping especially to give General Synod 2024 delegates a chance to understand the proposal in detail so that it is widely understood and known before the report comes to General Synod.

- June 2024: The team's final report and recommendations come to General Synod for consideration.

Communication Resources

For more information about the RCA restructuring process, we invite and encourage you to read and review the following articles provided to the denomination, to date. All of the articles below, and a general overview of the restructuring team's work, can be found at www.rca.org/synod/rca-restructuring-team.

- Restructuring Team Update: March 2023 (March 23, 2023)
- Roundtable Discussions Provide Feedback for the Restructuring Team (March 7, 2023)
- Update from the RCA Restructuring Team - February 2023 (February 3, 2023)
- Restructuring Team In-Person Roundtable Meetings (February 3, 2023)
- Fall 2022 Update from the RCA Restructuring Team (October 24, 2022)
- Where We Are: Restructuring Team Updates And Generous Separation (June 10, 2022)
- Highlights from the Restructuring Team's First In-Person Meeting (May 17, 2022)
- Sherri Meyer-Veen Joins RCA Restructuring Team (April 4, 2022)
- General Synod Council Names Restructuring Team for RCA's Future (February 2, 2022)
- New Team To Develop Restructuring Plan for the RCA (October 17, 2021)

The restructuring team is grateful for and encouraged by the signs of God at work in this season of the RCA. We invite you to join us looking for those signs, seeking where God is at work. May all that we think, say, and do reflect Jesus Christ.

Serving together,
The RCA restructuring team