

GENERAL SYNOD
REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

2023 Journal of Actions
Meeting 11
Monday afternoon - June 12, 2023
H.S. Kuyper Fieldhouse

CALL TO ORDER

The president called to order the eleventh meeting of the General Synod at 1:36 p.m. on Monday, June 12, 2023. The Rev. Hiu Fung (Kelvin) Kong, additional corresponding delegate from the Commission on Race and Ethnicity, offered prayer.

MISSIONARY VIDEO

Delegates viewed a brief video highlighting the work Remember Nhu and Bob Abel, RCA missionary. The Rev. Debra Rensink led the Synod in prayer for this mission work.

TABLE DISCUSSION – ‘MISSION PARTNERS AND MISSIONARIES’

The president led the delegates through a guided exercise of reflecting on God’s blessings and offering prayer for mission partners and missionaries who are working to help others to see God at work in their lives.

ELECTION OF PRESIDENT

The president called upon the general secretary to review the procedures for electing the president of General Synod (GS Workbook, pp. 32-34). The general secretary addressed the General Synod. The tellers distributed and collected the ballots for the election of the president.

REPORT OF NEW BRUNSWICK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

The president called upon the Rev. Dr. Micah McCreary, corresponding delegate from and president of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, and the Rev. Abigail Norton-Levering, corresponding delegate from the New Brunswick Theological Seminary Board of Trustees, to present its report (GS Workbook, pp. 255-261). Rev. Dr. McCreary and Rev. Norton-Levering addressed the Synod.

TE 23-1 was presented to the house (GS Workbook, pp. 259-260).

The president called upon the Rev. Steven De Vries, moderator of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance, to provide the advice of the advisory committee, which was to vote in favor TE 23-1 (Report of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance, p. 3).

VOTED: To adopt TE 23-1 (yes 168; no 3).

REPORT OF WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

The president called upon the Rev. Dr. Felix Theonugraha, corresponding delegate from and president of Western Theological Seminary, and Steve Spoelhof, corresponding delegate from and chairperson of the Western Theological Seminary Board of Trustees, to present its report (GS Workbook, pp. 262-267). Rev. Dr. Theonugraha and Mr. Spoelhof addressed the Synod.

REPORT OF THE MINISTERIAL FORMATION CERTIFICATION AGENCY

The president called upon the Rev. David Schutt, *interim* executive director of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency, to present its report (GS Workbook pp. 252-254). Rev. Schutt addressed the Synod.

REPORT OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA CHURCH GROWTH FUND, INC.

The president called upon the Rev. Dr. Michael Bos, corresponding delegate from and president of The Reformed Church in America Church Growth Fund, Inc., to present its report. (GS Workbook, pp. 123-126). Rev. Dr. Bos addressed the Synod.

ELECTION OF PRESIDENT, CONTINUED

As a result of the electing ballot cast for president, the president declared Rev. Judith Nelson president-elect of the General Synod. All past General Synod presidents were invited to the front platform. The president offered prayer and Rev. Nelson addressed the Synod.

MISSIONARY VIDEO

Delegates viewed a brief video highlighting Grace Covenant Ministries and the work of Tommy Miracle, RCA missionary. The Rev. Eddy Alemán led the Synod in prayer for this mission work.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON CHURCH ORDER

The president called upon the Rev. Joshua Scheid, moderator of the Commission on Church Order, to present its report (GS Workbook pp. 183-191). Rev. Scheid addressed the Synod.

CO 23-1 was presented to the house.

The president called upon the Rev. Betsy Westman, vice moderator of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance, to provide the advice of the advisory committee. The advice of the advisory committee was to vote in favor CO 23-1 (Report of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance, p. 1).

VOTED: To adopt CO 23-1 (GS Workbook pp. 188-189)
(yes 168; no 2).

CO 23-2 was presented to the house.

The president called upon the Rev. Betsy Westman, vice moderator of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance, to provide the advice of the advisory committee. The advice of the advisory committee was to vote in favor CO 23-2 (Report of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance, p. 1).

VOTED: To adopt CO 23-2 (GS Workbook p. 190) (yes 168; no 4).

A motion was made and supported from the floor as follows:

Whereas, the General Synod 2017 voted, “to affirm that the Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108 and 109 categorically states that God condemns ‘all unchastity,’ which includes same-sex sexual activity, and that faithful adherence to the RCA’s Standards, therefore, entails the affirmation that marriage is between one man and one woman.

Whereas, more fundamentally, neither council, nor creed is above the infallible Word of God, which sufficiently and clearly judges sexual activity between two human beings of the same sex as sinful, Genesis 1-2 positively revealing the male-female relationship as God’s design for marriage, and the law and instruction of God clearly stating that same-sex sexual activity is immoral, “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination” Lev. 18:22. (See also 1 Cor. 5:1-2; 1 Cor. 6:9-20; 1 Tim. 1:10, for the re-affirmation of the same biblical sexual ethics).

Let it be resolved that all those who live in an open same-sex relationship, and/or live a life of same-sexual activity shall not hold office in the RCA, and/or be official members of any synodical council, or committee, as this is and would be an unfaithful representation and public contempt of Christ, the head of the Church, and His work among the people of His covenant.

The president ruled the motion out of order because the motion constituted new business and the opportunities for presenting new business (as established by the agenda and schedule adopted by the Synod) had passed.

REPORT OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON OVERTURES AND NEW BUSINESS

The president called upon the Rev. Becky Town, moderator of the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business, to present its report (Report of the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business, supplemental report). The Rev. Town addressed the Synod.

In response to Overtures 2 (GS workbook pp. 99-100) and 7 (Regional Synod Overtures supplemental report, p.1) ONB 23-1 was presented to the house (Report of the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business, p.1). It reads as follows:

To instruct the restructuring team to review their process to ensure there are adequate opportunities for input from all parties, and further,

To continue to strive for open, transparent, and communicative conversation.

Reasons:

1. The overtures make clear that there is a portion of the body that does not feel heard and does not feel there are adequate opportunities to provide input into the process.
2. The restructuring team is striving to listen and communicate well, but there may be an opportunity to improve dialogue.

A motion was made and supported from the floor to amend ONB 23-1 as follows (additions are underlined):

To instruct the restructuring team to review their process to ensure there are adequate opportunities for input from all parties, and further,

To continue to strive for open, transparent, and communicative conversation and to extend the timeline for the restructuring process by one year.

A point of order was made from the floor that the amendment should be a separate motion. The motion was subsequently withdrawn by the delegate who moved it and supported it from the floor.

ONB 23-1 in its original form was before the house.

A motion was made and supported from the floor to cease debate.

VOTED: To cease debate (yes 156; no 19).

VOTED: To adopt ONB 23-1 (yes 121; no 52).

A motion was made and supported from the floor as follows:

To extend the timeline for the restructuring process for one year.

A point of order was raised questioning whether the motion was new business. The president declared that the point of order was not well-taken.

A motion was made and supported from the floor to amend the motion as follows (additions are underlined):

To extend the timeline for the restructuring process for one year and to ask the transformation committee to present, where possible, changes that can be recommended in 2024 which can be implemented as an early phase to meet specific resource concerns whilst the denomination considers the transformation of judicatories and assemblies.

VOTED: To reject the motion to amend (yes 30; no 139).

The motion in its original form was before the house.

A motion was made and supported from the floor to cease debate.

VOTED: To cease debate (yes 156; no 15).

VOTED: To reject the motion (yes 21; no 152).

In response to Overtures 3 (GS Workbook p. 100) and 8 (Regional Synod Overtures supplemental report, pp.1-2) ONB 23-2 was presented to the house (Report of the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business, p.1). It reads as follows:

To deny Overtures 3 and 8.

Reasons:

1. The committee feels that relationship-building is something that the restructuring team is taking seriously.
2. Relationship-building isn't something that the restructuring team alone can affect; this needs to be the work of the whole denomination at all levels.

VOTED: To adopt ONB 23-2 (yes 143; no 26).

In response to Overtures 4 (GS Workbook pp. 100-101) and 9 (Regional Synod Overtures supplemental report, p. 2) ONB 23-3 was presented to the house (Report of the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business, pp.1-2). It reads as follows:

To instruct the restructuring team to consult with the Commission on Theology, the Commission on Church Order, and the General Synod professors of theology around the issue of practical theology as the formal expression of our doctrinal convictions.

Reasons:

1. Our structures and polity are not merely a matter of form following function.
2. This is the area of expertise of the Commission on Theology, the Commission on Church Order, and the General Synod professors of theology. It would be good to consult with these entire bodies in addition to the member of the professorate who is a member of the restructuring team and the Commission on Church Order members who are serving as resource people for the team.

VOTED: To adopt ONB 23-3 (yes 133; no 35).

In response to Overtures 5 (GS Workbook pp. 101-102) and 10 (Regional Synod Overtures supplemental report, pp. 2-3) ONB 23-4 was presented to the house (Report of the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business, pp. 2-3). It reads as follows:

To instruct the Commission on Church Order to review the apparent conflict between the two systems of government at work in the RCA, namely the centralized and directed government of the General Synod Council and the widely conversational and bottom-up government of our historic polity, to include:

- Re-examining the Carver model for policy governance, its principles in comparison and contrast to those of our polity, its costs and benefits after two decades of use, its critique from outside the GSC, with attention to its restrictions on interaction with the staff and on communication in general, and its effect on the organizational health of the RCA;
- Consulting the officers and stated clerks of all the classes and regional synods, as well as other General Synod commissions;
- Investigating the governance policies of our partner denominations in full communion, such as the more open governance of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA); and further;

To offer a report and any recommendations to the General Synod of 2025.

Reasons:

1. It has been 20 years since the General Synod Council adopted the Carver model in November of 2003. It is time to review the RCA's experience of its costs and benefits.
2. This would give opportunity to explore what system(s) of governance our full communion partners use.

A motion was made and supported from the floor to amend ONB 23-4 as follows (deletions are stricken):

To instruct the Commission on Church Order to review ~~the apparent conflict between~~ the two systems of government at work in the RCA, namely the centralized and directed government of the General Synod Council and the widely conversational and bottom-up government of our historic polity, to include:

- Re-examining the Carver model for policy governance, its principles in comparison and contrast to those of our polity, its costs and benefits after two decades of use, its critique from outside the GSC, with attention to its restrictions on interaction with the staff and on communication in general, and its effect on the organizational health of the RCA;
- Consulting the officers and stated clerks of all the classes and regional synods, as well as other General Synod commissions;
- Investigating the governance policies of our partner denominations in full communion, ~~such as the more open governance of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA);~~ and further;

To offer a report and any recommendations to the General Synod of 2025.

VOTED: To amend ONB 23-4 (yes 154; no 13).

VOTED: To adopt ONB 23-4 as amended (yes 135; no 33).

In response to Overture 6 (Regional Synod Overtures supplemental report, p. 1) ONB 23-5 was presented to the house (Report of the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business, p. 3). It reads as follows:

To deny Overture 6.

Reasons:

1. The timing of this request seems premature since the restructuring team is still developing its proposals.
2. If this question is not adequately addressed by the restructuring team's proposals, this committee encourages the regional synod to revisit this request.

VOTED: To adopt ONB 23-5 (yes 155; no 14).

RECESS

The president declared the General Synod recessed at 4:58 p.m., following a closing prayer by Israel Camacho, seminarian seminar participant.