

## Report of the President

I will begin my report today by saying thank you. First and foremost I want to give thanks and praise to God for all that God had done by blessing me with the honor and the opportunity of serving as your president this past year.

I want to thank my wife, the Rev. Anna Jackson, for picking up the slack while I was traveling.

I want to thank the consistory, members, and friends of my church, the Second Reformed Church in Hackensack, New Jersey, for their support and patience for the times I was away from them.

I want to thank my brother in Christ, our general secretary, the Rev. Eddy Alemán, for his words of encouragement and for being a friend.

I also want to give thanks for the entire General Synod staff, who in the midst of challenging times and changes have managed to continue to work tirelessly and serve God faithfully on behalf of the Reformed Church in America. I will not call individual names because I know that I will accidentally leave one out, but from the bottom of my heart I want to pause and celebrate you for guiding me through this year and for all that you do in plain sight and behind the scenes to keep things moving.

My reason for starting my report in this manner is because one thing I have learned in my year as the president of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America is the need to celebrate all of the amazing things that each and every one of you have done and are doing for the building up of God's kingdom. This includes all of you who have given of your precious time to be counted among the delegates to General Synod 2023 to do the work God has placed upon your hearts.

For the last three months leading up to General Synod, many of you have joined me in participating in a monthly time of prayer started by our past president the Rev. Phil Assink. On the third Friday of each month you combined your hearts and your prayers with mine to lift up prayers around a theme that God placed on my heart. That theme revolved around the word "recovery."

We began our prayer time with me asking you to wrestle with the question, "How can we rely upon God to recover from the heartbreak of separation?" By the end of our time in prayer, God blessed us with the Holy Spirit that moved our hearts away from separation to the place of celebration. We found ourselves celebrating the joy of unity! We are not now or will never be separated from one another so long as we remain anchored, heart, mind, and soul, to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And for that we gave God praise as we ended that time of prayer celebrating the goodness of God in our lives.

In our second gathering for prayer, I invited you to join me in praying that God will bless this assembly, General Synod 2023, with the wisdom to help us to, “Recover from financial worries and move us to be good stewards of all that God has entrusted us with.” By the end of our time of prayer, God blessed us through the Holy Spirit with the wisdom to see with new eyes, the message Jesus shared with us in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 6, reminding us that we serve a God who knows our every need. So let us focus our energy on doing what God has called us to do, and what we will discover is that we can take comfort in knowing that the Lord will provide. We may have to make a few changes along the way, but this in no way changes the work that God has called us to do today. So let us go forward confident in knowing that the Lord will provide what we need to accomplish what God has called us to do, celebrating God’s blessed assurance in the words of the hymn that says, “God will take care of you, through ev’ry day, o’er all the way; He will take care of you, God will take care of you.”

On our third and final gathering for prayer, I invited you to join me as we “look to God to guide General Synod in helping us to recover from our loss of identity.” By the end of our time of prayer, God blessed us once again to see that we have much to celebrate because we have not and will never lose our identity so long as we remember who we are and whose we are. We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that we may declare the praises of God who called us out of darkness into God’s wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9).

Reformed Church in America, this is who we are! We are a people who have come to do the work God has called us to do together as we celebrate the joy of being united in Christ! We are a people who have come to do the work God has called us to do, trusting that God will take care of our every need. We are a people who have come to do the work God has called us to do with no question in our mind of who we are or whose we are. We are a people whom God has called and blessed with the job of writing this chapter in the life of the Reformed Church in America. And I am overjoyed to have been blessed with the opportunity to witness it happening through my year as president as I visited and met with many of you in my travels.

As I attended the joint racial and ethnic council gathering in Chicago in August of last year, I had the opportunity to speak with many of the individuals who make up our councils. In these conversations various members of each council shared how God is guiding them forward to do ministry in their own context. I listened to stories of how some are starting new outreach ministries both locally and globally. I listened to stories of how some have formed new partnerships for training and engaged in book studies to raise up and train new leaders. I listened to stories of how some churches have rededicated themselves to meeting the needs of their local community. These included the offering of feeding programs, educational services for youth and seniors, and counseling services, only to mention a few.

I was blessed with the opportunity to preach at Hope Church in Holland, Michigan, and later to participate in the planning meeting with their great consistory members on how they would implement the anti-racism policy that was adopted by the 2022

General Synod. This movement to dismantle racism has gained momentum and is being seen in a number of churches and classes including a bi-monthly Dismantling Racism prayer gathering. It's wonderful to see God at work in the life and hearts of our congregations as we move towards living into Revelation 7:9, acknowledging our differences while embracing what we have in common, our love of Jesus Christ.

While in Michigan I was blessed with the opportunity to have lunch with some of the GS Staff. In this time of sharing, making new acquaintances, and renewing long standing friendships, I listened to some concerns of how the changes in the RCA may affect their jobs. But even in this I heard the joy and the excitement of faithful people who love serving God in their various positions. As I said earlier, we have an amazing staff and we are truly blessed to have them.

In my travels I met with a number of classes and regional synods, each expressing a level of concern regarding the proposal that will be coming from the restructuring team. But the one thing I did not hear was defeat. Each of them in their own way has accepted the reality that we are called to serve God no matter what. To that end, some are working to make changes to accommodate the decreased operating funds, while others have formed discussion groups to provide support for pastors and church leaders who may have questions about how the coming changes may impact their congregation. In all of the conversations, each one ended with the sharing of their hopes and desires for the future of their churches and the denomination. I want to thank all of you whom I have met with this past year. You welcomed me into your space and sent me off to serve God with hope and encouragement not only as the president of General Synod, but also in my role as a pastor of a church whose members are also concerned about the future of the RCA.

I was blessed with the opportunity to fulfill one of my lifelong dreams to visit the continent of Africa through my mission trip to South Africa. My journey began in Johannesburg with a visit to the Apartheid Museum for an education on the impact apartheid had on South Africa. My trip then continued to Soweto, Bloemfontein, Botshabelo, Lesotho, and Cape Town. In each of these locations, with the exception of the country of Lesotho, I witnessed firsthand the social, political, and financial impact apartheid had on them.

During my visit to Botshabelo, I had the privilege to see the great work that is being done by Setshabelo Family and Child Services. Through the Rev. Derrick Jones and the Rev. Dr. Denise Kingdom Grier I had heard about the work that Setshabelo was doing in response to a crisis that has devastated many families and children in South Africa but to see it in person was truly an eye-opening and life-changing experience for me.

For those who may not be familiar with them, Setshabelo Family and Child Services provides counseling for traumatized children, temporary safe care for abandoned children, foster care, and in-country adoption. They provide services for the whole family by offering support groups for men, fathers, women, and mothers; marriage enrichment courses; and parenting workshops, just to mention a few.

I had the opportunity to meet many of their clients and see and hear testimonies of the amazing work they are doing. It was heartwarming to see them helping children to reclaim their childhood in a safe and loving environment as opposed to struggling to raise their younger siblings; helping men and women who had fallen away become productive members of society and reintegrated back into their families; helping children get an education that will help them to improve their lives when they become adults; and seeing and listening to the testimonies of couples learning how to be good parents. One story I love to share is when we met a young man who married a woman who had a daughter from a previous relationship. Soon after they got married, the young man sought out Setshabelo to take parenting classes so that he could be a good father to his new stepdaughter and the baby he and his wife just brought into the world together. Listening to stories like this truly touched my heart and for the first time I have ever considered doing ministry overseas. But I will see where God leads me on that journey. This is why I have selected this organization to be one of the two agencies we support this year through our offerings.

In moments like this and for such a time as this I can't help but to pause and give God thanks for blessing us with the heart, the desire, and the ability to make someone's life just a little bit better.

My mission trip to South Africa concluded with a visit to Belhar Uniting Reformed Church of South Africa. This is the church who blessed the RCA with our fourth standard, the Belhar Confession. It was explained to us how this document stands as one historical step towards bringing about racial harmony through the continued work in dismantling racism.

Continuing in this spirit of celebration, I count it an honor to be in this position during the time when we are celebrating five decades of ordained women into the office of elder and deacon, and four decades of ordained women into the office of minister of Word and sacrament. What a wonderful opportunity it is for us to take a moment to recognize the gifts that God has given us through our sisters in Christ who love and serve the Lord faithfully. Having grown up among strong women who worked alongside the men in my church I was encouraged as I saw God at work in what we accomplished together. In the past six years I have learned to appreciate the blessings of having an ordained woman by my side as my co-pastor, particularly when we find ourselves in situations where her guidance, counsel, and word of love are able to reach those whom I can't. Using our unique gifts that God has blessed each of us with to touch lives and draw people to God.

To lift up and acknowledge the work of the amazing women that God has blessed the RCA with, on Saturday evening we will have a celebration dinner at my request and co-sponsored with Women's Transformation and Leadership. I hope you have already registered to join us. Following that, on Sunday evening we will pause for a moment to celebrate God at work through the women of the RCA by taking a look at where we began, where we are now, and where God will lead us into the future. This plenary will be recorded for those who are not present and will be stored in our archives as a part of our history to inspire current and future generations of women

who are considering saying yes to God's call. And did I mention that the plenary will end with a dessert reception?

Beloved people of God, as my time as president draws to a close again I want to say that it has truly been an honor and a privilege to join with you on this brief journey in the life of the Reformed Church in America in this capacity. I am grateful for all of your calls and prayers, and I am encouraged about where we are in the life of our church and excited as I wait in anticipation to see and be a part of where God is leading us into the future.

With that I leave you with the following call to action:

If you are blessed with the opportunity, select a mission trip to go on and when you return share your experience with your RCA family.

Though many people are not fond of change as we await the final report of the restructuring team, don't allow this to distract you from the work that God has called you to do.

Faithfully devote yourself to a time of prayer. Pray for yourself, pray for your family, pray for your church, for the RCA, for our leadership, and for anyone and everything God puts on your heart.

May God continue to bless each and every one of you for all that you have done and all that you continue to do in the name of the Lord. We have a great work to do and you are the people God has called to get it done.

Peace and blessings,  
Rev. Dwayne L. Jackson