

## **Addendum to the Report of the Restructuring Team**

### **Restructuring Proposal - First Draft: Growing Disciples Who Participate in God's Reign Throughout the World**

Per the directive of the General Synod of 2021, the Restructuring Team is working towards a proposal of a new structure for the RCA.

As a team, we believe there is good reason to restructure the denomination at this moment. First of all, we are living in a time of transition. The center of Christianity has shifted from North America to the Global South (South America, Africa, and Asia). In this time of flux, we are seeing both the decline of the mainline church in North America at the same time we see the rise of the church out of the Global South. Second, while we face widespread disagreements in the RCA on issues, we are not restructuring around any issue. We know that if we were to restructure around issues, we will be in a constant state of restructuring. Third, we are a 17th-century denomination with 19th-century leadership models and 21st-century technology, and are woefully unprepared to engage the 22nd century.

We believe we need a simpler, adaptive, and efficient structure that will enable us to contextualize our Reformed faith wherever we find ourselves globally. In keeping with our Reformed polity and tradition, we want to give the freedom to local ministries to be independent yet interdependent at the same time.

We seek the road in between issues, a road that seeks unity around our common Reformed identity with the freedom to contextualize that identity. As we enter the new Reformation, this is the moment in history to rethink how we govern ourselves, how we meet together, and how we might free the church to participate in God's mission.

The Restructuring Team has worked hard to discern the focus of the RCA's work moving forward, spending much of our first year in discernment. We have sensed that the RCA should focus on making disciples. We came up with these definitions of a disciple of Jesus and what a disciple-making community looks like:

A disciple of Jesus is someone who is:

- Being transformed into the likeness of Jesus
- Deepening their lives with God through worship, the sacraments, prayer, and the Scriptures
- Growing with other disciples in community
- Concerned to see people transformed by Jesus
- Actively serving the needs of their communities
- Responding to the promptings of the Holy Spirit
- Inviting others to follow Jesus

A disciple-making community:

- Actively seeks those far from God
- Intentionally reproduces disciples who help grow other disciples of Jesus

- Cultivates wholeness in the lives of others
- Faithfully expresses the gospel in word and deed, and shares in the sacraments while spurring one another in love and good deeds
- Demonstrates radical hospitality
- Pursues peace, justice, and mercy in the world
- Equips and empowers next generation leadership
- Starts other disciple making communities

We have tested this focus with leadership of classes and regions, and through 15 restructuring roundtable discussions with church members and pastors across the denomination. Based on the feedback, that focus on discipleship is currently understood as “growing disciples who participate in God’s reign throughout the world.” The restructuring team will continue to clarify how discipleship is encouraged through our proposals about structure, which will come to General Synod in 2024.

After a season of discernment together, we broke into two sub-teams focused on communication and the structure proposal. The structure sub-team interviewed like-minded denominations to seek out different structuring ideas and to see what is and what is not working globally. We also listened to feedback from the restructuring roundtables conducted in 14 in-person events and one online gathering.

From the feedback, we learned that while there is a great deal of appreciation for our current structure, we could be doing more to foster strong and healthy relationships between members of the RCA. This is particularly important as we work to pursue our mission effectively and with fewer layers of governance.

The new structure seeks to simplify governing models while reducing overhead without compromising our effectiveness in developing relationships as we pursue God’s mission.

Feedback is an important part of this process. The restructuring team desires to fully engage our members and gather their feedback throughout the entire process. We are committed to transparency and communication and will continue to work closely with our RCA community as we move towards a still faithful yet streamlined way of operating.

This document is Draft #1 of a framework that we are offering for feedback. It is only a draft; there are many details and questions yet to address before the team brings its report next year. As part of this process, our team is seeking substantial input from delegates at General Synod this year.

## **Principles and goals for restructuring**

The restructuring team has created guiding principles and goals to assist in the creation of the new structure.

### *Principles*

- Reformed – We will hold on to our Reformed distinctives going forward. This includes our creeds, confessions, and liturgy.
- Missional – We will remain centered on God’s mission, locally and globally.
- Aligned – We seek to be a people on a mission together, all heading in the same direction.
- Diverse – We see God is widening our reach globally, and we want to embrace difference while still holding one another accountable to our shared mission.
- Adaptive – We believe our new structure must be able to adapt to future needs and various cultural contexts globally.
- Efficient – We want to reduce redundancies wherever possible to make the structure as unobtrusive to the mission of the Church as possible.

### *Goals*

- Centering on God’s mission together, locally and globally.
- A local focus so that our whole system supports the local church and ministries.
- A robust structure for pastor/leader care that includes opportunities to grow and develop as leaders as well as being cared for and caring for other leaders.
- A clear system that embraces diversity while holding one another accountable.
- More flexibility in credentialing our pastors and elders without lowering our standards.
- Increased, efficient communication internally and externally.
- A new mental model on assessments and how we conduct business.

### **How we came to this draft framework**

At the restructuring team’s March 2023 in-person meeting, we spent a lot of time discussing the framework for a new structure. The structure sub-team had done significant research and exploration around structure, and that sub-team brought their ideas to this meeting. At that meeting, a remarkable breakthrough occurred as the team, made up of people from across the denomination with different perspectives and experiences, worked through the ideas presented by the structure subteam. By the end of the meeting, the team was in consensus about the framework for the structure: resource centers with clusters, and global leadership.

Reaching this clarity—and unanimous alignment—was experienced by our team as a work of the Holy Spirit. Since March we have begun to work on additional details of the framework. We now present this framework to General Synod for its feedback.

### **Proposed restructure #1: Move to global leadership and resource centers with clusters of churches and ministries**

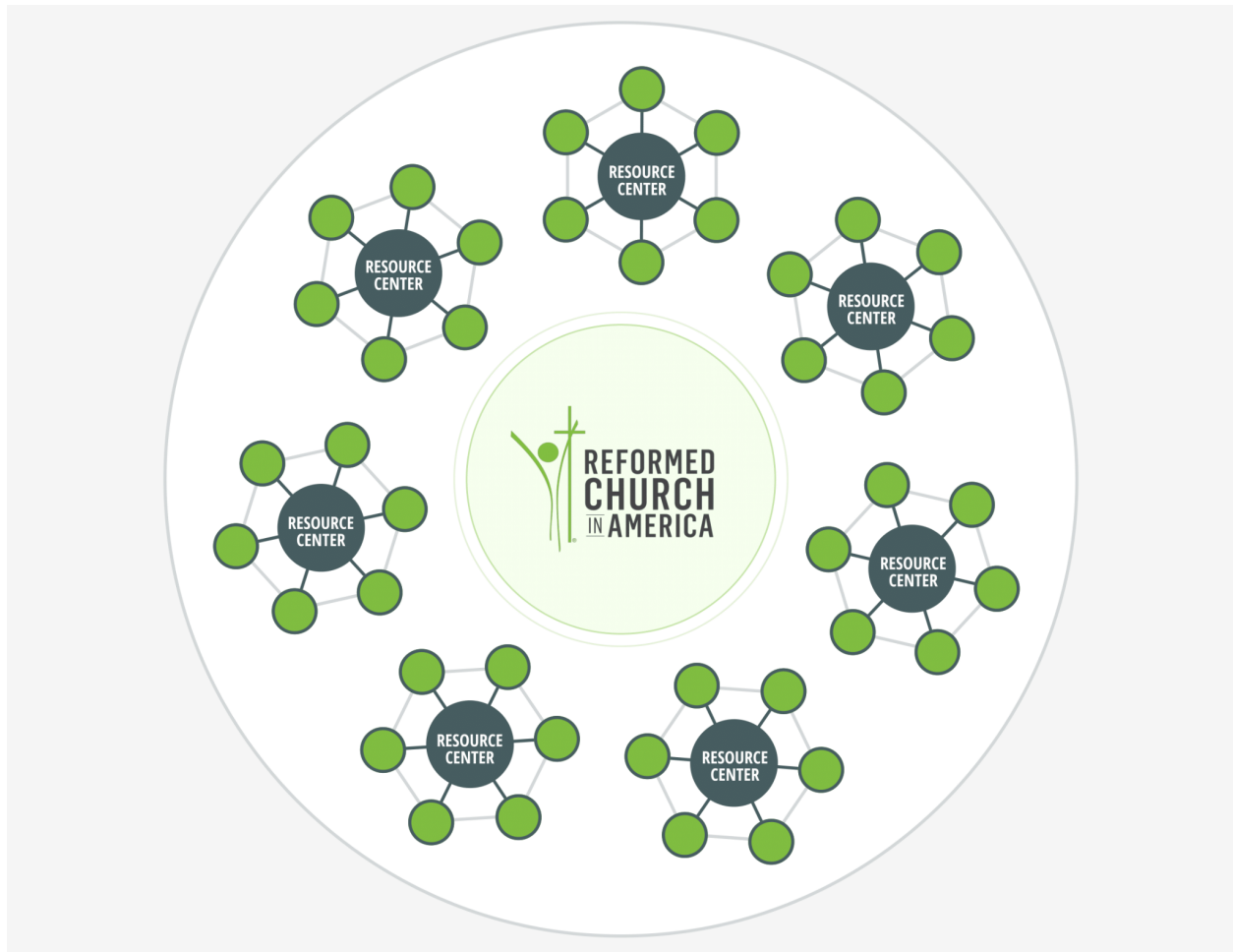
We propose a shift that combines the functions of regional synods and classes into one assembly, the resource center. The resource center will be the primary assembly in this proposed structure, with responsibility for credentialing and ordaining ministers and commissioned pastors, equipping and resourcing churches, and

functioning as a judiciary. Resource centers will also group churches and ministry leaders into clusters for support, though clusters will not be an assembly in their own right. This is not a like-for-like replacement of the current regional synod and classis structure; rather, the functions are combined into a new system that also reduces overhead.

A second assembly is the global leadership council. The global leadership council will be the denomination's executive board, with responsibility for vision casting, overseeing staff through the general secretary, and nominating a judiciary to decide judicial appeals from decisions made at the resource center. Every three to four years the global leadership council would host a global gathering for the denomination to come together and celebrate God's work around the world. The global leadership council would be made up of representatives from every resource center.

This proposed restructuring will allow the resource center to serve as a central hub for the churches and ministries within its clusters. The resource center will provide a variety of resources and support services, including training, financial management, and community outreach programs. The global leadership staff of the RCA will help to facilitate communication and collaboration between the different resource centers, ensuring that all churches and ministries have access to the resources they need to thrive.

Overall, this new system will help to streamline operations and improve efficiency within the RCA. By combining the functions of the regional synods and classes into a single assembly (resource centers), we can reduce overhead costs and focus more resources on supporting the churches and ministries that make up our community. The proposed visual representation serves as a clear and concise representation of this new system, and we believe that it will help to pave the way for a brighter future for the RCA as a whole.



*A visualization of the resource centers (note: smaller dots represent clusters of churches and ministry leaders)*

### *Resource centers*

Resource centers will be strategically located around key areas of RCA churches and ministries. They will be composed of churches, ministries, and ministry leaders (including specialized ministers), which in turn are organized into clusters. These centers would be the heartbeat of the denomination. They would be the location for credentialing and ordinations other than local deacons and elders. The resource center is also a judicatory, and it provides the administration for all its clusters. They would be centers for equipping and resourcing (with the support from the denomination) for all clusters. They would determine the makeup of the clusters and the appropriate staffing and needed financing required to support their staffing themselves. The denomination would provide support staff to connect them with the grants, programs, and support they require (as determined by the local clusters and centers).

The resource center will become the primary assembly of the RCA. This structure helps us achieve our goal to be more focused locally.

Each resource center would determine what staffing it needs. Resource centers will determine the financial support needed to support their staff and mission, which will vary between resource centers. This proposal helps us achieve our goal of lowering costs and keeping more resources local.

The ordination process would be determined by the resource center (with the common standards determined by Global Leadership Council) and ordinations held by the resource center. We believe that this proposal helps us gain more flexibility in our credentialing as stated in our goals.

The resource center will function as a judiciary as needed. A higher judiciary will be at the global leadership council level.

Every resource center will have a global leadership council staff who serves as a liaison between global leadership and the resource center. The liaison will connect them with needed grants, equipping, and resourcing as needed (to be determined in cooperation with the resource centers).

Resource centers will be based in areas around the world where the RCA has congregations and ministries. As the denomination expands, additional resource centers will be added. Having a global presence speaks to our goal for greater diversity.

Resource centers would meet annually to conduct business, hear ministry reports, and look at staffing. All meetings ought to focus on worship, equipping, fellowship, and relationships to spur one another on to love and good deeds.

The restructuring team wants to discuss an end to Robert's Rules of Order for all business meetings and suggest we adopt a consensus model going forward (one that seeks agreement, not majority rule). Consensus helps us move from a win-lose mindset to a mindset of working together. We also believe that a consensus model levels the field for all people, especially when the model focuses on agreement rather than a simple majority. Additionally, we have seen with pastors out of Latin America that Robert's Rules is very difficult to understand and they find themselves just voting with leadership rather than having a clear voice. Consensus is much easier across cultures and meets our value of radical hospitality (<https://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/consensus>).

### *Clusters*

Clusters are groups of churches and ministry leaders within a resource center; each resource center will have a number of clusters.

The goal for clusters is to build one another up for the accomplishment of the mission and to spur one another on to love and good deeds. Clusters may be based on proximity, ministry focus, or whatever criteria the resource center chooses. Clusters may be geographically based or may be gathered based on needs and ministry focus. For example, resource centers may put together clusters with a focus on local mission, leadership development, church renewal and revitalization, and so on.

We propose regular meetings in clusters for relationship development and cooperation, at least once a quarter. As with resource center meetings, these meetings ought to focus on worship, equipping, fellowship, and relationships to spur one another on to love and good deeds.

Clusters will be created and disbanded by the resource center, and the groupings are not permanent. The resource center will determine groupings, which can be changed when desired by clusters or the resource center. This process is more adaptable than transferring churches between classes because clusters do not have their own boards. Each cluster will have a representative on the resource center board.

Congregations will have a say in the cluster and resource center they belong to. If a congregation desired to change resource centers, that would happen in cooperation with the current resource center, along with the agreement from the requested resource center.

#### *Differences between classes and clusters*

“The classis is an assembly and judicatory consisting of all the enrolled ministers of that body, commissioned pastors serving under a commission approved by the classis, and the elder delegates who represent all the local and organizing churches within its bounds” (*Book of Church Order* 1.II.1 [2022 edition, p. 31]).

A cluster is a group of church and ministry leaders, including pastors, commissioned pastors, elders, specialized ministers, and more. (Note: the judicatory is moved to the resource center.)

“The classis is a permanent, continuing body which functions between stated sessions through committees. Voting rights shall be limited to elder delegates, those enrolled ministers who are actively serving as ministers either under the jurisdiction of or with the approval of the classis, and commissioned pastors serving under a commission approved by the classis” (*Book of Church Order* 1.II.1 [2022 edition, p. 31]).

A cluster will be a non-permanent body that focuses on building one another up as congregations, ministers, commissioned pastors, elders, deacons, and specialized ministers that are on mission together. The cluster is simply an extension of the resource center. The cluster is not a separate body from the resource center, it is simply a temporary grouping of churches and ministry leaders who belong to the same resource center. A cluster is not an assembly. Business and voting happen at

the resource center level, which includes elected representative leadership from the clusters within the bounds of the resource center.





# RESOURCE CENTERS

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# CLUSTERS

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## RC

## Clusters

Administration,  
Ordinations

Relationship  
networking,  
fellowship and  
accountability

Determines Clusters  
for Churches,  
Ministries and  
Specialized Ministers

Works together for a  
common mission  
within cluster

Judiciary

1-1 Conflict resolution  
preferred here  
  
2nd mediation prior  
to RC judiciary

Equipping and  
Resourcing  
(connecting with  
denomination)

Build one another up  
for love and good  
deeds

### *Global leadership council*

The current General Synod Council would be renamed the global leadership council. The global leadership council would be made up of leaders from each resource center (at minimum, a representative from each resource center).

The global leadership council shall implement its decisions, policies, and programs through proper channels and agencies. Through all means, it shall work to increase the effectiveness of the mission and witness of the church.

The global leadership council will be composed of an elected board and will include at least one representative of each resource center. The size of the global leadership council should be reasonable and not excessive, and a fair representation of our churches, ministries, and ministers around the world.

The global leadership council would have a nominated judiciary that would be comprised of key leaders with skills essential for the proper and orderly handling of judicial matters. This judiciary would have the final say on disputes that are unable to be settled by resource centers.

The global leadership council will offer a global meeting every three or four years to bring the denomination together in celebration of God's movement around the world, with worship, preaching the Word, equipping, fellowship, and support. This will not be a business meeting like General Synod. These meetings may be hosted in various countries, not only in the United States. The global leadership council will not be responsible for paying the travel costs or registration fees for resource centers. Resource centers may allocate funds in their budgets to offset costs for participants.

The restructuring team anticipates some resource centers will be located outside the U.S. and Canada, based on current interest and on information from RCA classes. Churches in Latin America and elsewhere are drawn to Reformed theology and to our focus on discipleship, and are interested in becoming RCA churches. Some classes have already begun adopting or organizing churches outside the U.S. and Canada. In some countries, this could result in a cluster or a resource center when there are sufficient churches and ministry leaders. In other countries, due to local regulations, it will be important to establish a new Reformed denomination when there are sufficient churches and ministry leaders there. Where this is necessary, that denomination and its churches would have "affiliated membership" and still enjoy full belonging in the RCA.

### *Denominational staff*

Denominational staff, or General Synod Council staff, will be renamed Global Leadership Council staff. The council will use an accountability model for policy governance to hold the general secretary accountable for the work tasked by the council. The staff would be overseen by the general secretary.

With greater focus on the resource centers, the denominational staff would be greatly reduced to be as efficient as possible without losing effectiveness.

Global leadership council ministry staff will be assigned geographically to bridge between the denomination and the resource centers to ensure quality support, grants, resources, and equipping needed in all the resource centers in those geographic regions.

#### *Implications for funding*

The restructuring team, in consultation with the chief financial officer, will propose a new, lower covenant share that aligns with this restructuring. This covenant share will fund the work of the global leadership council and global leadership council staff; resource centers will determine and collect their own funding from participating churches.

A decrease in covenant shares would be slowly adopted over three years as we move from North America only to a global presence. Therefore we propose gradually reducing the covenant share over three years with the understanding that we are spreading the reach of the RCA worldwide.

#### *Name change for consistories*

Consistories will continue to look the same, with pastors, elders, and deacons. We propose congregations could continue with “consistory” language, or could adopt “leadership team” language as an acceptable alternative.

### **Proposed restructure #2: Move to more frequent local gatherings with less frequent global gatherings**

To keep our focus on the local church, we believe we need to create spaces for more local meetings and less frequent global gatherings. The ultimate purpose for every meeting ought to be discipleship: deepening our relationships with one another, supporting one another, holding one another up and accountable, and assisting one another to greater effectiveness in our ministries.

#### *Resource center gatherings*

Each resource center must hold an annual business meeting. These meetings may be held in person, virtually, or a hybrid of both.

The meetings will include the building of relationships in addition to regular business. Each meeting will include worship, prayer, preaching, and equipping. These meetings will use a consensus model rather than Robert’s Rules of Order.

Delegates to the resource center assembly will include elder and deacon representatives and all ministers and commissioned pastors from churches in the resource center, as well as specialized ministers in the resource center.

In addition to the annual business meetings, resource centers may meet at their discretion. Clusters are encouraged to meet quarterly to foster accountability and healthy relationships that spur one another on to love and good deeds.

### *Global leadership gatherings*

The RCA will hold a gathering every three or four years as a global denomination to celebrate God's work around the world. Worship, prayer, preaching, and equipping will be the focus of these gatherings. These gatherings will be held in person, with a virtual option.

These gatherings will receive reports about the work of the church, may focus on networking and relationship building, may share stories and offer ideas, but they will not be decision-making business meetings.

The location for the gathering will be set at the end of each global meeting. Locations will rotate around the world. Travel and accommodations would be up to the attendees, congregation, ministry, or resource center; these costs are not the responsibility of the global leadership council. Resource centers can decide how they might allocate or offset costs.

### **Proposed restructure #3: Create a biblically-based system for accountability and discipline**

We believe that Christ gave us a good pattern to follow when disputes arise as seen in Matthew 18. The following proposal is our recommendation to seek resolution and reconciliation with one another. The resource center will be the primary judicatory.

- In every dispute, we would ultimately desire resolution between individual parties.
- If the two parties can't find a resolution, there should be a meeting with a mediator.
- If there is no resolution between the individuals and/or through mediation, we propose that these disputes go to adjudication at the resource center, with the potential of appeal to a higher judicatory at the global leadership level.

We are working with the Commission on Church Order to spell out the specifics of this proposal to follow later this year.

### **Other items still in consideration**

1. *Book of Church Order* revisions – We realize that the *BCO* will require revision based upon any approved new structure; however, we rely on the work of the Commission on Church Order.
2. Education relations – There is a meeting in August with our colleges, seminaries, and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency to discuss the future of the relationship between the RCA and each body, and the role of the General Synod professoriate.
3. Commissions and councils – With the proposed changes in the denomination, we desire to work together with the General Synod Council, as well as representatives from the commissions and councils, to seek a new way to accomplish the work of current commissions and councils.
4. The title and role of the general secretary – is there a reworking needed for the title and responsibility of the general secretary?