

## Report of the Commission on Christian Worship

The commission met via Zoom on October 19, 2023, and again in person on February 2-4, 2024, in Powell, Ohio, at the facilities of New Hope Church, where we were welcomed in worship.

### Concerning RCA Restructuring

*Editor's note: The following section reflects the restructuring team's proposals as they appeared in the team's second draft, published in the fall of 2023. The restructuring team's final recommendations have changed and no longer recommend a reduction in the number of commissions.*

The commission spent time discussing the current work around restructuring the Reformed Church in America (RCA). While we concur that some restructure may be needed, we are concerned about the dissolution of some of the current commissions. The commission sees itself as the conscience of worship in the RCA. Previously our role was to write liturgies that were requested from the General Synod. Over the years our churches have moved away from utilizing those resources and we have found that our role has been changing. Those changes have certainly meant that the way we do our work is different than it was 20 years ago, but the need for the Commission on Christian Worship continues in the Reformed Church in America.

The commission is still convinced that worship—the assembling of God's covenant people around Word and sacrament—is the central activity by which the church encounters the triune God, who alone has the power to transform. The history of the church shows us that renewal and transformation of the church is nearly always accompanied by (if not actually occasioned by) a renewal of worship. Such renewal includes but is not limited to: a deeper understanding of the gospel, more courageous witness, more generous *diakonia*, more engaged prayer, and work in the world on behalf of the last, lost, littlest, and least.

All of these things, of course, are distilled and demonstrated in good worship—where we do both the sacramental “show” and the kerygmatic “tell,” where the church learns most effectively who it is and what it is called to do.

The commission is therefore committed both to provide resources and to encourage congregations in the RCA that wish to revitalize their common life and mission by deepening their worship life.

The commission is invigorated by work that helps congregations to see more clearly how the enthusiasm of passionate disciples is excited, nurtured, and shaped in worship, how intergenerational discipling relationships are modeled in the assembly at worship, and how local and global mission as well as testimony to God's justice and compassion and reconciliation can be embodied in worship. An increasingly diverse world urgently demands church and ministry be contextualized in new ways.

One of the challenges to resourcing the church has been collecting, categorizing, and disseminating the great resources that many of our churches are using. Our role over the coming years will hopefully focus on overcoming this challenge as the RCA restructures to step into God’s emerging future.

### **Bible Translation Resources**

Our work around translations of the Bible continues to evolve. There has been some excitement around creating a resource that would enable readers to see at a glance how different translations relate to the reader and one another. We have included a table that shows the beginning of our work. We continue to engage pastors and scholars in this discussion as the work moves forward.

<b>Version</b>	<b>Reading Level</b>	<b>Publisher/ Organization Dates</b>	<b>WFW/TFT Paraphrase (See explanations below chart)</b>	<b>Strengths/ Weaknesses</b>
NRSV	8.0	Zondervan/Harper Collins  Major revision to RSV published in 1989; most recent revision complete in 2020 (NRSVue)	WFW/Literal	Translators sought to create a translation that would serve all Christian churches (ecumenism) that was a literal as possible. Created for use in corporate worship and private devotion; popular in seminaries and academic circles; gender-inclusive language from 1989
NIV	7.0	Zondervan  First published in 1978, most current revisions in 2011	TFT/Dynamic	Beginning in 2005 use of gender-neutral language, 2011 revision reversed some gender-inclusive changes; first “new” English translation since Reformation that didn’t use a previous English translation as its base or starting point

NLT	6.3	Tyndale House First published in 1996, most current revision complete in 2015	TFT/Dynamic	Meant to be thoroughly understood by a reader of modern English.
Message	6.0	Nav Press First published in 2002	Paraphrase	Intent is to provide a “fresh perspective” on Scripture. Not intended to replace other translations
First Nations		InterVarsity Press 2021		
Reina-Valera 1960		Most recent edition 2015		
Nueva Version International (NVI)		First published 1999		Gender-inclusive language

**Word for Word (Literal):** Often the closest English form of Hebrew or Greek word; really good for academic study and works well with interlinear Bibles

\*Drawback: readers may misunderstand figures of speech, literary devices, and cultural references.

**Thought for Thought (Dynamic):** Place a higher emphasis on summing up the biblical author’s thoughts while still respecting the text. Perhaps might be more approachable, perfect for light reading or a devotion.

\*Drawback: every tweak in the name of understanding is a step toward the translator’s interpretation

**Paraphrase:** focus on getting the general idea across with clear language; useful for those new to reading or new to their faith journey. May offer a fresh perspective.

\*Drawback: not meant to stand alone

### Litany of Lament

As reported to the General Synod of 2023, in the spring of 2023 the Commission on Christian Worship completed its work on the Liturgy of Lament for the Reformed Church in America’s complicity in the transatlantic slave trade and the dislocation of indigenous peoples. In the spring of 2023, the Commission on Christian Worship sent out the liturgy to various other commissions for their review and input. The reception of the liturgy was complimentary and generous. Two commissions, the Commission on Race and Ethnicity and the Commission on Christian Action, both wondered about the inclusion of a lament for Pacific Islanders. Although the Commission on Christian Worship understood and affirmed the spirit of the request by these commissions, it

was decided by the Commission on Christian Worship not to do so at this time. Our reason is that the General Synod of 2021 specifically requested for the liturgy to address the RCA's complicity in the slave trade and dislocation of indigenous peoples (*MGS 2021*, CA 21-3, p. 204).

We made no further changes to the liturgy at our spring 2024 meeting.

### **Worship with New Hope Church**

The worship service was conducted by the youth of New Hope Church. They did everything: greeted, ushered, led worship, played in the band, assisted in communion, taught the children up front, gave their public testimonies to the congregation, and hosted and served a pancake breakfast for the upcoming mission trips and outreaches. Their pancake brunch had more than 200 people in attendance. Fellowship Halls A, B, and C were filled, along with the youth meeting room and narthex.

Youth Day displays the leadership of New Hope's youth. The reason for Youth Day is that New Hope Church holds the heritage of the RCA that teaches us to go above and beyond in investing in our youth. New Hope journeys the extra mile with each of them all year long through mentorships, small groups, service projects, community service, and numerous activities. New Hope Church provides education and development opportunities founded in biblical truths. New Hope's youth build lasting friendships with one another and the community they serve.

It is through these relationships that foundational paths connect for a successful Christian journey. They are studied up and prayed up on the subject or task placed before them. This is where their confidence comes from, and the ability in their public speaking affirms their personal relationship with Christ. The Scripture breathes through their words spoken and sung because they themselves believe them and have adopted them as their own. As Christ prepares them to become kingdom ambassadors in the world wherever their call takes them, they are equipped in the capacity of their giftings. New Hope acknowledges this by spending time and investing in its youth all year and, for many of them, most of their lives through parents, Sunday school, mentorships, vacation Bible school, volunteers, and community outreach projects beyond church walls. This engagement is never ending.

What was witnessed and experienced in Sunday worship with New Hope Church was evidence of Christ in each youth because of their trusted relationship with Christ and the body of Christ. They have grown up as eyewitnesses to true RCA values through real Christianity and what it means to lead in confidence. Everyone in the service experienced their calm and depth of confidence. It's easy to follow your GPS (global positioning system) because it knows where it is going—just like the New Hope Church youth, who knew where they were going because they have worshiped before in many places and spaces, and Christ has always met them there. The Youth Day service is available on the New Hope Church YouTube channel:

[www.youtube.com/@NewHopePowell](http://www.youtube.com/@NewHopePowell).

**Thank You**

The commission wishes to express gratitude to Kent Frens and Troy Van Beek, who are concluding their terms this year.

Respectfully submitted,  
Troy D. Van Beek, moderator