

Report of the General Synod Council Serving As the Executive Committee of the General Synod

The Son of God gathers, protects, and preserves the church by his Spirit and his Word (Heidelberg Catechism, Answer 54). The church exists to announce, teach, and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. The church speaks, and it acts. For those of us in the Reformed tradition, the church governs its life, and it determines how best to carry out its mission through its assemblies.

God seeks certain characteristics, and the world also watches to see if those characteristics are evident in our life and work together. Our ability to go forth and preach the gospel is supported by the work of our congregations, classes, and synods. Together we are a body of committed believers in covenant with one another. Christ's mission is enhanced when the Word of God and our love for each other are the foundation for order, discipline, and effectiveness. This Reformed understanding of the church and the manner through which we govern our life together are foundational.

Our prayer throughout the year and as we meet as a General Synod body is that our unity and attention to governance will glorify God.

The General Synod Council is established by and responsible to the General Synod. It shall act as the executive committee of the General Synod and it shall administer the affairs of the Reformed Church in America between the sessions of the General Synod. It shall implement decisions, policies, and programs of the General Synod through proper channels and agencies. It shall support, strengthen, and coordinate the work of the several commissions, boards, institutions, and agencies of the Reformed Church in America, thus seeking to increase the effectiveness of the mission and witness of the church (*Book of Church Order [BCO]*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 7, Section 1 [2023 edition, p. 73]).

The General Synod Council serves “as the Executive Committee of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, as the Committee of Reference at meetings of the General Synod, and as the Board of Trustees of the General Synod as may be required by law” (*BCO* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6a [2023 edition, p. 110]).

For a full listing of the responsibilities of the General Synod Council, refer to the Bylaws of the General Synod (*BCO* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6 [2023 edition, pp. 110-111]).

The work of the General Synod Council, as directed by previous General Synods, is reported to the General Synod in two areas:

1. Matters of governance—the work the General Synod Council (GSC) has done with respect to a) the meeting of the General Synod; b) matters of its own organization, including its oversight and stewardship of the financial resources

given to it; c) its support and supervision of denominational staff and the general secretary; d) the work of its committees, teams, and racial and ethnic councils; and e) a general overview of the work of the church as reported by the GSC in its role as the General Synod Executive Committee.

2. The work the GSC has done with regard to the oversight of the mission and ministry assigned to it by the General Synod under the rubric of Transformed & Transforming, the General Synod's 15-year ministry goal, and which is reported by the GSC in its role as the General Synod's program agency.

GENERAL SYNOD MEETING

Referral of Business

The business of General Synod was assigned to the appropriate committees as presented in the General Synod Workbook.

As part of its adoption of the agenda, this General Synod will be asked to adopt a modification of the rules related to consideration of CO 24-4 (see pp. 246-281). CO 24-4 is a significant and complex change to the *Book of Church Order* that the Commission on Church Order has developed at the request of the restructuring team. Due to the complexity of this set of proposed amendments, any additional proposed amendments are very likely to have “ripple effects” that will require changes to multiple other areas of the proposed amendments.

In order to give the Commission on Church Order time to identify and process the various ramifications, the body is asked to set a deadline of 4:30 p.m. local time on Friday, June 14, for submission of any proposed amendments from the floor to CO 24-4.

Delegates will spend time in discussion groups on Friday morning, and consideration of CO 24-4 is anticipated to begin during the evening session on Friday, June 14. The proposed deadline gives delegates time to process following their discussion groups while also giving the Commission on Church Order time to prepare for any proposed amendments, if any, so that the body is able to consider the full ramifications of any further changes.

EC 24-1

To approve the agenda and schedule of the General Synod as presented in the General Synod Workbook, including the deadline for amendments to CO 24-4 as explained in this report.

The Seating of Delegates

The Bylaws of the General Synod require that a classis be current in the payment of its General Synod assessments before its delegates may be seated as members of the General Synod (*BCO* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 1, Section 1a [2023 edition, p. 107]).

The general secretary will report on classes' payments of General Synod assessments and will report whether there are any delegates who cannot be seated because of irregularities.

Amendments to the *Book of Church Order*

The General Synod of 2023 adopted and referred to the classes for approval one amendment to the *Book of Church Order*. The amendment is recorded in the *2023 Minutes of the General Synod* as noted. Forty-five classes were eligible to vote on these amendments (per *BCO*, Rules and Amendments of the Government of the Reformed Church in America and Disciplinary Procedures, Section 2b [2023 edition, p. 77]). As of April 10, 2024, 6 classes had not reported votes to the Office of the General Synod on the question of whether to approve the amendment. The votes of the other 39 classes, as reported in writing by the classes' stated clerks, were as follows:

<i>Book of Church Order</i> Amendment	Disapproved	Approved
1. Updating the Method for Assessment Calculation for Union Churches (<i>MGS 2023</i> , CO 23-1, p. 189)	0	39

The amendment received the approval of the required two-thirds of classes, and so it is presented here for final declarative action.

EC 24-2 To declare Amendment 1 to be approved for incorporation into the 2024 *Book of Church Order*.

The 2023 General Synod also approved in first reading for recommendation to the next stated session of the General Synod the following amendment to the Bylaws of the General Synod:

Corresponding Student Delegates from General Synod Agents—BCO Chapter 3, Part I, Article 9, Section 5 (MGS 2023, CO 23-2, pp. 190-191)

Composition of the Commission on Theology—BCO Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 9a (MGS 2023, TH 23-1, p. 229)

EC 24-3 To declare the amendment to the Bylaws of the General Synod specified in CO 23-2, adopted in first reading by the 2023 General Synod, to be approved for incorporation into the 2024 *Book of Church Order*.

EC 24-4

To declare the amendment to the Bylaws of the General Synod specified in TH 23-1, adopted in first reading by the 2023 General Synod, to be approved for incorporation into the 2024 *Book of Church Order*.

GSC Appointment of Interim General Synod Treasurer Between Sessions of the General Synod

When the GSC's former chief financial officer (CFO) and treasurer, Jillisa Teitsma, left the employ of the GSC at the end of August 2023, Lisa Stover stepped in as interim chief financial officer during the search for a new CFO. At that time, the GSC took action to appoint Lisa as the interim treasurer of the General Synod in order to empower her to fulfill the role she was asked to take on. The GSC did this in its capacity as the executive committee of the General Synod, as the GSC is tasked with "administer[ing] the affairs of the Reformed Church in America between the sessions of the General Synod" (*BCO* Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 7, Section 1 [2023 edition, p. 73]).

The GSC anticipates taking a similar action at a May 8 special Zoom meeting. It will appoint Tony Schmid as the interim treasurer of the General Synod, so that Tony is able to fulfill his new role as chief financial officer during the time between the beginning of his employment and the 2024 stated session of the General Synod in June, when the General Synod can officially appoint him as its treasurer.

According to the bylaws of the GSC, the Church Growth Fund, the Board of Benefits Services, and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency, the appointed treasurer of the General Synod is the treasurer of each of the four respective boards, as well (GSC bylaws: Article VI, Section 6.1; Church Growth Fund Bylaws: Article VI, Section A; Board of Benefits Services bylaws: Article V, Section 5.5; MFCA bylaws: Article IV).

Appointment of the General Synod Treasurer

In accordance with its corporate bylaws, the General Synod must annually appoint a treasurer of the General Synod corporation (Corporate Bylaws of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, Article V). The General Synod has historically appointed the GSC's chief financial officer to serve as the treasurer of the General Synod. Tony Schmid began his service as the GSC's chief financial officer on April 22, 2024, and thus the General Synod is asked to appoint him as its treasurer.

EC 24-5

To appoint Tony Schmid as treasurer of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America.

General Synod Meeting Location

The location for the next annual meeting of the General Synod in 2025 is the Westin La Paloma in Tucson, Arizona. The 2025 meeting of the General Synod is planned to

take place on June 5-10. The General Synod is able to respond to invitations from the assemblies of the church to meet in other locations. Planning for the meeting requires invitations to be submitted at least two years in advance of the proposed meeting.

Land Use Acknowledgement

The 2021 General Synod, in its adoption of CA 21-1, instructed the GSC to “annually state a land acknowledgement for any location in which General Synod meets” (*MGS 2021*, p. 203). The Commission on Christian Action assisted in the preparation of this acknowledgement.

We respectfully acknowledge that the land on which the 2024 General Synod of the Reformed Church in America meets is on the land and territories of Indigenous peoples, who were removed from their ancestral lands, often by governmental entities, and usually by violent means. Today, Arizona is home to 22 federally recognized tribes; Tucson is home to the Tohono O’Odham and the Yaqui. We acknowledge their history in this place and lament any role the Reformed Church in America or her members may have played in their displacement.

OVERVIEW OF THE GSC’S WORK ON MATTERS OF ITS INTERNAL GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

The General Synod Council operates internally according to a not-for-profit governance practice known as “policy governance” developed by Dr. John and Miriam Carver. Policy governance allowed the GSC to enhance its ability to monitor the various “ends” (goals) that have been established by the General Synod. Initially, those goals were related to Our Call, the General Synod’s ten-year goal for mission and ministry that ended in 2013. In October 2014, the GSC adopted new ends and objectives to fulfill the directives of the new ministry goal adopted at General Synod 2013, *Transformed & Transforming*, and has continued to refine those policies since that time. Most recently, at its March 2024 meeting, the GSC adopted significant edits to all of its ends policies in order to clarify and focus them. This work was encouraged by the expert in policy governance from whom the GSC has received training in recent years. Policy governance also supports the GSC’s ability to both support and monitor the work of its general secretary and staff through a series of “executive limitations” policies. The GSC has established and holds itself accountable for its own work through policies concerning its own internal governance and its relationships with the general secretary and staff. All GSC members receive training in policy governance. The Ministerial Formation Certification Agency and the Board of Benefits Services also operate in accordance with the principles of policy governance.

RCA Salary Structure for Fiscal Year 2024 (October 2023–September 2024)

The GSC policy (EL-8) pertaining to staff compensation states, “With respect to employment, compensation, and benefits and recognition of employees, consultants, contract workers, and volunteers, the General Secretary will not cause or allow

jeopardy to fiscal integrity or to public image or decisions that are unrelated to the relevant market.”

The GSC compensation program allows for the evaluation of positions based on the essential requirements and responsibilities of the job as defined in the job description. Job descriptions are created together by the supervisor, employee, and Human Resources. As responsibilities change or when there is an open position, the job description is reviewed, updated as needed, and reevaluated to ensure that it is still classified in the correct range. The program incorporates geographic differentials to recognize variances in distinct regions. This approach has become more important as we have more and more employees working remotely. Positions are benchmarked against comparable external positions through the use of compensation surveys in the nonprofit and church sectors. The GSC reserves the right to transfer an employee to another position or increase or decrease an employee’s job specifications based on business need.

There are 13 salary ranges that span between 11 and 23. Grade 11 represents the most entry-level positions, and Grade 23 represents the highest level, held by the general secretary. The majority of positions fall within the middle ranges (14 to 17).

Staff are evaluated annually by their supervisors. Any increases or adjustments in wages are approved by the general secretary. The general secretary is evaluated by the General Synod Council. Executive staff who are accountable to the Board of Benefits Services (BOBS), the Church Growth Fund (CGF), and Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA) are evaluated by their respective boards.

The following table represents the ranges that were used for fiscal year 2024. The ranges are utilized to establish beginning wages and annual salaries and do not represent the actual compensation of any individual employee. Most employees’ salaries fall in the mid-range of the table. The following table represents Grand Rapids-based staff; this table is adjusted for cost-of-living differences for staff who live and work in other areas.

GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN					
2023-2024					
ANNUALIZED SALARY RATE					
GRADE	LOW	25%	MID	75%	HIGH
11	\$24,960	\$27,620	\$30,280	\$32,940	\$35,600
12	\$32,240	\$35,880	\$39,520	\$43,160	\$46,800
13	\$35,200	\$38,975	\$42,750	\$46,525	\$50,300
14	\$41,800	\$46,950	\$52,100	\$57,250	\$62,400
15	\$47,000	\$52,800	\$58,600	\$64,400	\$70,200
16	\$56,000	\$62,900	\$69,800	\$76,700	\$83,600
17	\$61,000	\$68,510	\$76,020	\$83,530	\$91,040
18	\$66,500	\$74,688	\$82,875	\$91,063	\$99,250
19	\$79,000	\$89,625	\$100,250	\$110,875	\$121,500
20	\$89,500	\$101,550	\$113,600	\$125,650	\$137,700

21	\$101,376	\$118,257	\$135,138	\$152,019	\$168,900
22	\$115,983	\$135,237	\$154,492	\$173,746	\$193,000
23	\$144,662	\$168,697	\$192,731	\$216,766	\$240,800

Commission Review Process

The GSC moderator and General Synod president met with two commission moderators in February 2017 to begin drafting a specific process the GSC will use in fulfilling its *BCO*-assigned responsibilities of both providing support for the work of the General Synod commissions and reviewing them once every five years. According to *BCO* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6g (2023 edition, p. 111), one of the GSC’s responsibilities is

To review all General Synod commissions at least once during each five-year period and to recommend to General Synod a continuation of, a reconstitution of, or a discontinuation of such commissions, with the understanding that the necessity of continuation shall not be assumed.

The GSC adopted a new commission review process in March 2017 and completed several annual cycles of review under the new process. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the process was put on hold while in-person meetings were paused. Coming out of the pandemic, the GSC reviewed and updated its commission review process to account for the fact that a larger percentage of RCA meetings will be held electronically going forward, and there will no longer be a joint in-person meeting of the GSC and commissions every fall. The GSC approved the updated process at its October 2022 stated meeting. The updated process can be found as an appendix to the GSC’s October 2022 meeting minutes, which are posted at www.rca.org/gsc.

The review of the Commission on Race and Ethnicity, originally scheduled for last year, is presented below. Due to a resignation on GSC of one of the two members of GSC assigned to the review team for the Commission on Race and Ethnicity, that review was not able to be completed in time to bring to the 2023 General Synod when originally scheduled, but it has since been completed and approved by the GSC for presentation to this General Synod.

Two commissions were scheduled for review during the 2023-2024 review cycle (Year B, according to the GSC’s review process): the Commission on Christian Action and the Commission on Christian Unity. GSC brings one of those two reviews this year: its review on the Commission on Christian Action. At its March 2024 meeting, GSC voted to postpone the review of the Commission on Christian Unity to the fall 2024 meeting of the GSC (GSC 24-19). The GSC review team was unable to meet with members of the commission by the time of the March meeting, and the GSC felt that the review would be more accurate and complete once the review team is able to speak with the commission.

Review of the Commission on Race and Ethnicity

On February 20, 2023, Yong Bok Kim and Harris Van Oort met with Kelvin Spooner, the moderator of the Commission on Race and Ethnicity (CORE) via Zoom. He shared that CORE continues to be very active as it meets every two months via Zoom and has a full in-person meeting annually. It currently has a full membership.

A great deal of the work of CORE was presented to the 2022 General Synod, when for the first time in the history of the RCA, the General Synod adopted CORE's more complete antiracism policies. The details of those policies are stated in CORE's report to the 2023 General Synod.

The work of CORE this year has focused on moving those policies from paper into the hearts and minds of RCA members and into a place where they are reflected in RCA structures. The commission's effort is to share the antiracism policy more broadly so it can be lived out in RCA structures. Kelvin indicated he was open to any help or suggestions from the GSC that would assist informing the structures in the RCA to implement the policies.

The work of CORE is meeting all the *BCO* responsibilities in a positive way. Also, in view of the RCA's increased global engagements, the work of CORE is increasingly important.

EC 24-6 To approve the continuation of the Commission on Race and Ethnicity.

Review of the Commission on Christian Action

“The lion has roared—
who will not fear?
The Sovereign Lord has spoken—
who can but prophesy?”
-Amos 3:8

The Commission on Christian Action (CCA) continues to be a much-needed voice and a vital resource for greater awareness, understanding, and action for the RCA denomination and all congregations of the RCA. Throughout these past five years (and since its inception), the work of the CCA has called us in godly ways to consider a multitude of needs and concerns within our world and continues to challenge us to act as faithful disciples of Christ.

Over the past five years, some of the good work the CCA has engaged in includes resources for lament for the RCA's lack of response to violent tragedies of injustice; evaluating and becoming more involved in addressing issues of food insecurity; engaging more deeply in antiracism training; addressing the needs of refugees, immigrants, and asylum seekers; caring for the environment; and resourcing churches and individuals around mental health. Looking to the future, the CCA feels the need

to continue to live out its mandate by helping the church understand more deeply and become more fully engaged in addressing the growing concerns of spiritual abuse, especially at the hands of church leadership.

This commission remains a vital component of the life and witness of the RCA. Therefore, we submit the following recommendation:

EC 24-7

To approve the continuation of the Commission on Christian Action (CCA); and further,

To commend the CCA for its work in being a vital voice and an important resource for Christian action to the Reformed Church in America.

Transfer of Congregations Across Regional Synod Lines

According to *BCO* Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 3 (2023 edition, p. 69), General Synod approval is required when a church is transferred between two classes that are in different regional synods. The most efficient way for this transfer request to come to the General Synod is through the GSC. (Depending upon the timing of the request, such transfer requests could also potentially be brought to the General Synod by means of an overture or new business.)

The GSC has been asked to bring four such transfers to the 2024 General Synod. In all four cases, the congregations are located in Texas, and they are requesting transfer to the newly formed International Classis of Texas in the Regional Synod of the Heartland.

The GSC agreed to bring this transfer request, provided that confirmation of agreement was received from all affected parties. As of April 8, 2024, the office of the General Synod had received signatures of affirmation from both classes, both regional synods, and all four congregations, indicating that they are all in agreement with this transfer.

EC 24-8

To transfer Cantico Nuevo Ministerio Internacional in Humble, Texas; Iglesia Nueva Vida in Plano, Texas; Iglesia Oasis Internacional in Carrollton, Texas; and Iglesia Reformada Impacto in Pittsburg, Texas, from the Classis of the Americas in the Regional Synod of the Far West to the International Classis of Texas in the Regional Synod of the Heartland.

Opportunities and Implications of Church Multiplication Outside North America

One role of the GSC is to keep its ears open to the concerns of people in the RCA. One concern expressed in recent years relates to the RCA becoming a “global denomination,” specifically recognizing churches outside the U.S. and Canada as part

of the RCA, with the potential of having classes and regional synods in other parts of the world.

There are currently 11 organized churches outside the U.S. and Canada that are part of RCA classes, in addition to a number of church plants:

- 1 organized congregation in the Dominican Republic, which joined the Classis de las Naciones in February 2023
- 1 organized congregation in Chile, which joined the Classis of the Americas in February 2023
- 9 organized congregations in Venezuela, which joined the Classis of the Americas in November 2023

The RCA has had only one classis outside North America in its history: the Arcot Classis in India (1854-1902). Eventually the churches in that classis joined a denomination headquartered in India.

Though global engagement has been a value of the RCA since the nineteenth century, only in the last decade has “global” church planting or “global” church adoption been a stated value of denominational staff leaders. A 2019 revision to GSC policy ends included this policy: “The RCA will foster a sustainable movement of church multiplication through starting new congregations and equipping church planters both locally and globally.”

As the GSC reviewed its ends policies this past year, what concerned the GSC is that the General Synod has not directly discussed the opportunities and challenges associated with having RCA assemblies outside the United States and Canada. A change of this magnitude should be addressed at the General Synod level.

The GSC sees both the opportunities and challenges of the RCA having member assemblies outside the U.S. and Canada. As doors have opened, often through existing relationships between immigrant leaders now living in the U.S. and church leaders in other countries, many see these opportunities as Spirit-led. At least four RCA classes have strong relationships with churches outside the U.S. and Canada, including additional churches interested in joining the RCA. Whereas the RCA may have wisdom to share in areas such as doctrine and polity, the RCA can learn from these international partners how God is working through God’s people in other countries and cultures. Moreover, having working relationships with leaders and churches in other countries is much easier than in the past thanks to the Internet.

However, there are questions to process if the RCA continues in this direction:

- Does the RCA’s work in international church planting align with the principles of RCA Global Mission?
- How can we avoid paternalism, part of the history of Western missionary efforts?
- How can our engagement in other countries respect and account for the work of our ecumenical partners in those countries?

- How do responsibilities such as pastor training and supervision, required compensation and benefits, and participation in covenant shares manifest themselves for churches in other countries?
- What other practical considerations need to be addressed? For example—
 - If there are middle assemblies entirely in countries outside the U.S. or Canada, there may be legal differences in different countries that may necessitate *BCO* differences.
 - It is currently a provision in our *BCO* that the General Synod pays for delegate travel only from the continental U.S. and Canada. Would this provision need to be changed, and what would be the financial implication?
 - Might there be visa and/or other documentation requirements for delegates coming to a General Synod from outside the U.S. or Canada? Whose responsibility would it be to research and provide/certify the correct documentation along with any attendant costs?
- Do recent splits in other international Protestant denominations (e.g., Anglican Communion, United Methodist Church) have anything to teach us?

The General Synod staff has limited resources (time, money, energy). Where should resources be invested?

These are not insurmountable questions, but they represent real concerns and questions as well as real opportunities that should be discussed honestly and openly so that we have shared expectations and understandings around our partnerships, resources, and equitability. The GSC presents this recommendation not to try to stifle the work of the Holy Spirit but rather to ensure that we approach this matter in a way that promotes equity, unity, and the growth of the kingdom of God for all involved: the RCA and all of its assemblies, all those interested in joining with the RCA, and our existing global and ecumenical partners.

Other denominations are recognizing similar opportunities and challenges. At the request of the Christian Reformed Church in North America's (CRCNA) Council of Delegates, the CRCNA formed a Global Vision Team to consider a suitable framework for missional partnerships between classes and international churches. This team is in the process of drafting their findings and recommendations.

Given all these considerations, the GSC thinks it would be wise for the General Synod to form a task force that can gather information from Reformed theology, history, church order, current classis engagements, and Global Mission experience, then bring recommendations to the General Synod of 2025.

Therefore, at its October 2023 meeting, the GSC voted to bring the following recommendation to the General Synod (GSC 23-76):

EC 24-9
To form a task force to study the opportunities and implications of having Reformed Church in America assemblies beyond

North America. The task force should include members from the Commission on History, the Commission on Church Order, the Commission on Theology, General Synod Council staff from Global Mission and church multiplication, and classes in relationship with churches beyond North America. The task force should bring recommendations to General Synod 2025 for church multiplication outside North America in the RCA.