

**The Acts and Proceedings
of the 218th Regular Session
of the GENERAL SYNOD**

REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

Convened at
Westin La Paloma
Tucson, AZ
June 5-10, 2025

2025 Acts & Proceedings

Vol. CIV

RECENT OFFICERS OF GENERAL SYNOD

(as of 06-30-2025)

A list of presidents, from the first in 1794 to 1955, can be found on pages 308-311 of the 1956 *Minutes of General Synod*. The list of presidents from 1956 to 1978 can be found on page i of the 2002 *Minutes of General Synod*. The list of presidents from 1979 to 2010 can be found on page i of the 2010 *Minutes of General Synod*.

PRESIDENTS

<i>Year of Election</i>	<i>From</i>	<i>Place of Election</i>
2011—The Rev. Lisa Vander Wal	New York	Grand Rapids, MI
2012—The Rev. Thomas Smith.....	Iowa	Palos Heights, IL
2013—The Rev. Carl Boersma	South Dakota.....	Pella, IA
2014—The Rev. Gregory Alderman.....	California	Pella, IA
2015—Elder Evan Vermeer	Iowa	Palos Heights, IL
2016—The Rev. Daniel Gillett.....	Michigan	Palos Heights, IL
2017—Elder Lee DeYoung	Michigan	Holland, MI
2018—Elder James Nakakihara	California	Grand Rapids, MI
2019—The Rev. EJ de Waard.....	Ontario.....	Holland, MI
2021—The Rev. Philip Assink.....	Washington.....	Tucson, AZ
2022—The Rev. Dwayne Jackson.....	New Jersey	Pella, IA
2023—The Rev. Judith Nelson.....	Michigan	Pella, IA
2024—The Rev. Joshua Scheid	New York	Tucson, AZ
2025—The Rev. Sarah Palsma.....	Ohio	Tucson, AZ

STATED CLERKS

The Rev. John A. Ingham	1932-1942
The Rev. James E. Hoffman	1942-1961
The Rev. Marion de Velder	1961-1968

GENERAL SECRETARIES

The Rev. Marion de Velder	1968-1977
The Rev. Arie R. Brouwer	1977-1983
The Rev. Edwin G. Mulder	1983-1994
The Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson	1994-2011
The Rev. Thomas R. De Vries	2011-2017
The Rev. Donald Poest (interim)	2017-2018
The Rev. Eddy Alemán	2018-

PERMANENT COMMISSIONS, BOARDS, AND AGENCIES 2024–2025

An asterisk (*) indicates serving a final term.

GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL

Patrick Beckford.....	2028*	
Brandon Beebe	2028*	
Nancy Boote.....	2027*	
Calvin Brouwer	2026*	
Vivian Campbell.....	2026*	AABC
Linda Cline.....	2025*	
Susan Davis.....	2025*	
Brian Engel, vice moderator	2025*	
Rainey Enjady.....	2028*	NAIM
Clair Hoeksema	2027*	
Randy Karcher.....	2026*	RSA
Bradley Kautz.....	2026*	RSFW
Yong Bok Kim.....	2026*	CPAAM
Linda Kroese	2028*	RSH
Michael Meyer-Veen	2025*	
Judith Nelson, moderator.....	2025*	PP, GS
Eric Nichols	2025*	RSMAt
Jonathan Opgenorth	2027*	RSGL
Sarah Palsma, second vice moderator	2025	VP, GS
Carlos Rivera.....	2027*	GCHM
Neale Roller	2025*	RSMAM
Joshua Scheid.....	2025	P, GS
Jidong Shan	2027*	
William TeWinkle.....	2028*	ad-interim
Timothy TenClay.....	2028*	RSNY
Gregory Town	2028*	
Rick Vriesen.....	2027*	RSC, ad-interim
Maudelin Willock.....	2026*	
Eddy Alemán (general secretary).....		<i>Ex officio</i>
Vacancy	2025*	Ecumenical- ELCA

RACIAL AND ETHNIC COUNCILS

African American Black Council Executive Committee

Sharon Atkins
 Winfred Burns
 Anthony Davis
 Earl James
 Kelvin Spooner, *chairperson*
 Laura Waddell

Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries Executive Committee

Jae Hyun Ahn
Peihuang Chen, *vice president*
Felix Fan
Shirley Lin
Tristan Lin
Jelty Ochotan
Leonardy Poluan, *president*
Das Rendla
Ancela Fransisca Rumokoy, *past president*
Gerri Yoshida, *secretary*

Global Council for Hispanic Ministries Executive Committee

Abraham Camacho
Carlos Lugo
Martin Torrealba
Maria Vera, *president*

Native American Indigenous Ministries Council Executive Committee

Nancy Gillis, *vice president*
Nathan Gullion, *president*
Vincea Nez, *secretary*

COMMISSIONS

Christian Action

James Dekker.....	2026	Ecumenical- Reformed
Leah Ennis-Gasero.....	2027*	
John Haldeman.....	2027	
Rodney Haveman.....	2025	
Edward Lungu.....	2025*	
Doug Ogden.....	2026	Ecumenical- ELCA
Bradley Prince.....	2026*	
Dianna Smith.....	2027*	
Anne Troost, <i>moderator</i>	2026*	
Thomas HungYong Song.....	2026	
Mashona Walston.....	2025	

Christian Discipleship and Education

Ellen Balk.....	2025
Kevin Hart.....	2027
Rebecca Koerselman.....	2026*
Paige Pugh.....	2027
Patricia Simmons.....	2025
LaCosta VanDyk, <i>moderator</i>	2026
Jason White.....	2027*

Christian Unity

Allan Altamirano	2027	
Andrew Bossardet	2027	
Nathan Busker	2027*	
Stacey Duensing Pearce	2025*	
Anthony Elenbaas	2026*	Ecumenical- CRCNA
Robert Hoffman	2026	
Carol (Kitt) Jackson, <i>moderator</i>	2026*	
Jeffery Lampen, <i>secretary</i>	2026*	
Kim Pavlovich	2025	
Eddy Alemán (<i>general secretary</i>)		<i>Ex officio</i>

Christian Worship

Larry Barber	2027
Rosalyn De Koster, <i>moderator</i>	2026
James DeVries	2027
Cory Grimm	2025
Ronald Rienstra	2025
Irving Rivera	2025
Beverly Robinson	2026

Church Order

Brian Andrew	2027*
Amanda Bruehl	2026
Philip De Koster	2026
Christopher Jacobsen, <i>moderator</i>	2027*
Howard Moths	2025*

History

Aric Balk	2026
Corstian Devos	2026*
Katlyn DeVries, <i>moderator</i>	2025
Daniel Meeter	2027*
Douglas Shepler	2027*
David Zomer	2025*

Judicial Business

Brion Brooks	2027*	RSMAM
Brianne Marriott	2025	RSFW
Erin Parker, <i>moderator</i>	2025*	RSA
William Peake	2026	RSH
Edward Thornton	2027*	RSMAt
Carl Visser	2027*	RSC
Susan Vogel-Vanderson, <i>vice moderator</i>	2025	RSGL
Susanah Wade	2026	RSNY

Nominations

Tricia Berry, <i>secretary</i>	2027*	RSH
Lawrence Dove, <i>vice president</i>	2026*	AABC
Nancy Gillis.....	2026	NAIM
Linda Gold.....	2025	RSA
Suzanne Hart.....	2025	RSGL
Dylan Kallioinen	2026	RSMAM
David Na.....	2027	CPAAM
Judith Nelson	2025	PP, GS
Albert Plat.....	2027*	RSC
Christopher Poest	2026	RSMAt
Patricia Sealy, <i>moderator</i>	2027*	RSNY
Jael Serrano-Altamirano.....	2025*	GCHM
Vacancy	2025	RSFW

Race and Ethnicity

Elvis Alvarez	2027	GCHM
Sara Anderson.....	2027	ad-interim
Anthony Davis	2027	AABC
Nathan Gullion.....	2026	NAIM
Earl James, <i>secretary</i>	2025	
Stephen Kim.....	2025*	CPAAM
Young Na, <i>vice moderator</i>	2026*	
Nathan Pyle, <i>moderator</i>	2026*	

Theology

Lyle Bierma.....	2026	Ecumenical– Reformed body
Steven Bouma-Prediger	2026*	
James Brumm, <i>moderator</i>	2025	
William (Ruggles) Church	2025	
Nathan Longfield	2026	
Micah McCreary	2027*	
Sara Nielsen	2027	
Carmelo Santos.....	2026	Ecumenical observer–ELCA
Douglas Scholten	2025	
Sara Tolsma.....	2026	
Matthew van Maastricht.....	2025	
Robert Whittington	2027*	

Women

Philip Bakelaar, <i>secretary</i>	2027*
Kristin Brouwer, <i>moderator</i>	2026
Florence Dekker	2026*
Tiffany Yun Tzu Fan	2027
Patricia Johnson, <i>vice moderator</i>	2027
Debra Rensink	2025*
Mark Waterstone	2025
Vacancy	2025

AGENCIES

Board of Benefits Services

Eddy Alemán (<i>general secretary</i>)		
Beryl Banks	2026	
Lynn Barnes	2025*	
Timothy Cumings, <i>president</i>	2026*	
Lucio Flavio Rodrigues, <i>vice president</i>	2025	
Clair Hoeksema	2027*	GSC designee
Christa Mooi	2027	
Judith Nelson	2025*	PP, GS
Wayne Otten.....	2025	
Seth Weener	2026	

Church Growth Fund

Elba Arias-Lopez, <i>secretary</i>	2025	
Michael Bos.....	2026*	
Joel Bouwens, <i>vice president</i>	2025	
Mark Ellingson.....	2026	
Michael Molling	2026	
Ronald Rukambe, <i>president</i>	2025*	
Diane Smith Faubion	2027	
Eddy Alemán (<i>general secretary</i>).....		<i>Ex officio</i>

Ministerial Formation Certification Agency

Norma Coleman-James, <i>secretary</i>	2025*	
Susan Converse	2026	
Anthony Davis	2025	ad-interim
Martha Draayer.....	2025	ad-interim
Jason Elder.....	2027	
Verlyn Hemmen	2027	
Jonathan Opgenorth	2027*	GSC Representative
Cathleen Wolff, <i>moderator</i>	2025*	
Lyle Zumdahl	2026	
Eddy Alemán (<i>general secretary</i>).....		<i>Ex officio</i>

Pastoral Formation Oversight Board

Nancy Boote.....	2027*	GSC Designee
Israel Camacho	2027*	
Norma Coleman-James	2025*	MFCA
Gregory Dunlap	2026*	NBTS
Victor Folkert, <i>secretary</i>	2025	
Daniel Gillett, <i>moderator</i>	2026*	
David Komline	2027	WTS
Cornelis Kors.....	2027	
Micah McCreary		NBTS president
.....		CPAT
Carol Mutch, <i>vice moderator</i>	2025*	
Chad Pierce.....	2026*	

David Schutt.....
Felix Theonugraha.....
Eddy Alemán (*general secretary*).....

MFCA interim
executive
director
WTS president
Ex officio

ECUMENICAL REPRESENTATION

Christian Churches Together

Laura Osborne (executive committee)

Christian Reformed Church (Reformed Church Collaborative)

Eddy Alemán
Christina Tazelaar

Creation Justice Ministries

Robin Suydam (board member)

Churches for Middle East Peace

Laura Osborne (board member)

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Eddy Alemán

Formula of Agreement

Eddy Alemán
Laura Osborne

Global Christian Forum

Stacey Duensing Pearce (young adult consultant)
Wes Granberg-Michaelson (executive committee)

National Council of Churches

Eddy Alemán (governing board)
Laura Osborne (Interreligious Table and Theology task force)
Matthew van Maastricht (Faith and Order Table)

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Laura Osborne (Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations)

World Communion of Reformed Churches

Eddy Alemán
Chelsea Lampen (*CANAAC secretary*)
Lisa Vander Wal (*executive committee*)

World Council of Churches

Eddy Alemán
Stacey Duensing Pearce (*Central Committee and young adult consultant*)

Institutions

New Brunswick Theological Seminary Board of Trustees

Brian Andrew	2027	
Valerie Arthur	2025*	
Angelita Clifton	2026	
Samuel Cruz	2026*	
Henry Davis III	2025	
Cambria Kaltwasser	2026*	
Therese McCarty	2025*	
Felicia McGinty	2026*	
Steven Miller	2025	
Michael Morris	2027*	
Abigail Norton-Levering, <i>moderator</i>	2025*	
Zachary Pearce	2025	
Albert Plat	2026	
Terry Richardson	2027	
Wilfredo Rodriguez	2025*	
Ming-Chen (Grace) Rohrer	2027*	
Elizabeth Testa	2027*	
Anthony Vis	2026*	
Eddy Alemán (<i>general secretary</i>)		<i>Ex officio</i>

Western Theological Seminary Board of Trustees Elected by the General Synod

Kate Bolt	2025	
Rebecca Renner Anderson	2025	
Lisa Vander Wal	2025*	

Colleges

Central College Trustees Affirmed by the General Synod

Mark Ellingson	2025	
Steve Sikkink	2025	
Judith Vogel	2025	

Hope College Trustees Elected by the General Synod

Eddy Alemán	2026	
Nathan Hart	2025*	
Michael Pitsenberger	2026	
Matthew Wixon	2027*	

Northwestern College Trustees Approved by the General Synod

Eddy Alemán	2026*	
Wayne Van Heuvelen	2025*	
Gerald Van Roekel	2027	

GUIDE TO COMMON RCA ACRONYMS

AABC.....	African American Black Council
AAR.....	Approved Alternate Route
BCO.....	<i>Book of Church Order</i>
BOBS.....	Board of Benefits Services
CCA.....	Commission on Christian Action
CCDE.....	Commission on Christian Discipleship and Education
CCO.....	Commission on Church Order
CCT.....	Christian Churches Together in the USA
CCU.....	Commission on Christian Unity
CCW.....	Commission on Christian Worship
CFW.....	Commission for Women
CGF.....	The RCA Church Growth Fund, Inc.
CJB.....	Commission on Judicial Business
COH.....	Commission on History
CON.....	Commission on Nominations
CORE.....	Commission on Race and Ethnicity
COT.....	Commission on Theology
CPAAM.....	Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries
CPAT.....	Commissioned Pastor Advisory Team
CRCNA.....	Christian Reformed Church in North America
CRE.....	Certificate of Readiness for Examination
GCF.....	Global Christian Forum
GCHM.....	Global Council for Hispanic Ministries
GSC.....	General Synod Council
MFCA.....	Ministerial Formation Certification Agency
MGS.....	<i>Minutes of General Synod</i>
NBTS.....	New Brunswick Theological Seminary
NAIM.....	Native American Indigenous Ministries Council
NCCC.....	National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA
PFOB.....	Pastoral Formation Oversight Board
RBA.....	Reformed Benefits Association
RCSC.....	Reformed Candidates' Supervision and Care
RSA.....	Regional Synod of Albany
RSC.....	Regional Synod of Canada
RSFW.....	Regional Synod of the Far West
RSGL.....	Regional Synod of the Great Lakes
RSH.....	Regional Synod of the Heartland
RSMAm.....	Regional Synod of Mid-America
RSMAt.....	Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics
RSNY.....	Regional Synod of New York
WCC.....	World Council of Churches
WCRC.....	World Communion of Reformed Churches
WTS.....	Western Theological Seminary

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REGIONAL SYNOD OF ALBANY

Dirk Gieser

Classis of Albany

Ministers

Jennifer Legg

Bethany Popkes

Elders

Judith Rappold

Jeff Van Iderstine

Classis of Columbia-Greene

Ministers

Savi Mark

Charles Wiessner

Elder

Gretchen Mallory

Classis of Montgomery

Ministers

Brian Engel

Betsy Westman

Elders

Randy Karcher

Robert Nasypany

Classis of Rochester

Ministers

Rick Admiraal

Christopher Fluit

Elders

Mark Beardsley

Beverly Robinson

Classis of Schenectady

Ministers

Jeremy Bork

Jordan White

Elders

David Walsh

Linda Young

Classis of Schoharie

Ministers

Linda Gold

Bob Hoffman

Elder

Martha Stanton

REGIONAL SYNOD OF CANADA

George Dekker

Classis of Canadian Prairies

Ministers

Al Plat

Doug Smith

Elders

Irene Apon

Brian LeMessurier

Classis of Ontario

Ministers

Fabiano Giesen Nunes

Olga Shaffer

Elders

Marco Lima

Grace Slot

REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE FAR WEST

José Avelar

Classis of the Americas

Ministers

Orlando DuBoys Marrero

Jael Serrano-Altamirano

Elders

Claudia Flores

Josefina Ramos Flores

Classis of California

Ministers

Rick DeBruyne

Ron Spence

Elders

Tony Davis

Kevin Gallmeier

Classis of Cascades*Ministers*

Fiasili Afalava
John Alfred

Elders

Dave Jorgenson
Dan Rientjes

Classis of Central California*Ministers*

Carlos Corro
Drew Yamamoto

Elders

Tony Chapman
Steve Wyllie

Classis of Rocky Mountain*Ministers*

Ann Blakeslee
Brad Kautz

Elders

Donna Kaemingk
Ina Montoya

Classis of the Southwest*Ministers*

Corinne Ellis
Ted Vande Berg

Elders

Dennis McMillan
Patricia Navarro

**REGIONAL SYNOD OF
THE GREAT LAKES**

Jamie DeVries

Classis of Great Lakes City*Ministers*

Jon Alexanian
Greg Brower
Sarah Montgomery

Elders

Carol DeBoer
Suresh Pillay
Angie Walker

Classis of Holland*Ministers*

Andy Bossardet
Sandra Cammenga
Phil Quinn

Elders

Leah Dykema
Brad Prince
Kathy Ten Brink

Classis of Muskegon*Ministers*

Sherwin Brantsen
Steven Hyma

Elder

Geraldine Eadie

Classis of North Grand Rapids*Ministers*

Matt Shults
Anne Troost

Elders

Katie Musick-Reynhout
Eddie Quakenbush

Classis of Northern Michigan*Ministers*

Drew Poppleton
Chip Sauer

Elder

Bruce Deckinga

Classis of Southwest Michigan*Minister*

Edward Schmidt

Elders

Cindy Dame
Jan Luchies

Classis of Zeeland*Ministers*

Miriam Barnes
Jon Opgenorth

Elders

Kevin Mc Cleery
Mark Northuis

**REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE
HEARTLAND**

Mike Metten

Classis of Central Iowa

Ministers

Mike Hardeman
Bep Reeves

Elders

Tricia Berry
Jason Taylor

Classis of Central Plains

Ministers

Randy Blumer
Jon Garbison

Elders

Linda Kroese
Rick McNeese

Classis of East Sioux

Ministers

Ross Davidson
Bryce Vander Stelt

Elders

Anita Cirulis
Rita Tesch

Classis of Minnesota

Ministers

Brett Vander Berg
Brad VanderWaal

Elders

Cal Brouwer
Patti Gilmer-Van Dorp

Classis of Pleasant Prairie

Ministers

Michael Brost
David VanNetten

Elder

Lois Fisher

Classis of West Sioux

Ministers

Missy Dokter
Steve Meester

Elders

Heath DeJong
Mark DeKock

International Classis of Texas

Ministers

Fabio Sosa
Armando Vera

Elder

Josue Hoyos

**REGIONAL SYNOD OF
MID-AMERICA**

Classis of Chicago

Ministers

Jeb Jebamony
Jewel Willis Thomas

Elders

LyNae Schleyer
Georgette Vander Velde

Classis of Illiana

Ministers

Mike Hoppe
James Oord

Elders

Donna Goben
Clair Hoeksema

Classis of Illinois

Ministers

Nora Johnson
Grant Mulder

Elders

CC Haymon
Julie Mann

Classis de las Naciones

Ministers

Dylan Kallioinen
Patricia Simmons

Elders

Yolanda Aviles
Lionel Rogers

Classis of Wisconsin*Ministers*

Robert Rook
Brian Taylor

Elders

Marc Theune
Bob Wierenga

**REGIONAL SYNOD OF
THE MID-ATLANTICS**

Corstian Devos

Classis of Delaware-Raritan*Ministers*

Dawn Alpaugh
David Ruisard

Elders

Carol Arnesen
Robyn Friedlander

Classis of the City*Ministers*

Christopher Poest
Dave Zomer

Classis of Greater Palisades*Ministers*

John Muniz
Arlene Romaine

Elders

Elvis Alvarez
Lisa Bontemps

Classis of New Brunswick*Ministers*

Fransisca Rumokoy
Douglas Shepler

Elders

Mark Mulholland
Mario Vargas

Classis of Passaic Valley*Ministers*

Kirsty DePree
Darryl Redmond

Elder

Kimberly Orr

REGIONAL SYNOD OF NEW YORK

Maudelin Willock

Classis of Brooklyn*Ministers*

De'Lafayette Awkward
Paul Glover

Elders

DonMarie Banfield-Jones
Jillien Torres-Glover

Classis of Mid-Hudson*Ministers*

Gloria McCanna
Alisha Riepma-Hosier

Elders

Jeff DeWitt
Carol Kenyon

Classis of Nassau-Suffolk*Minister*

Das Rendla

Elders

Susan Johns
Donald Spruck

Classis of New York*Ministers*

Sharon Atkins
Alfred Correa

Elders

Debra Thomas
Gerri Yoshida

Classis of Orange*Ministers*

James O'Connell
Stan Seagren

Elders

Robert Craver
Pete Newman

Classis of Queens*Ministers*

Young Aie Na
Albert Potgieter

Elders

Nancy Gessner
Janet Paduano Cardillo

Classis of Rockland-Westchester

Ministers

Donald Hoover
Thomas Johnston

Elders

Karie Brown
Ancris Ramdhanie

GENERAL SYNOD PROFESSORS

Carol Bechtel
Micah McCreary
Chad Pierce

GENERAL SYNOD PRESIDENT

Joshua Scheid

GENERAL SYNOD

VICE PRESIDENT

Sarah Palsma

**CORRESPONDING
DELEGATES**

GENERAL SECRETARY

Eddy Alemán

**COMMITTEE OF REFERENCE
(GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL)**

Patrick Beckford
Brandon Beebe
Nancy Boote
Cal Brouwer
Vivian Campbell
Lin Cline
Susan Davis
Brian Engel
Rainey Enjady
Clair Hoeksema
Randy Karcher
Brad Kautz
Linda Kroese
Mike Meyer-Veen
Judy Nelson
Eric Nichols
Jon Opgenorth
Sarah Palsma
Carlos Rivera

Neale Roller

Joshua Scheid
Jidong Shan
Tim TenClay
Greg Town
Rick Vriesen
Maudelin Willock

**NEW BRUNSWICK THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY**

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President

Micah McCreary

Students

James Brock
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SEMINARY**

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Students

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CERTIFICATION AGENCY**

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President

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CHURCH GROWTH FUND BOARD

Ron Rukambe

BOARD OF BENEFITS SERVICES

TJ Cumings

GENERAL SYNOD COMMISSIONS

Commission on Christian Action

Anne Troost

Commission on Christian Discipleship and Education

LaCosta Van Dyk

Commission on Christian Unity

Andy Bossardet

Commission on Christian Worship

Jamie DeVries

Commission on Church Order

Philip De Koster

Commission on Judicial Business

Susanah Wade

Commission on History

Katlyn DeVries

Commission on Nominations

Tricia Berry

Commission on Race and Ethnicity

Nate Pyle

Commission on Theology

James Brumm

Commission for Women

Deb Rensink

ADDITIONAL COMMISSION DELEGATES

Commission on Christian Discipleship and Education

Elena Davidson

Commission on Race and Ethnicity

Leo Poluan

Commission for Women

Pei-Huang Chen

REGIONAL SYNOD EXECUTIVES

Regional Synod of Albany

Abby Norton-Levering

Regional Synod of the Far West

Phil Assink

Regional Synod of the Great Lakes

Tom Grabill

Regional Synod of the Heartland

Dale Assink

Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics

Stephen Eckert

Regional Synod of New York

Micheal Edwards

REGIONAL SYNOD WOMEN

Regional Synod of Albany

Katy Kroondyk

Jo-Ann Mandell Tipple

Regional Synod of Canada

Teresa Dekker

Thais Lima

Regional Synod of the Far West

Saouila Afaalava

Josefina Ramos Flores

Regional Synod of the Great Lakes

Michelle Chahine

Linda Kolk

Regional Synod of the Heartland

Jan Van Wyk

Regional Synod of Mid-America

LyNae Schleyer

Jewel Willis Thomas

Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics

Debbie Pierce

Claudette Reid

Regional Synod of New York

Sara Appleyard-Pekich

Cora Taitt

REGIONAL SYNOD YOUTH

Regional Synod of Albany

Elliot Weidenaar

Regional Synod of Canada

Samuel Dias Damasceno

Regional Synod of the Far West

Karla Zazueta

Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics

Maryella Post

Regional Synod of New York

Tiara Elcock

ECUMENICAL DELEGATES

Christian Churches Together

Monica Schaap Pierce

Christian Reformed Church in North America

José Rayas

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Jonathan Linman

National Council of Churches

Vashti McKenzie

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Jihyun Oh

Y. Dianna Wright

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCE
PEOPLE**

General Synod Chaplain

Jim De Hoog

Parliamentarian

Russell Paarlberg

Seminarian Seminar Leader

Tim TenClay

**Emerging Leaders Seminar Leader
(Youth Delegates)**

Ruth Langkamp

**SEMINARIAN SEMINAR
PARTICIPANTS**

Elvis Alvarez

Elba Arias

James Brock

Amanda Bruehl

Marilyn Correa

Susan Fennema

AJ Funk

Holly Ingels

Josh Pruis

Lydia Ribich

Shanda Sprick

Jeaneen Thomas

Chun Ling (Angela) Wei

ACTS AND PROCEEDINGS

The General Synod of the Reformed Church in America convened in its two hundred eighteenth regular session at the Westin La Paloma in Tucson, Arizona on Thursday, the fifth of June, A.D. two thousand twenty-five, at 3:00 p.m. Mountain Time.

FORMATION OF THE SYNOD

OPENING OF SYNOD

The General Synod was opened by president Joshua Scheid on Thursday afternoon, June 5, 2025. It began with an opening worship service at 3:06 p.m. in the Pavilion. Leadership for this and subsequent worship services was provided by a worship team consisting of Rubin Charles, Josiah DeNooyer, Shaundra Fairfield, Rob Fraticelli, DeShawn Houston, AnnAlissa Lamers, and Dyane Christie Poluan. Readings were delivered by Rev. Eddy Alemán, Rev. Sara Appleyard-Pekich, Rev. Dr. Carol Bechtel, Rev. James De Hoog, Rev. Brad Kautz, Thais Lima, Ina Montoya, Rev. Dr. Young Na, Rev. Sarah Palsma, Maryella Post, Rev. Dr. Carlos Rivera, Rev. Dr. Ancela Fransisca Rumokoy, Rev. Joshua Scheid, and Rev. Olga Shaffer. The Word was preached by Rev. Paul Glover, and the sacrament of communion was celebrated, with general secretary Rev. Eddy Alemán, Ina Montoya, and Rev. Olga Shaffer serving as co-celebrants.

At the Thursday evening meeting (June 5, 2025), which commenced at 7:01 p.m. Mountain Time, the president introduced the vice president, parliamentarian, general secretary, meeting recorders, and chaplain, and recognized others in attendance as corresponding delegates or seminarian seminar program leaders and participants. The president presented a brief orientation regarding how the General Synod conducts its business, the delegates were informed of the process for voting electronically, and the parliamentarian explained parliamentary procedures to the General Synod. The president explained how reports are presented to the General Synod. The general secretary explained certain procedural matters, including ways to access the General Synod workbook electronically and the method of reviewing the journal of actions.

WORSHIP

All times of worship were led by the worship team described in the preceding section (Opening of Synod). In addition to the opening worship service on Thursday afternoon (June 5, 2025), delegates worshipped in the meeting room for plenary sessions on Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday mornings (June 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10, 2025). On Friday morning (June 6) additional worship participants were Rev. Sharon Atkins, Rev. Vivian Campbell, Rev. Dr. Micheal Edwards, Rev. Cora Taitt, Debra Thomas, Rev. Susanah Wade, and Rev. Maudelin Willock, all on behalf of the African American Black Council. On Saturday morning (June 7) additional worship participants were Rev. Jael Serrano-Altamirano (who preached the Word) and Rev. Maria Luz Vera, both

on behalf of the Global Council for Hispanic Ministries. On Sunday morning (June 8) additional worship participants were Rev. Narayana Rendla (who preached the Word), Elba Arias, Peihuang Chen, Rainey Enjady, Rev. Jebasingh Jebamony, Rev. Savitri Mark, Rev. Dr. Young Na, Leonardy Poluan, Rev. Dr. Ancela Fransisca Rumokoy, Jidong Shan, Angela Wei, Rev. Ferani Wongkar, and Rev. Andrew Yamamoto, all on behalf of the Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries. On Monday morning (June 9) additional worship participants were Rainey Enjady and Ina Montoya, both on behalf of the Native American Indigenous Ministries Council.

During the meeting on Monday evening (June 9, 2025) Rev. Dr. James Brumm, corresponding delegate from the Commission on Theology, and Rev. Dr. Katlyn DeVries, corresponding delegate from the Commission on History, presented the necrology report.

The worship service on Tuesday morning (June 10, 2025) was a closing worship service. It began at 7:50 and concluded at 9:14 a.m., and included the installation of the Rev. Sarah Palsma and elder Brad Prince as General Synod president and vice president, respectively. Rev. LaCosta Van Dyk preached the Word. Readings were delivered by Rev. James De Hoog, Thais Lima, Rev. Dr. Young Na, Rev. Sarah Palsma, Brad Prince, Rev. Joshua Scheid, Rev. Dr. Ancela Fransisca Rumokoy, Rev. Dr. Felix Theonugraha, Rev. Jewel Willis Thomas, Mario Vargas, and Rev. Andrew Yamamoto. Closing prayer was offered by Rev. James De Hoog.

Offerings were received during the worship services on Thursday, June 5, 2025; Sunday, June 8, 2025; and Tuesday, June 10, 2025. The total amount received was distributed in equal shares to two ministries. One is the RCA's Missionary Care Fund. Its purpose is to provide care for RCA missionaries when they are in unpredictable or difficult circumstances. The other is the Children's Mission Books Project. It is a partnership between RCA Global Mission and Generation Spark, and its purpose is to publish books and curriculum resources that share the stories of past and current missionaries to inspire generations and engage them in mission for years to come.

Meetings of the General Synod were opened and closed with prayer by the following persons:

Thursday, June 5

Evening Opening Prayer – Joshua Scheid (General Synod president)
Evening Closing Prayer – Jim De Hoog (General Synod chaplain)

Friday, June 6

Morning Closing Prayer – Jan Van Wyk (Regional Synod of the Heartland)
Afternoon Opening Prayer – Alfred Correa (Classis of New York)
Afternoon Closing Prayer – Cora Taitt (Regional Synod of New York)

Saturday, June 7

Morning Closing Prayer – Susan Fennema (Seminarian Seminar participant)
Afternoon Opening Prayer – Brandon Beebe (General Synod Council)
Afternoon Closing Prayer – Elena Davidson (Commission on Christian Discipleship and Education)

Sunday, June 8

Evening Opening Prayer – Claudia Flores (Classis of the Americas)
 Evening Closing Prayer – Brett Vander Berg (Classis of Minnesota)

Monday, June 9

Morning Closing Prayer – Joshua Pruis (Ministerial Formation Certification Agency)
 Afternoon Opening Prayer – Sarah Montgomery (Classis of Great Lakes City)
 Afternoon Closing Prayer – Elliot Weidenaar (Regional Synod of Albany)
 Evening Opening Prayer – Fiasili Afalava (Classis of Cascades)
 Evening Closing Prayer – Eddy Alemán (General Secretary)

PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR

So that the parliamentarian, invited presenters, and General Synod Council executive staff might respond to questions for clarification and participate as requested by the General Synod president in presentations to the General Synod and in other activities that appear on the agenda, the General Synod:

VOTED: To grant privilege of the floor to the parliamentarian, invited presenters, and General Synod Council executive staff who are asked to speak.

**SEATING OF DELEGATES/
DECLARATION REGARDING QUORUM**

The general secretary informed the synod that there were no irregularities and all delegates could be seated. The possible membership of General Synod was 198, with enrolled membership at 186, therefore, a quorum was declared present.

MINUTES AND JOURNAL/TELLERS

The Acts and Proceedings of the 217th regular session of the General Synod were read by title.

VOTED: To approve the minutes of the 2024 General Synod – “The Acts and Proceedings of the 217th Regular Session of the General Synod – 2024.”

The Rules of Order were read by title, and it was indicated that copies were available online.

Patrick Beckford, Linda Cline, and Susan Davis (Committee of Reference members) and all Seminarian Seminar participants were appointed as tellers.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA AND SCHEDULE

The General Synod approved a schedule based upon the agenda of General Synod prescribed in the Special Rules of Order of the General Synod (*BCO* Chapter 3, Part II, Article 1 [2024 edition, pp. 129-130]). See p. 25 for the General Synod’s adoption of EC 25-1.

In addition to the prescribed agenda, at the beginning of most meetings delegates were shown a brief video regarding the work of an RCA chaplain, missionary, or mission program. The purpose of this video series was to share the various ways in which the daily work of chaplains and missionaries brings hope and healing to the people they serve.

Additionally, the schedule provided for workshops related to equity-based hospitality during the evening meeting on Thursday, June 5; the afternoon meeting on Friday, June 6; the morning meeting on Saturday, June 7; and the morning meeting on Monday, June 9. They were led by Rev. Sara Appleyard-Pekich, Rev. Sharon Atkins, Israel Camacho, Karla Camacho, Leonardy Poluan, Rev. Joshua Scheid, and Rev. Liz Testa. The schedule also provided for a workshop related to church and community assistance for immigrants and refugees on the afternoon of Sunday, June 8. It was led by Daniel Yang (national director of Churches of Welcome) and JJ TenClay (refugee ministries coordinator for the RCA).

During the Sunday evening meeting (June 8, 2025) the following ecumenical delegates addressed the General Synod: Dr. Monica Schaap Pierce (Christian Churches Together), Rev. José Rayas (Christian Reformed Church in North America), Rev. Dr. Jonathan Linman (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), Bishop Vashti McKenzie (National Council of Churches), and Rev. Jihyun Oh (Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.]).

Additionally, during the Monday afternoon meeting (June 9) the General Synod recognized twenty-nine “Missional Impact Partner” churches for fiscal year 2024, which are churches that gave annual gifts of at least \$40,000 or a minimum of 10 percent of their income to carry out GSC initiatives locally and globally.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The following delegates were designated by the president to serve on advisory committees that considered specific business on church order and governance and overtures and new business, as well as certain recommendations by commissions, boards, and agencies of the General Synod.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHURCH ORDER AND GOVERNANCE

Moderator: Fransisca Rumokoy (Classis of New Brunswick)

Vice Moderator: Al Plat (Classis of Canadian Prairies)

Ministers:

Carol Bechtel (General Synod Professor)

Grant Mulder (Classis of Illinois)

Stan Seagren (Classis of Orange)

Jael Serrano-Altamirano (Classis of the Americas)

Elders:

Tricia Berry (Classis of Central Iowa)

Beverly Robinson (Classis of Rochester)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON OVERTURES AND NEW BUSINESS

Moderator: Bob Rook (Classis of Wisconsin)

Vice Moderator: Sandra Cammenga (Classis of Holland)

Ministers:

Das Rendla (Classis of Nassau-Suffolk)

Sarah Montgomery (Classis of Great Lakes City)

Bethany Popkes (Classis of Albany)

Micah McCreary (General Synod professor)

Elders:

Tony Davis (Classis of California)

George Dekker (Regional Synod of Canada)

Janet Paduano Cardillo (Classis of Queens)

DISPOSITION OF COMMUNICATIONS

The Office of the General Synod received no communications that were directed to or intended for the General Synod.

PRESENTATION AND REFERRAL OF NEW BUSINESS

No items of new business were presented to or received by the General Synod.

**REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT
Joshua Scheid**

Sisters and brothers in Christ—members of the 218th General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, staff of the RCA, guests who are with us in Tucson and those who are joining us online—grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ in fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

I greet you this afternoon not foremost as your president, but as a fellow disciple of Jesus Christ, humbled and honored for the profound privilege to serve you and to serve his church.

I have written and unwritten and re-written this address. Themes have come and gone. What is it that the Spirit is saying to us and to our churches? Lord willing, I hope to offer a word of gratitude, a word of hope, and a word of encouragement.

A Word of Gratitude

I give thanks to God for each of you. You've taken a week of your time to be here in Tucson so that we can pursue Christ together in the work of his church. I give thanks for my fellow stated clerks; we have the richest time together in the days before Synod. I treasure that; AnnAlissa, we're so grateful that you coordinate that for us. I give thanks for every agency, board, commission, and council member—for every servant leader who remains committed to discerning God's will and building God's church together. Thank you, RCA, for the trust you've shown me and the prayers you've prayed for me.

My sisters in the Lord and in leadership, Rev. Judy Nelson and Rev. Sarah Palsma, thank you for your partnership, wisdom, and prayerful discernment these past two years. It's truly a joy to serve with you!

Pastor Eddy, I'm grateful for your faithful leadership in the RCA and the spirit in which you lead. To the staff of the RCA, we will thank you more along the way, but I'd be remiss not to say thanks to you now, for all you do and, more importantly, for who you are. It's fun to co-labor in God's kingdom with you!

Thank you to the church I serve. Massapequa Reformed Church, we've been stretched in gentle ways this year, but you've been patient to support me and God has been gracious to sustain and strengthen us.

Last but certainly not least, thank you to Kathryn, my partner in marriage and ministry. I didn't have the hard job traveling for meetings and visits. She bore the brunt of that burden, staying home to care for our three daughters: Miriam, 9 $\frac{3}{4}$; Lydia, 5; and Abigail, 1 $\frac{1}{2}$. They keep life real, and real busy—you may have a chance to meet them when they get here this weekend.

A Word of Hope

I'm so glad that we're back at La Paloma (the "dove") in the days surrounding Pentecost; you might be slightly less glad if you think this weather is hotter than tongues of fire. I'm excited for our worship when we get to Pentecost on

Sunday, but until then I was recently reminded of something written by the great missionary Samuel Zwemer (my slight paraphrase): “we must have our Calvary before we can have our Pentecost.” Let me help you understand what I mean...

What seemed like a pivotal year serving as president for such a time as this, now seems peculiar. Yes, we’ve approved the restructuring of our denomination, but we’ve also declared (wisely) that it won’t take effect quite yet. So, do we celebrate? Do we lament? A little of both? It’s a strange place to be. In fact, you could say, as Edie Lenz (President of Mid-America Synod) reminded me at the April meeting of Council of Synod Executives, the General Synod officers, and staff on the Strategic Leadership Team, “we are still in the goo.” (To be hospitable for those of you who don’t remember or aren’t familiar with the illustration, when I accepted this office last year, I described the process of how inside a chrysalis, a caterpillar turns into goo before it emerges as a butterfly.)

Perhaps a better metaphor for us is to think of it more like Holy Saturday, when our Savior laid silent in the tomb, but something strange was happening. To quote the late, great African American preacher Rev. Dr. S. M. Lockridge, “Sunday’s comin’.”

But Saturday... the disciples—the eleven and the women—mourning, confused, uncertain, probably afraid, but committed to prayer and preparation. I’m generously imagining that, and I could be wrong, but Luke says that early the next day they were on their way with the spices *they had prepared* (Luke 24:1).

I’m not sure if you feel it like I do: the Spirit’s silent stirring of the goo. Like Holy Saturday, it’s a time for us not to pause, but to prepare and to pray. A time to plant. A time to dream. A time to build.

Four years ago in this very room, the General Synod overwhelmingly adopted the Vision 2020 Team’s recommendation for *grace-filled separation*. Some of you, like me, have said goodbye to partner churches you served and ministry mentors whom you served with. Others have had to lead your congregations or your classes through emotionally exhausting debates about leaving or staying and restructuring, and I’ll name it: it hasn’t always been “grace filled.” We must grieve all that, and probably, we ought to confess anything that’s left broken and unreconciled, but Sunday’s comin’.

This morning, we overwhelmingly adopted the recommendation for *grace-filled transition*—thanks to past president Phil Assink for the phrase—to help us implement middle assemblies and, in the face of real grief and real complexity, to do so with real grace, working together every step of the way. In humility and in hope. I mean, isn’t it exciting that we have classes working out ways to welcome churches and pastors from the CRC here in North America and churches beyond—in Venezuela, Chile, and around the globe; churches who are asking to be part of God’s movement in the RCA.

Of course, as the Rev. Dr. Paul Glover reminded us, restructuring itself will not *save* the RCA—there’s only One who does that—but it will *serve* and strengthen the RCA if we steward this opportunity to empower the local church for discipleship and mission. We’re not changing for efficiency’s sake, we’re transforming for the sake of mission: “minister[ing] to the total life of all people by preaching, teaching, and proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ,” our

faithful Savior to whom we “belong, body and soul, in life and in death.” These words are our anchor in uncertainty. They are a rope in the storm. Over the past several years there’s been no shortage of storms, both in the church and in the world. Like Samuel Zwemer said, Calvary comes before Pentecost.

How about a word from the Lord? I invite you to hear these words from Hebrews 12: “Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight that slows us down, get rid of the sin that so easily trips us up, and run with endurance the race set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, disregarded its shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such hostility from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and give up” (Hebrews 12:1-3). Don’t lose heart. For Sunday has come, and our hope is *alive*.

Because Christ is risen, we dare to dream—not naively or nostalgically, but eschatologically. We are being re-formed as the people of God from every nation, tribe, people, and language (Revelation 7:9)—the beautiful body of Christ, being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:20-22). A Spirit-formed, Scripture-rooted, multiethnic, multigenerational, cross-cultural, *cross-centered* community of grace and truth in love.

I won’t sugarcoat anything. We don’t live that out perfectly, but we’re learning and leaning in. We may not have all the answers, but we are asking better questions and having better conversations.

Some Words of Encouragement

So, where is the Holy Spirit moving and how can we faithfully follow? I’m not going to offer any presidential recommendations, but I do want to offer five encouragements as we restructure in the year ahead:

1. The cross of Christ calls from I/me to we/us.

To be sure, being a multiethnic, multicultural, multigenerational body filled with the diversity of spiritual gifts is a good and wonderful thing, but I appreciate an observation shared by pastor and author Rich Villodas: “When we make diversity the end goal, we are no different from New York City subway cars.” What does that mean? A train car is a crowd of anonymous people in close proximity who really couldn’t care less where you are going or whether you get to your destination. You care about where *you’re* going and if *you’re* going to get there. God calls us to be more than just a subway car. We’re Christ’s church. Where the gospel is at work, the church becomes, in Rich’s words, “a diverse community that embraces the unique gifts and acknowledges the distinctive sins of their ethnic-racial-social makeup while experiencing loving communion with others under the lordship of Jesus.” That’s why our EBH [equity-based hospitality] workshops are important and helpful. We are learning a better way to do our business.

2. Actually dare to dream.

In restructuring, might we be missing out on what God is doing and where the Holy Spirit is leading if, in some cases, we merely make a classis into a middle

assembly, or if we're merely trying to maintain the status quo?

3. Be patient.

It doesn't have to be permanent; it's not going to be perfect. Inevitably, we'll identify those things that aren't working well and we'll find a way to make them work better. If, after good faith effort, a church finds it is not a good fit for its new middle assembly, it should be okay for that church to move within the RCA. I don't think that there should be a transfer portal open so a church can change middle assemblies every year, but can we commit together to ensure we're helping each local church be in the best position to flourish in the ministry God has given it?

4. Be intentional about the spiritual work of restructuring.

To help us do this, Sarah and I intend to ask the Commission on Christian Worship to craft a liturgy for the closing of a classis or regional synod, but whether or not the commission is willing and able to offer such a resource, please make time and hold space for both grieving and gratitude before disbanding a classis or synod.

Finally, 5. This is more of a celebration, but I want to say again that the Reformed Church in America has the very best Global Mission team, missionaries, and mission partners, all working together to share God's love with the world.

I was blessed beyond measure by gracious and generous hospitality in the Middle East. It was amazing to witness the legacy of Samuel Zwemer's faith and obedience over 100 years ago in the ongoing work of the American Mission Hospital, Al Raja School, and the National Evangelical Church in Bahrain; and the Protestant Church in Oman and the Al Amana Centre. I actually come with a message to share from leaders of the PCO: "To Rev. Derrick Jones and the RCA, thank you. It can't be understated, it can't be overstated, but it needs to be said: thank you."

It was also a great joy traveling earlier this year to Hanover, Germany, to celebrate the installation of Revs. Jeff and Chelsea Lampen to their new ministry at RELISH and their work with the World Communion of Reformed Churches. It was a bonus to connect with mission partners in the Netherlands as well. Each of these missionaries are doing, in some cases, very different but very good work for the gospel in their contexts. So I want to invite and encourage your church, if you don't already, to consider supporting one of our many missionaries with a full or partial PIM share. We can learn so much from the global church as we follow Christ together.

From Long Island to Whidbey Island, from Athabasca to Argentina to Africa, Asia, and the Arabian Gulf, God is at work in the world and Christ continues to build his church by his Spirit and through his people. And God will always do abundantly more than we ask or imagine.

May we be strong in faith, sure in hope, steadfast in love.

Thank you, and God bless you.

**REPORT OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY
Eddy Alemán**

Dear delegates of General Synod 2025, the Lord be with you!

It is an honor for me to address you this morning to share my report with you. It is always a joy to see you, to connect with you in person, and to worship the Lord with all of you. Pastors, I pray with many of you on Friday afternoons; we have been praying together virtually for more than five years and it is a real blessing to see many of you in person at this meeting. Friday afternoons are a highlight of my week! Elders, you are a great blessing to the congregations you serve and to the whole denomination. Thank you for your faithful service to God in the Reformed Church in America.

As you may have noticed in my previous reports to you, I always take this opportunity to give an update on the work of the RCA staff, to share vision for the future of our denomination, and to offer a pastoral call to the church. This year I will do the same.

Since the beginning of my tenure as general secretary of our beloved denomination seven years ago, I have shared with the GSC staff and other leaders in the denomination that we need to see this decade of the 20s as a decade of deep change in the Reformed Church in America. The first half was going to be hard and very difficult—we have seen this already—where we experienced huge loss in many areas, but the second half of this decade is going to be great where we will see and experience a wonderful movement of the Holy Spirit leading us into the future God has prepared for us. We are in 2025! This is half way of this second decade of the 21st century. I strongly believe that we as a denomination have turned the corner. In the first half, we needed to buckle up tightly because this was a season of big changes as many churches and leaders left the RCA. We are still in the midst of some of those changes, including restructuring. Now we are in the second half of the decade, the time to experience new growth, renewal, and ministry refocus. I am already seeing many signs of this new season. The Reformed Church in America is smaller, but it's also healthier. Leaders are showing up with the humility of Jesus more often, with more curiosity and respect. We have a shared commitment to following Christ together, and clarity on how we live that out where we have differences of conviction. We are now in a time of rebuilding and gospel imagination, as part of the restructuring.

Knowing who we are, and how we have decided to live together in the Reformed Church in America, has been good for us, and it's a powerful testimony to what God can do. It's so much easier to divide over differences, but with God's help we are able to journey together. This unity is a precious thing. This complexity, this witness has drawn others into the Reformed Church in America. In fact, this week we have six ministers with us who recently transferred to the RCA from the Christian Reformed Church in North America. They have joined us as observers, because they want to get to know their new church home and show their support. Welcome, friends.

The first half of this decade was very difficult. The work of discernment and gracious separation was hard, and that work is now beginning to bear fruit. We have turned the corner! Praise God!

A year ago, General Synod approved the restructuring team's recommendation to merge the eight regional synods and the classes of the RCA into what is called "middle assemblies". As Reformed people, we believe that the Holy Spirit speaks through gathered assemblies, and more than two-thirds of classes of the RCA gave their affirmative vote for this change to take place. Later this morning, you will have the opportunity to give the final declarative vote for this change to become a reality in our denomination and to make all the necessary changes to the *Book of Church Order*. This is a big change for our denomination, but a necessary change for us to refocus on what's really important, which is making disciples who make disciples. Disciple-making must lead the way of everything we do as a denomination!

At this point I want to acknowledge the Rev. Chad Farrand, executive for the Regional Synod of Mid-America and executive director of the Classis de las Naciones, who was a close friend of mine, a dear colleague, and very instrumental in the crafting of the restructuring team's report. You can see Chad's fingerprints all over this report! He went to be with the Lord earlier this year. This has been a huge loss for me, for the Regional Synod of Mid-America, for the Classis de las Naciones, and for the Reformed Church in America. I invite you to join me in offering a moment of silence to honor his life.

Now let me turn my attention to offering you a report of the progress we have been able to make in the different areas of the ministry of the RCA. We are seeing great signs of hope in our midst! There is so much to be thankful for and to celebrate in the ministry of the Reformed Church in America. There is so much evidence that God continues to lead our denomination in mission. Here are some highlights:

The Center for Church Multiplication and Ministry

The scope of the Center for Church Multiplication and Ministry is broad, and all the efforts are for one thing: to strengthen and grow Christ's church.

Each department of the center has a unique approach to this work, all aimed at supporting congregations in following Christ in mission, both now and into the future. Our ministry team works alongside classes and congregations as they serve the needs of the church.

In the area of discipleship and church innovation, our staff has heard from congregational leaders about the need for leadership development—especially for consistories, for younger leaders, and for other volunteers. This year, 15 congregations were awarded grants to strengthen leadership development.

Another 21 congregations are participating in Generation Spark. This program uses mentoring to help all generations lead within their churches. Mentoring creates a sense of belonging, and it strengthens the faith of both mentor and mentee.

In the area of Revelation 7:9, equity-based hospitality is so important. God has brought us the vision to be a Revelation 7:9 church, where all tribes and tongues and peoples and nations are gathered around God's throne in worship. We already are a Revelation 7:9 church, and we continue to grow more into this reality. This is important work of following the Spirit! Equity-based hospitality

is about fostering healthy, equitable environments where everyone can find a place of welcome, purpose, and belonging. Teaching equity-based hospitality creates belonging and unity as we pursue this calling from God.

At the racial and ethnic council meetings in Orlando in January, the nine values of equity-based hospitality were presented, with very positive feedback. This led to our General Synod president, Rev. Joshua Scheid, who was in attendance, requesting equity-based hospitality workshops to be an integral part of this General Synod. We had the first session last night.

Sankofa journeys are another important part of our work to help churches embrace Revelation 7:9. The purpose of these Sankofa journeys is to:

- Explore historical narratives
- Foster racial reconciliation
- Build authentic multicultural, multiethnic community
- Inspire heart transformation leading to meaningful action

The center is working with each racial and ethnic council to plan a Sankofa journey. Two Sankofa journeys are planned for 2025. In August, the Native American Indigenous Ministries Council and Women's Transformation and Leadership are planning a Sankofa to visit the Mescalero Apache Reservation in New Mexico. In September, the African American Black Council is planning a Freedom Ride Sankofa to visit the King Center in Atlanta and historic and civil rights sites in Montgomery, Alabama. Additional Sankofas will be scheduled for 2026, in partnership with the other racial and ethnic councils.

In the area of Women's Transformation and Leadership, more than 400 diverse women from 40 congregations across the RCA have experienced renewal or empowerment this year.

A new volume of the Women of the Bible Study Series has been completed and is now available in English and Spanish, in print and online. This series continues to reach many people, inviting them into God's Word.

Last August, 15 women from 7 RCA churches took part in the Ella es Llamada Peru mission experience. They visited missionaries Sandy and Albino Rodriguez at Casa del Maestro in Cusco, Peru. They led workshops and worship with young women, and shared testimonies of God's faithfulness on their journeys. Several of the team have moved into deeper leadership in their own churches as elders, deacons, and worship directors, and some are planning to return to Cusco with congregational teams in the near future.

In the area of church multiplication, we are also making great progress with many church plants in the pipeline and a number of churches being organized. You will hear a detailed report this afternoon from the Church Multiplication team as we celebrate together the organization of new churches.

Global Mission

We have been engaged in global mission work for more than 350 years as a denomination. Our missionaries and mission partners around the world are awesome leaders making a huge impact in the places they serve proclaiming

the Good News of the Gospel with passion and boldness in many different ways.

In January I was able to attend Mission 2025. It was so great to be able to hear from our missionaries and partners about the amazing work that is happening around the world. It was also inspiring to be with about 200 people from RCA congregations that are invested in becoming more missional. Those are the kinds of meetings that inspire me! It was so great in fact that the Global Mission team will be hosting a similar event in September called Local Mission 2025, which will focus on the inspiring stories of impact that are being made by local churches in their own communities. You will hear more about Local Mission 2025 in the Global Mission report tomorrow.

Of course, we cannot do everything we do without the support staff who work behind the scenes in operations, archives, finance, benefits, and more. Our staff is passionate about the work of the church! Staff, thank you for your commitment and your good work to support the ministry of the Reformed Church in America.

Besides all of the work our GSC staff is doing to serve the churches and pastors of the RCA, I have had the opportunity to visit many of our churches to preach and to have meaningful conversations about the future of our beloved denomination. God is certainly doing a beautiful thing in our midst. Praise be to God!!

A Vision for the Future

Last year I shared that the church of Acts 2.0 is a disciple-making church. In today's fast-paced, ever-changing world, the mission of the church remains as clear and critical as ever: to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20). Yet, in many congregations, this central mandate of Jesus risks being overshadowed by a lot of different things like programs, events, and even institutional maintenance. It is essential for every church of the Reformed Church in America to re-center itself on its foundational calling—to be a disciple-making church.

This is Jesus' most important call to the church. However, the church in North America has lost the art of making disciples. Churches today do many good things but often fail to make disciples. At the heart of disciple-making lies obedience to Christ's command. Jesus' final instructions before ascending into heaven were not merely suggestions but a direct mandate: "Go and make disciples." A church that is not actively making disciples is missing the core of its mission. Programs, worship services, and fellowship are important, but they are not ends in themselves. They are tools that should support the greater purpose of forming fully committed followers of Jesus.

In the Reformed Church in America, we need to focus our future work on making disciples who make disciples. The vision of the restructuring team's report last year is for the RCA to become a denomination that makes disciples of Jesus who participate in God's reign everywhere. Within the staff, the Strategic Leadership Team has developed a strategic plan to support disciple making in churches. This is what the plan looks like:

Our core focus is to help our churches make disciples who grow disciples.

We do that in three ways:

1. Working in partnership with classes (or middle assemblies, as they will soon be called)
2. with a special focus on smaller churches
3. grounded in a Revelation 7:9 vision of all God's people.

Our 10-year target—the really big goal we're reaching for—is to be 1,500 churches on mission, where each church is:

- making disciples who make disciples
- engaged in the work of RCA Global Mission
- intergenerational and multiethnic
- contributing financially and spiritually to the life of denomination

This is the direction we are going and I ask you to join the movement to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit to go where God is leading us to go!

Pastoral Call

I want to conclude my report by offering a pastoral call to the Reformed Church in America. I want to frame this pastoral call under the theme: "Don't be Afraid"!

First, don't be afraid to love with boldness!

The world of today is a world of mistrust, hate, and division. We need a lot of love today! 1 John 4:18 says,

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

This passage carries a profound message about the nature of love and fear. True, genuine love is not mixed with fear. When love is authentic and pure, it brings security, not anxiety. Over the years, we as a denomination have experienced a lot of anxiety for a lot of different reasons and it is time for us to move in a different direction. We need healing and we need to restore our relationships—and that will not happen if we continue to be afraid to love one another.

A mature, complete love eliminates fear. This kind of love—often interpreted as God's love or a deeply unconditional love—provides reassurance and safety that makes fear unnecessary. Fear arises when someone expects judgment, rejection, or consequences. If you're afraid, it often means you're anticipating punishment. If someone lives in fear, especially in the context of relationships or with God, it suggests that their understanding or experience of love is incomplete or not yet fully developed, or has been painful in the past.

When the love of God is fully embraced it eliminates fear and judgment. This brings the healing we need to experience as a denomination. If we want to become a disciple-making church we must love each other. In the Gospel of John, love is the marker of true discipleship. Jesus says: "As I have loved you, love one another." When we learn to love each other, the world will know

that we are his disciples. Church divisions and fights only destroy the church's testimony to the world. We need God's help to let go of fear so we can love fully. So please don't be afraid to love!

Second, don't be afraid to live a life worthy of the calling you have received from God.

Ephesians 4:1-3 says:

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

In a world where self-promotion often takes precedence over humility, and division seems to grow more rapidly than unity, Paul's words in this passage strike a powerful and timely chord. His message to the church of Ephesus is not one of complaint or despair but of deep exhortation. He challenges believers to live lives that reflect the sacred calling they have received from God. This message is so relevant for us today in the Reformed Church in America. God has also given us a calling!

In this passage Paul talks about five things that we need to put into practice as we embrace the future God has for us as a family of faith.

Humility: Last year I also mentioned that the church of Acts 2.0 was a humble church. I need to mention this again in my pastoral call to you today because humility is extremely important to live together. The world in which we live today is messy, and we need a lot of humility to live faithfully in the midst of the messiness of the world and the messiness of our denomination. Jesus modeled humility by living faithfully in the midst of a messy world. We need to learn the humility of Jesus.

Gentleness: Learning to live together requires gentleness. Gentleness, in particular, is vital because it shapes how we approach one another. It softens our words, tempers our reactions, and opens the door to reconciliation. Gentleness allows us to handle differences without division. In our denomination, like in any church community—or any relationship—conflicts and misunderstandings will be inevitable. A gentle spirit does not ignore these tensions but addresses them with grace and care, aiming to preserve the unity given by the Spirit. One of the things that gives me hope about the Reformed Church in America is that we are more gentle with each other now than we were a few years ago. That's one of the signs that we've turned the corner. We need to keep growing in gentleness.

Patience: Patience is born from humility. To be patient is to recognize that we do not have all the answers, that people grow at different rates, and that circumstances are often out of our control. Humility tempers our ego, allowing us to see others with compassion rather than frustration.

When we are humble, we can more easily accept the flaws, struggles, and differences in others. Patience, then, is the natural fruit of humility—it enables us to wait without resentment, to endure without complaint, and to love without conditions. Here, too, I see evidence of greater patience within the RCA. This is

the work of the Holy Spirit. We need to continue to develop patience.

Bear with one another in love: The phrase “bearing with one another” implies that people will test us, irritate us, or even hurt us. The call is not to simply tolerate, but to endure with love. This is a higher standard. It means seeing others not as obstacles to our peace, but as fellow travelers on a shared spiritual journey. To “bear with” someone suggests a continual process, not a one-time act. This is hard! It’s a posture that we need to choose, again and again.

Finally, make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit: In this passage Paul reminds us that unity is not automatic or easy—we know this! It requires intentional effort, spiritual maturity, and daily reliance on the Holy Spirit. As believers, we are not just members of a community—we are stewards of a divine unity that reflects the very nature of God. Reformed Church in America, let us, therefore, make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. In doing so, we honor Christ and strengthen his body, the church.

Living a life worthy of our calling is not about perfection—it’s about direction. It’s about choosing, day by day, to reflect the character of Christ in how we treat others and in how we pursue peace. This is the essence of the Christian witness: not just what we believe, but how we live.

We need God’s help to live in this way, with humility, gentleness, and patience, to bear with one another in love, and to keep the unity of the Spirit. Living this way also opens us up more fully to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

That’s the third part of my pastoral call: **don’t be afraid to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit.** Acts 1:7-8 says:

He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

The book of Acts talks about the church in the first century filled and empowered with the Holy Spirit to transform the world.

This coming Sunday is Pentecost Sunday! Every year that we celebrate Pentecost is a reminder that the Holy Spirit continues to empower the church for mission in the world. Today the church must continue to write the story of transformation. This story is not finished yet! The Holy Spirit will take us to places that are unknown or uncomfortable—but that’s ok. Let us not be afraid to follow the Spirit’s guidance.

Acts 1:7-8 is not merely a historical moment; it is a theological pivot point. It moves us from anxiety about the future to boldness in the present. It moves us from passive observation to active participation. The risen Christ has entrusted his mission to his people—and empowered them with his Spirit. The question for the Reformed Church in America is not whether we are called, but whether we will respond. Friends, let us respond to this calling with passion and boldness. Let us respond to this calling without fear.

Mr. President, this concludes my report.

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 [2024 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 [2024 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 [2024 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

Approval of Agenda

The business before the 2025 General Synod was presented in the General Synod Workbook, which forms the agenda of synod.

EC 25-1

To approve the agenda and schedule of the General Synod as presented in the General Synod Workbook. (ADOPTED)

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 [2024 edition, p. 107]). The general secretary reported on classes' payments of General Synod assessments and reported that there were no delegates who could not be seated because of irregularities.

Amendments to the *Book of Church Order*

The General Synod of 2024 adopted and referred to the classes for approval ten amendments to the *Book of Church Order*. The amendments are recorded in the *2024 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 [2024 edition, p. 77]). As of June 5, 2025, one classis had not reported votes to the Office of the General Synod on the question of whether or not to approve the amendments. The votes of the other 44 classes, as reported in writing by the classes' stated clerks, were as follows:

<i>Book of Church Order</i> Amendments	Disapproved	Approved
1. Amendments to Preamble of the <i>Book of Church Order</i> (<i>MGS 2024</i> , EC 24-10, pp. 75-77)	3	41
2. Revisions to the Responsibilities of the Classis (<i>MGS 2024</i> , EC 24-11, p. 78)	2	42
3. Explanation of Points of Doctrine (<i>MGS 2024</i> , EC 24-12, p. 80)	5	39

4. Minister Serving as Mentor (MGS 2024, EC 24-13, p. 82)	5	39
5. Preparation for Commissioning (MGS 2024, EC 24-14, p. 83)	4	40
6. Additional Elder Delegate to Classis (MGS 2024, CO 24-1, pp. 238-239)	2	42
7. Union Churches (MGS 2024, CO 24-3, pp. 241-246)	1	43
8. Elder as Supervisor of Consistory (MGS 2024, RF 24-7, p. 137)	7	37
9. Creation of One Level of Government between the Consistory and the General Synod, and New Form of Judicial Bodies (MGS 2024, CO 24-4, pp. 247-278)	3	41
10. Global Amendment Replacing Classis with Middle Assembly (MGS 2024, RF 24-1, pp. 111-112)	11	32

All ten amendments received the approval of the required two-thirds of classes, and so they were presented to this General Synod for final declarative action. Amendments 1 through 8 are presented immediately below. GSC proposed that the declarative action on Amendments 9 and 10 should include specific provisions related to implementation, as outlined later in these minutes.

EC 25-2

**To declare Amendment 1 to be approved for incorporation into the 2025 *Book of Church Order*.
(ADOPTED)**

EC 25-3

**To declare Amendment 2 to be approved for incorporation into the 2025 *Book of Church Order*.
(ADOPTED)**

EC 25-4

**To declare Amendment 3 to be approved for incorporation into the 2025 *Book of Church Order*.
(ADOPTED)**

EC 25-5

**To declare Amendment 4 to be approved for incorporation into the 2025 *Book of Church Order*.
(ADOPTED)**

EC 25-6

**To declare Amendment 5 to be approved for incorporation into the 2025 *Book of Church Order*.
(ADOPTED)**

EC 25-7

To declare Amendment 6 to be approved for incorporation into the 2025 *Book of Church Order*. (ADOPTED)

EC 25-8

To declare Amendment 7 to be approved for incorporation into the 2025 *Book of Church Order*. (ADOPTED)

EC 25-9

To declare Amendment 8 to be approved for incorporation into the 2025 *Book of Church Order*. (ADOPTED)

The 2024 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:

Officially Related and Affiliated Colleges—BCO Chapter 3, Part I, Article 9, Section 3 (MGS 2024, CO 24-2, p. 240)

EC 25-10

To declare the amendment to the Bylaws of the General Synod specified in CO 24-2, adopted in first reading by the 2024 General Synod, to be approved for incorporation into the 2025 *Book of Church Order*. (ADOPTED)

Effective Date of Amendments Related to Restructuring: “Grace-Filled Transition”

The classes approved both restructuring amendments to the *Book of Church Order* that were adopted by General Synod 2024. The first amendment, from CO 24-4, combines the regional synod and classis into one assembly and creates new judicial bodies (Amendment 9). The second amendment renames the new “middle assembly” (from RF 24-1; Amendment 10). These amendments, together with their corresponding changes to the Bylaws and Special Rules of Order of the General Synod (which only need approval from two General Synods), are now before General Synod 2025 to be declared effective.

Typically, when amendments to the constitution or bylaws are declared effective by a second General Synod, they become effective immediately. The *BCO* specifies:

- “When the declarative action has taken place, the amendment shall become effective” (“Rules and Amendments,” Section 2c [2024 edition, p. 77]).
- “An amendment to the Bylaws and Special Rules of Order shall go into effect upon announcement by the president of the Synod of favorable action under this provision” (*BCO* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 12 [2024 edition, p. 127]).

However, given the significant work involved as current classes and regional synods re-form into middle assemblies, it's fair to ask "are we ready for this change in June?" The answer is, "no, we're not." While some regions have a well-developed plan and process in place and others remain unclear what restructuring will look like for them, the reality is none are ready for implementation in June. A summary entitled "Regional Plans for Restructuring into Middle Assemblies" appears as an appendix at the end of this section discussing amendments to the *Book of Church Order*. The summary is "as of" late May 2025.

The General Synod Council and General Synod officers consulted with the Commission on Church Order (CCO) regarding whether the effective date can be modified in some way by action of the General Synod. The answer is "yes." *Robert's Rules of Order* allows for changing the time at which an amendment to a governing document goes into effect, as well as attaching temporary provisions that would apply during the transitional period (*Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised [RONR]* [12th edition], 57:15).

The General Synod officers also consulted with representatives from all of the regional synods regarding the proposed date. If it's good to the Spirit and good to us, GSC proposes an effective date of December 30, 2026. (This date was unanimously agreed to by those representing the Council of Synod Executives [COSE].)

The CCO also identified a number of changes that may require a longer transitional period since their implementation will be officially initiated only after the effective date of the amendments. For example, the Commission on Nominations may need additional time to receive nominations from the middle assemblies according to the new equitable rotation for representative members of the Commission on Nominations, the General Synod Council, the Commission on Judicial Business, and other commissions. *Robert's Rules* provides a way to address such considerations, which are reflected in the proposal below as the added provisions "relating to transition and implementation" (*RONR* [12th edition], 57:15).

EC 25-11

To declare Amendments 9 and 10 to be approved for incorporation into the 2026 *Book of Church Order* provided, however, that these amendments shall not go into effect until December 30, 2026; and further,

To declare the amendments to the Bylaws of the General Synod specified in CO 24-4 and RF 24-1, adopted in first reading by the 2024 General Synod, to be approved for incorporation into the 2026 *Book of Church Order* provided, however, that these amendments shall not go into effect until December 30, 2026; and further,

That the provisions below relating to transition and implementation will apply as long as necessary:

- 1. Members nominated by the regional synods and elected by the General Synod will continue to serve as members of the General Synod Council, the Commission on Judicial Business, and the Commission on Nominations until the new process for nomination with an equitable rotation from the middle assemblies is fully implemented by the Commission on Nominations, and the General Synod has elected their replacements.**
- 2. Judicial business under consideration by the General Synod Commission on Judicial Business (CJB) will be completed by the current CJB membership under the provisions of the current RCA Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures.**
- 3. Judicial business under consideration by a regional synod and not resolved by the effective date of Amendment 9 will be referred to the General Synod Commission on Judicial Business for consideration.**
- 4. The regional synods will continue to be listed as part of the General Synod Group Exemption Roster as long as the regional synod corporations are structured as “subordinate organizations”—if their governance is by a board the majority of which are appointees of the middle assemblies.**
- 5. Classis votes on proposed amendments from General Synods 2025 and 2026 must occur prior to the effective date.**
- 6. Necessary paperwork (“change forms”) that document the final roster of each middle assembly—including churches, ministers, and pastors—shall be submitted to General Synod staff by November 1, 2026, two months prior to the effective date. (ADOPTED)**

Additional Principles and Processes for Grace-Filled Transition

Adopting an effective date of December 30, 2026, helps everyone at every level of the RCA prepare for the transition to middle assemblies. Each regional synod was asked to report its initial plan to re-form into one or more middle assemblies prior to this year’s General Synod. A number of other changes related to restructuring were referred to various commissions and boards for follow up, and will come before General Synod 2025 or 2026 for a vote (e.g., the frequency of in-person General Synod, the formula for calculating the number

of delegates from middle assemblies, etc.).

While many minds have collaborated to anticipate transitional needs, it is highly unlikely that we have addressed every possible circumstance and complexity. Each step of the way, in all things seen and unforeseen, we commit to a mutually grace-filled transition.

A. *Closure and Commissioning*

The gracious extension of time before restructuring becomes effective provides space to attend intentionally and carefully to not only the systemic work of restructuring but also the spiritual work of restructuring. With a full annual cycle ahead, regional synods and classes will be able to both grieve and celebrate the closing of one season and the commencement of a new day.

B. *Communication*

Regional synods are urged to communicate clearly with the classes within their bounds, and classes with their churches. Every effort should be made to ensure that middle assemblies are formed with the consent of each classis and consistory involved.

C. *Bounds*

As new middle assemblies are formed, a local church may become a member of a middle assembly, or classes may be re-formed into a middle assembly, beyond currently-defined regional synod bounds.

D. *Transfer Period*

After the effective date, the transfer of a church from one middle assembly to another happens by mutual consent of the middle assemblies involved, without any required action by the General Synod. Even where best intentions are followed, it is possible that a local church may discover that its new middle assembly is not a place where it can flourish in ministry. Deference should be given to the decision of the consistory to transfer for a period of at least several years; this is something that could be adopted by General Synod as a regulation (similar to the Regulations for Mutually Generous Separation that were adopted by General Synod 2021).

E. *Annual Review of Minutes*

Each middle assembly shall annually report upon the state of religion within its bounds and submit a copy of the minutes of every session convened that year. Currently, these reports are submitted by classes to the regional synod. Prior to the effective date, the General Synod will need to define a clear process for this important review.

F. *Reporting of Ministerial Changes*

Middle assemblies will continue to report “the names of persons who have been examined and licensed or ordained, all admissions and dismissions of ministers, all changes of pastoral relations, and the deaths of ministers” (BCO Chapter 1, Part II, Article 19, Section 2 [2024 edition, p. 63]). Most of this is already communicated by stated clerks to the General Synod office, so no standalone report should be needed. The one item that isn’t currently reported to the General

Synod office is “the names of persons who have been examined and licensed.” General Synod staff and the stated clerks will be consulted to determine whether this can be accomplished by creating a new form or revising one of the current forms used for reporting the other types of these changes (i.e. blue, green, tan, and orange forms).

- G. *Equitable Rotation for Corresponding Delegates*
Once the new configuration of middle assemblies is known, the General Synod will need to define the equitable rotation that will be used to invite women and youth corresponding delegates to General Synod.
- H. *Equitable Rotation for Members of Commissions, Boards, and Agencies*
Once the new configuration of middle assemblies is known, the Commission on Nominations will need to define the equitable rotation that it will use for identifying which middle assemblies will nominate candidates for the General Synod Council, the Commission on Judicial Business, and the Commission on Nominations.

APPENDIX REFERENCED IN DISCUSSION OF “EFFECTIVE DATE OF AMENDMENTS RELATED TO RESTRUCTURING: ‘GRACE-FILLED TRANSITION’”

Regional Plans for Restructuring into Middle Assemblies

When the restructuring team presented its recommendations for denominational restructuring to the 2024 General Synod, it also offered some implementation suggestions and guidelines. One of those was, “...if CO 24-4 is adopted, each current regional synod is asked to work together with all of its classes to develop a plan by June 2025 to re-form into one or more middle assemblies” (*MGS 2024*, p. 111).

Each of the RCA’s eight regional synods was asked to submit a brief report on their region’s plan for transitioning into middle assemblies, and those reports were shared for the information of General Synod delegates. These collected reports were for the General Synod’s information only; General Synod was not asked to take any actions related to the developing regional plans.

Regional Synod of Albany

The Regional Synod of Albany is made up of 6 classes, 87 congregations, and approximately 5,000 members. On May 5, 2025, the Regional Synod of Albany (RSA) passed the following resolution:

That two middle assemblies be formed and two transition teams:

- One based on the request of Montgomery Classis to create an additional assembly, and
- One based on a version of the *Upstate New York Middle Assembly Proposal*.

Both transition teams have the full support of the resources and staffing of the Regional Synod.

This is the core framework of the transition to middle assemblies in this region. What is currently agreed upon is that there will be two middle assemblies, both will receive the support of our existing structure, and there is an overall desire for an equitable division of resources between the two middle assemblies.

The *Upstate New York Middle Assembly Proposal* is designed to incorporate the majority of congregations in the RSA and seeks to continue the affirmation that churches in this region are “in this together for good.” The proposal, which has been reviewed and, in overall concept, affirmed by five out of six classes, consists of ministry teams that will execute the BCO-required functions of the middle assembly, as well as function to support mission and ministry throughout the middle assembly. Additionally, geographically-based collections of congregations will be formed to continue building meaningful relationships, coordinate local ministry, and support ministers and consistories. A transition team will be developed to work out the fine details of this proposal and implement the plan.

A significant majority within the Classis of Montgomery desire to form an additional middle assembly in this region. The desire is to build around the identity of being “welcoming and discipling.” A transition team will be developed from leaders within the Classis of Montgomery and others from the RSA who desire to form a middle assembly that is different than the one based on the existing RSA proposal. This middle assembly is likely to seek more uniformity in theological positions (leaning more traditional), be leaner in structure, and seek to unite and empower like-minded congregations in ministry.

The RSA has committed to having another meeting in October to complete work toward restructuring that is unfinished at this time. Currently, there is more clarity of what the Upstate New York middle assembly will be like, in both vision and structure, and decidedly less clarity on the other middle assembly. As the two transition teams are formed, a clearer picture of the distinctives between the middle assemblies will develop. At that point, consistories will be able discern which middle assembly is a better fit and seems like an environment in which they can minister as God calls. It is expected that some congregations from the other classes currently part of the RSA will join the middle assembly forming around the core of Montgomery Classis, and a few congregations within Montgomery Classis will join the middle assembly forming around the RSA proposal.

Submitted by
Dirk Gieser, RSA president

Regional Synod of Canada

The Regional Synod of Canada is combining with its remaining two classes (the Classis of Ontario and the Classis of Canadian Prairies) to form one Middle Assembly of Canada. We have already begun preliminary work on our legal structure and have retained the services of a lawyer to assist us in this important work.

This September, Lord willing, we are planning to meet together in person with the leadership of our churches (in Calgary, Alberta) for a time of connecting, learning, growing, and casting vision for our middle assembly.

Regional Synod of the Far West

The Regional Synod of the Far West (FWR) is made up of six classes, covering a broad geographic area including California, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Washington.

At our November 2024 FWR Summit, the Classis of the Americas requested and was approved by our regional synod to become their own middle assembly. The remaining classes are Classis of Central California, Classis of Cascades, Classis of Rocky Mountain, Classis of California, and Classis of the Southwest.

After the summit, the remaining classes were tasked with discussing several possible ways forward at their spring classis meetings. FWR staff (Rev. Phil Assink and Rev. Steve Norman) attended these spring classis meetings to resource and help with the discussions.

Two popular proposals from the November summit—either forming the remaining FWR classes into one middle assembly or each remaining classis becoming a middle assembly and sharing staff—lost momentum at these meetings and are no longer being pursued.

At this time, it is difficult to predict which of the remaining classes will be dissolved, dispersed, or merged. We have prayed, discussed various options, and changed directions several times.

Following the spring classis meetings, informal discussions have taken place between some classes about merging, while other classes have been talking about becoming middle assemblies on their own. At least one classis is in conversation with Heartland and Mid-America to explore merging into their proposed new middle assembly.

Since no official requests have been made, we are not able to project possible scenarios with confidence. A guess would be that two or three middle assemblies might be formed from the remaining five classes.

Next Steps

The FWR will hold an in-person meeting August 17 to 18 in Newark, California. Before that summit, each classis will submit a report describing where they are in the process so we can tailor our summit accordingly.

We were hoping to have another meeting in November 2025 to move forward in approving each classis's plan for restructuring the classis and to formally dissolve the FWR by the end of 2025. We have received feedback that this timeline was not realistic and we now hope to complete our regional synod restructuring by November 2026.

Context and Spiritual Grounding

We are a culturally diverse regional synod with Native American, Spanish-speaking, African American, Korean, Kenyan, Samoan, and multi-cultural congregations. Our congregations are found in very diverse community contexts. We have urban, suburban, agricultural, and rural congregations.

Diversity is also reflected in our pastors. Many of our pastors fit in one or more of the following categories: bi-vocational, part-time, commissioned, having English as a second language, and/or coming from another denomination.

The FWR is far from what it was in 2020. There have been dramatic changes in the number of congregants, the number of congregations, and financial strength.

While other classes experienced loss, the Classis of the Americas experienced amazing growth in numbers of churches and congregants. Since 2020, Classis of the Americas has grown from 3 churches to 24 churches with 3,040 in worship.

The numbers were very different for our other classes. In all of the other FWR classes combined, total congregants dropped from 18,769 in 2020 to 5,695 in 2023. The number of organized churches dropped from a high of approximately 130 to 35 congregations.

The FWR today is also very far from what it was in 2021 as far as leadership style, values, and emphasis. We see this as a strength. After the former FWR director retired and the former leadership team dissolved, a new leadership team was formed with a new approach to leadership. The former team was handpicked, small, and had a “top down” approach. The former emphasis was on providing programs and resources. The new leadership approach was to include representatives from each classis, chosen by that classis, and to have co-directors, Phil Assink and Steve Norman.

The new emphasis is on relationships, sharing both resources and spiritual support among member classes, rather than directly from regional staff. Formerly, the FWR had a high value on church growth. It seemed that the larger, growing churches and growing classes had more influence in our regional synod than smaller churches. Smaller churches and smaller classes often felt disconnected and not valued. Our new approach is to value all of our churches, no matter what size they are. We believe and teach that healthy missional churches come in all shapes, sizes, ethnicities, and worship styles.

We are also lifting up our participation in and relationship with General Synod and General Synod Council staff as a high value. We consult often with General Synod Council staff, invite them to our meetings, and encourage our classes to get involved in commissions.

Regional Synod of the Great Lakes

The Great Lakes Region, currently made up of seven classes across Michigan and Ohio, can report the following restructuring update:

- Great Lakes City Classis—our largest classis—and the Classis of Northern Michigan launched a collaborative experiment on July 1, 2024, to explore a potential merger. The partnership has proven fruitful, and a decision to formally merge is expected. They plan to continue as an assembly in the new structure.
- The Classis of Holland, our second largest classis, has added a few

new churches and leaders but plans to continue as an assembly in the new structure.

- The Classes of Muskegon and Zeeland continue to dialogue about a possible merger, though no agreement has been reached yet. If it takes place, with some help, they could become an assembly in the new structure.
- The Classis of Southwest Michigan voted in February 2025 to disband by August 31, 2025. A special service on February 25 honored its legacy. Remaining churches are in the process of joining other classes.
- The Classis of North Grand Rapids, a small and healthy classis at present, anticipates significant growth. They expect to welcome 10 to 13 CRCNA churches in the next two years, positioning them well to become a new assembly.

We anticipate the Great Lakes Region will condense from seven classes to three or four interconnected assemblies in the new structure. Not wanting to lose the support of other assemblies for connection, collaboration, and learning, key assembly staff will meet with other assembly staff at least twice a year for dialogue and sharing.

Regional Synod of the Heartland

In the Regions of Heartland and Mid-America, we are discerning how God might be leading us to reimagine how ministry is to be done. As we develop a middle assembly model, we are *not* simply combining and renaming our former classes and/or regional synods. Our approach is to design a ministry structure that focuses on the mission, vision, and values of forming disciples. This structure provides leaders and ministries with a new freedom and responsibility to be faithful in participating in God's reign in their context. At the same time, it keeps them rooted in relationships with others and provides them with the support, resources, and accountability needed to be faithful and fruitful as they live into the unique vision God gives them.

The Starfish Model

Our proposed middle assembly is designed with a "starfish" model, as opposed to a traditional hierarchical structure. The middle assembly model will have two major components: multiple missional networks connected by a single central administrative hub. The networks are the heart and soul of this model, in the same way that our classes have been the heart and soul of our denomination. The hub exists to serve and connect the networks.

Missional Networks

Missional networks will be composed of churches, ministries, and/or leaders who have partnered together to pursue God's reign. The goal of each network is to improve our ability to put all our focus and energy into making disciples by building relationships, sharing resources, encouraging, supporting in prayer, learning, and holding each other accountable.

The networks will be self-organized groups that share common needs, a common focus for mission, or other goals. In other words, a network can be formed based on location, mission, ministry focus, church size, programs, learning topics, etc. Each network will be led by a facilitator who will organize regular meetings and provide coaching for participants.

Each missional network would have the freedom and responsibility to:

- Determine its focus: Define how its members will pursue growth in emotional health and missional fruitfulness.
- Invite participants: Gather congregations, ministries, and/or other ministers that best align with current needs and priorities.
- Identify needs: Assess the specific needs of its members.
- Develop strategies: Create and implement strategies to address those needs.
- Support: Offer encouragement, guidance, and resources to others in the network.
- Collaborate: Work together to achieve shared goals.
- Innovate: Develop and implement new approaches to mission and ministry.
- Allocate resources: Manage and distribute resources within the network.

Each missional network will also participate in the life of the middle assembly by participating in gathered meetings and committees (judicial, student care, etc.), sharing resources, communicating best practices, and partnering in common projects. Every congregation, ministry, specialized minister, and retired minister (who wish to remain active) within the middle assembly will be expected to be a part of a missional network and will choose the network they participate in. This model could also be adapted to include the participation of other leaders (elders, deacons, youth and children's leaders).

Central Administrative Hub

The central administrative hub exists to serve the missional networks by connecting and coordinating the networks and by providing essential support so they can focus on discipleship and mission. Its functions would include:

- Support and empowering: providing coaching, administrative assistance, and other resources
- Strategic planning and mission
- Communication: clarifying the mission, vision, and values across the middle assembly by creating, inviting, and sharing stories from the various missional networks, as well as facilitating communication with the Reformed Church in America.
- Training and ordinations
- Judicial work and accountability
- Resource allocation and data management
- Business meetings and annual gatherings

The central administrative hub is made up of two components: a council and staff. The hub council oversees the entire middle assembly and delegates the work of the central administrative hub to the staff. The council includes key

missional network facilitators and other leaders, and its members will serve limited terms. (Note: In the beginning, the council will include one representative from each historical classis. This makeup will shift over time as the missional networks become more established.) The hub staff conduct the business of the middle assembly throughout the year. They support the missional networks, carrying out the functions listed above. The staff may be paid or volunteer, part-time or full-time.

In addition, the central administrative hub will gather all the missional networks twice a year as a governing assembly. One meeting will focus on business and will take place digitally. The second meeting will be an in-person gathering of the middle assembly over the course of two days. This annual in-person gathering will also include business, but the focus will be on leadership and ministry development and will include prayer, worship, celebrating, equipping, visioning, and connecting ministries and individuals across the missional networks.

Note: While the Regional Synod of the Heartland Admin Team has approved this model, there are two additional factors that are not yet settled: 1. We are discussing a possible merger with the Regional Synod of Mid-America, as well as adding other churches from other classes; 2. There may be a second middle assembly proposal from the region of the Heartland, but the details of how that report will be submitted are still being worked out.

Regional Synod of Mid-America

In the Regions of Heartland and Mid-America, we are discerning how God might be leading us to reimagine how ministry is to be done. As we develop a middle assembly(s), we are *not* simply combining and renaming our former classes and/or regional synods. Our approach is to design a ministry structure that focuses on the mission, vision, and values of forming disciples. This structure provides leaders and ministries with a new freedom and responsibility to be faithful in participating in God's reign in their context. At the same time, it keeps them rooted in relationships with others and provides them with the support, resources, and accountability needed to be faithful and fruitful as they live into the unique vision God gives them.

The Starfish Model

This proposal is envisioned using a starfish model (a flatter, more nimble organization), as opposed to a traditional hierarchical structure. The middle assembly model will have two major components: multiple missional networks connected by a single central administrative hub. The networks are the heart and soul of this model, in the same way that our classes have been the heart and soul of our denomination. The hub exists to serve and connect the networks.

Missional Networks

Missional networks will be composed of churches, ministries, and/or leaders who have partnered together to pursue God's reign. The goal of each network is to improve our ability to make disciples by building relationships, sharing resources, encouraging, supporting in prayer, learning, and holding each other accountable.

The networks will be self-organized groups that share common needs, a common focus for mission, or other goals. In other words, a network can be formed based on location, mission, ministry focus, church size, programs, learning topics, etc. Each network will be led by a facilitator who will organize regular meetings and provide coaching for participants.

Each missional network would have the freedom and responsibility to:

- Determine its focus: Define how its members will pursue growth in emotional health and missional fruitfulness.
- Invite participants: Gather congregations, ministries, and/or other ministers that best align with current needs and priorities.
- Identify needs: Assess the specific needs of its members.
- Develop strategies: Create and implement strategies to address those needs.
- Support: Offer encouragement, guidance, and resources with others in the network.
- Collaborate: Work together to achieve shared goals.
- Innovate: Develop and implement new approaches to mission and ministry.
- Allocate resources: Manage and distribute resources within the network.

Each missional network will also participate in the life of the middle assembly by participating in gathered meetings and committees (judicial, student care, etc.), sharing resources, communicating best practices, and partnering in common projects. Every congregation, ministry, specialized minister, and retired minister (who wish to remain active) within the middle assembly will be expected to be a part of a missional network and will choose the network they participate in.

Central Administrative Hub

The central administrative hub exists to serve the missional networks by connecting and coordinating the networks and by providing essential support so they can focus on discipleship and mission. Its functions would include:

- Support: providing support, coaching and administrative assistance to missional networks.
- Empowerment
- Mission
- Communication: Clarifying the mission, vision, and values across the middle assembly by creating, inviting, and sharing stories from the various missional networks, as well as facilitating communication with the Reformed Church in America.
- Training and ordinations
- Judicial work
- Strategic planning
- Resource allocation
- Data management
- Business meetings and annual gatherings
- Accountability

The central administrative hub is made up of two components: a council and staff.

The hub council oversees the entire middle assembly and delegates the work of the central administrative hub to the staff. The council includes key missional network facilitators and other leaders, and its members serve limited terms. (Note: In the beginning, the council will include one representative from each historical classis. This makeup will shift over time as the missional networks become more established.) The hub staff conduct the business of the middle assembly throughout the year. They support the missional networks, carrying out the functions listed above. The staff may be paid or volunteer, part-time or full-time.

In addition, the central administrative hub will gather all the missional networks twice per year as a governing assembly. One meeting will focus on business and will take place digitally. The second meeting will be an in-person gathering of the middle assembly over the course of two days. This annual in-person gathering will also include business, but the focus will be on leadership and ministry development and will include prayer, worship, equipping, connection, visioning, and in-person connections of missional networks.

Note: While the Synod Assembly of Mid America voted to adopt this model and to pursue a future with one middle assembly within RSMA, there are two classes that are continuing to discern their participation in this middle assembly or the formation of two other middle assemblies prior to December 30, 2026.

Additionally, RSMAM voted to continue conversations and discernment with the Synod of the Heartland, but is not committing to a merged future.

Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics

At its annual meeting on May 10, 2025, the Synod of the Mid-Atlantics adopted the following plan for restructuring:

To create five middle assemblies based on the current five classes, create a Mid-Atlantic Network, and transition the subsidiary corporations into independent non-profit organizations.

Structure

- A. Five Middle Assemblies: The formation of five middle assemblies, each corresponding to our existing five classes, including their enrolled ministers, commissioned pastors, and elder delegates who represent all the churches within their bounds. This ensures compliance with the *Book of Church Order* while providing a more localized and responsive structure for governance. This maintains our historical commitment to accountability and connection while simplifying administrative complexity and increasing efficiency.
 1. City
 2. Delaware-Raritan
 3. Greater Palisades
 4. New Brunswick
 5. Passaic Valley
- B. Mid-Atlantic Network: The formation of the Mid-Atlantic Network, a collaborative entity that will be designed to foster connection,

collaboration, joint ventures, and ministry development. This network will serve as a hub for innovation, shared mission, and collective support among those of the five new middle assemblies who choose to participate.

- C. Transition Subsidiary Corporations into Independent, Non-profit Organizations
1. Reformed Church Home
 2. Synod Foundation
 3. Warwick Conference Center

This restructure preserves the essential governance structures of our tradition while creating new opportunities for collaboration, ministry innovation, and collective visioning. By establishing five middle assemblies to oversee polity and governance and launching the Mid-Atlantic Network to provide a place of shared ministry and support, we believe we can strengthen the witness and mission of the Reformed Church in America in our region for years to come.

Transition Timeline

We envision a five-year transition timeline, to be more fully outlined by the yet-to-be appointed transition team. Most of the significant changes will occur in the first three years, with years four and five focusing on evaluating and refining the new structure. The last regional synod meeting would be held in May 2027.

Year 1: July 2025–June 2026

Preparation and Initial Steps

- Administrative and legal preparation
- Staffing changes
- Subsidiary corporation independence plans

Year 2: July 2026–June 2027

Legal Restructuring and Network Formation

- Regional synod dissolution process
- Network development

Year 3: July 2027–June 2028

Subsidiary Corporation Independence

Years 4-5: July 2028–June 2030

Stabilization and Evaluation

Regional Synod of New York

The Regional Synod of New York (RSNY), inspired by Acts 16:6-10, sees the forming of middle assemblies as the possibility for opportunities of new beginnings to strengthen collaboration and transformation for partnership in ministry and mission among congregations. In Acts 16:6-10, the apostle Paul and his companions received a vision that led them to preach the gospel in Macedonia, allowing them to preach the gospel in a new region, marking the beginning of Christianity's expansion into Europe. As we hold conversations around forming middle assemblies on the East Coast, Revelation 7:9 also guides us.

In light of recent events related to the plight of racial relations in the U.S. and in church communities, it is more urgent than ever that we continue to develop a culture that puts into practice the value of continuing to raise up women and people of color in ministry, and put in place guidance on practices for identifying and deploying people of color and women whom the Holy Spirit has already called and anointed for ministry. RSNY's focus on Revelation 7:9 will help the synod more fully cooperate with the vision of the Commission on Race and Ethnicity as described in their 2022 report to the General Synod (*MGS 2022*, pp. 232-239).

The Regional Synod of New York is composed of seven classes: Brooklyn, Mid-Hudson, Nassau-Suffolk, New York, Orange, Queens, and Rockland-Westchester.

Immediately after General Synod 2024, RSNY distributed to all classes information on restructuring, with a January 2025 date for classes to submit to the regional synod their plan for forming a middle assembly. The executive minister informed each classis that he was available to visit classis meetings to discuss and answer questions around restructuring. RSNY also established a core group to hear from classes and answer questions they may have.

RSNY called a meeting of the regional synod on Saturday, August 3, 2024, to hear and discuss classis plans and answer questions around forming a middle assembly. At this meeting three classes reported on their plan to form a middle assembly. Additional members were added to the core group, forming a task force with a hired consultant to work with the team.

The RSNY Task Force gathered on several occasions to discuss ways to encourage middle assemblies to deeply value diversity, exemplified by people of different races and ethnic backgrounds worshiping, serving, and taking communion together. The task force desires to see more diversity in designing middle assemblies—in leadership, clergy, consistory, and congregations—while simultaneously creating welcoming spaces.

The RSNY, at its November 2, 2024, stated session, directed the RSNY team to respond to two issues for our middle assemblies.

- **Mandate One:** Recommend to the RSNY ways to continue to meet in our diversity after the Regional Synod of New York no longer exists.
- **Mandate Two:** Recommend to the RSNY ways to preserve/ensure financial equity and justice after the Regional Synod of New York no longer exists to receive assessments and distribute funding for grants.

The RSNY believes that Revelation 7 calls middle assemblies to accountability, which will focus on the idea that all organizational structures are accountable to God for their actions and the call to mutual accountability within the new context of consistory-church relationships. This accountability will enhance and preserve a new structure with a commitment to effectively provide guidance for our churches. This accountability will refocus our vision to immense multitude of redeemed people from every nation, tribe, and language, representing God's inclusive love and the call to share the gospel with others in the life of each middle assembly.

From the conversation shared when a representative from each classis in the Regional Synod of New York met, this is what we heard or received in written detail reports with diagrams in an organized structure.

1. The Classis of Rockland-Westchester intends to become its own middle assembly.
2. The Classes of Mid-Hudson and Orange are in the process of merging and becoming a middle assembly (but will still call themselves a classis).
3. Some in the Classis of Nassau-Suffolk would like the classis to become its own middle assembly.
4. The Classis of New York intends to become its own middle assembly.
5. Within the Classis of Queens, there is the possibility of a Korean language affinity middle assembly that would include congregations from one or more classes both within and outside our regional synod.
6. There have been informal conversations on the possibility of Queens and Nassau-Suffolk merging, and Brooklyn merging with other classes or perhaps with a middle assembly outside the bounds of the Regional Synod of New York.
7. There has been discussion that classes unable to function as their own middle assembly might be gathered under the umbrella of what is now the Regional Synod of New York.

Shared concern was expressed for those classes that have not moved forward with determining what middle assembly they will be part of; there was the conviction that any congregations or classes having difficulty moving forward be treated with compassion and be helped to move into a middle assembly, since this will be required of every current classis.

While all of our classes are working on their plan for a middle assembly, there are plenty of barriers to building this kind of community—classism, sexism, ableism, and racism, to name a few.

In closing, we are blessed to receive a grant from the RCA to explore these restructuring issues with our classes and congregations, with professional facilitators to assist classes and consistories to develop meaningful connections and communications in their developing, purposeful middle assemblies.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Dr. Micheal Edwards
Executive minister, Regional Synod of New York

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 serves as the GSC's chief financial officer, and thus the General Synod is asked to appoint him as its treasurer.

**EC 25-12
To appoint Tony Schmid as treasurer of the
General Synod of the Reformed Church in
America. (ADOPTED)**

General Synod 2026 Meeting Location

The location for the next annual meeting of the General Synod in 2026 is the Sheraton Music City Nashville Airport in Nashville, Tennessee. The 2026 meeting of the General Synod is planned to take place on June 11-16. 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 2025 General Synod of the Reformed Church in America met 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 2025 (October 2024–September 2025)

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 12 salary ranges that span between 12 and 23. Grade 12 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 the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA) are evaluated by their respective boards.

The following table represents the ranges that were used for fiscal year 2025. 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

2024-2025

ANNUALIZED SALARY RATE

GRADE	LOW	25%	MID	75%	HIGH
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 for the GSC to 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 (2024 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 are now held electronically, and there is longer 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 Christian Unity, originally scheduled for last year, is presented below. GSC had postponed that review last year due to scheduling challenges; it is now completed and presented below.

Two additional commissions were scheduled for review during the 2024-2025

review cycle (Year C, according to the GSC's review process): the Commission on History and the Commission for Women. GSC brings those reviews and recommendations as well.

Review of the Commission on Christian Unity

Commission members reported that they have been active in faithfully carrying out the responsibilities assigned to the commission in the *Book of Church Order*. Commission members have represented the RCA at the meetings of three different international ecumenical bodies: the World Council of Churches, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, and the Global Christian Forum. Commission members have also participated in U.S.-based ecumenical bodies: the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. and Christian Churches Together.

The commission has also provided resources to RCA congregations, such as sending out a call for congregational prayer for the wellbeing of Ukraine, and communicated with other churches, such as last year's meeting with the leadership of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in America.

Commission members reported an interest in expanding the role of the commission in providing resources regarding ecumenism to the RCA. They would like to see a greater presence regarding ecumenical matters on the RCA website, such as articles, videos, and educational materials. This would allow a shift of ecumenical participation to local levels as well as national and international levels.

Commission members noted that, in this time of division not only within the RCA but also within the larger culture, there is a need for expanded and improved communication. Maintaining or reestablishing relationships with Reformed bodies that have left the RCA is an opportunity for witness in the larger world. Over the next three years, commission members expect conversations to begin around formalizing relationships with the Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Kingdom Network, recognizing that our commonalities are much greater than our differences.

Commission members reported good relationships with and support from staff members who have been assigned to work with the commission. However, the workload of keeping up with the many areas of ecumenical participation and the RCA's many ecumenical responsibilities are beyond one staff person. Commission members would appreciate more timely communication and a better handle on budget possibilities to cover commission activities.

GSC feels that the many gifted people represented on the commission are worth the continuation of the Commission on Christian Unity for another five years.

EC 25-13

To approve the continuation of the Commission on Christian Unity. (ADOPTED)

Review of the Commission on History

The Commission on History has actively fulfilled its duties as required by the BCO and as requested by General Synod. The commission's work includes preparations for the celebration of the 400th anniversary of the RCA, the Historical Series, and collaborating with the RCA archivist. This work is all necessary and, if not performed by the Commission on History, would fall to staff.

The Commission on History will be important for the RCA going forward as it continues to explore and develop its unique identity and seeks to become more diverse in its ethnicity and languages. There is important work to be done around collecting historical records as it plants churches in new parts of the world.

For these reasons, as well as others stated in written survey responses from commission members, GSC concluded that the commission's work is essential for the denomination, its churches, and scholars, and for the preservation of the record of the RCA's role in the story of Christ's church.

One of the major challenges the commission wrestles with is providing support for an understaffed and underfunded Archives. When the GSC review team met with the commission, it learned that the Commission on History is exploring a creative alternative to meet this need; GSC sent a letter to the commission expressing its support of the commission's exploratory work.

EC 25-14 To approve the continuation of the Commission on History. (ADOPTED)

Review of the Commission for Women

The GSC review team that met with the Commission for Women reported that the commission has been very active fulfilling its role to equip and support women in ministry in the RCA. Commission members are involved in mentoring other women leaders, organizing retreats and workshops, seeking out and telling stories to make sure that the diverse voices of women across the denomination are heard, and also raising up concerns that surface regarding barriers and hostility that exist toward women in office and women in leadership.

GSC recommended that the synod continue the existence and work of the Commission for Women. The commission continues to follow the guidelines of the RCA's mission and vision to meet the current needs of women in ministry, while also discovering innovative ways to address future needs. The commission is a necessary voice alongside the work of Women's Transformation and Leadership to provide education, advocacy, and support.

Furthermore, GSC commended the ongoing work of the commission to celebrate the stories of women's contributions and roles in Christ's church and the mission field. The GSC honored their hardships and holds space for the tensions and hurt that still exist in the church for women to live out their God given callings. The GSC is grateful for all the siblings in Christ who mentor, pray, and stand with these women of deep faith.

EC 25-15**To approve the continuation of the Commission for Women. (ADOPTED)****Transfer of Congregations Across Regional Synod Lines**

According to *BCO* Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 3 (2024 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 was asked to bring five such transfers to the 2024 General Synod. In all five cases, the Office of the General Synod received signatures of affirmation from the consistory, both classes, and both regional synods, indicating that they are all in agreement with the transfers, and so the GSC agreed to bring the transfer requests to the General Synod.

The transfer requests are as follows:

- Bethany Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan, requested a transfer from the Classis of Southwest Michigan (Regional Synod of the Great Lakes) to the Classis of the City (Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantic).
- Trinity Reformed Church in Ridgewood, New York, requested a transfer from the Classis of Queens (Regional Synod of New York) to the Classis of the City (Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantic).
- Platt Park Church in Denver, Colorado, requested a transfer from the Classis of Rocky Mountain (Regional Synod of the Far West) to the Classis of the City (Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantic).
- Peace Reformed Church in Eagan, Minnesota, requested a transfer from the Classis of Minnesota (Regional Synod of the Heartland) to the Classis of the City (Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantic).
- Iglesia Reformada Impacto in Pittsburg, Texas, requested a transfer from the International Classis of Texas (Regional Synod of the Heartland) to the Classis of the Americas (Regional Synod of the Far West).

EC 25-16

To transfer Bethany Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan, from the Classis of Southwest Michigan to the Classis of the City; and further,

To transfer Trinity Reformed Church in Ridgewood, New York, from the Classis of Queens to the Classis of the City; and further,

To transfer Platt Park Church in Denver, Colorado, from the Classis of Rocky Mountain to the Classis of the City; and further,

To transfer Peace Reformed Church in Eagan, Minnesota, from the Classis of Minnesota to the Classis of the City; and further,

To transfer Iglesia Reformada Impacto in Pittsburg, Texas, from the International Classis of Texas to the Classis of the Americas. (ADOPTED)

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF FINANCE

The Office of Finance provides centralized finance and accounting services to the denominational corporations, including the General Synod Council (GSC), the Board of Benefits Services (BOBS), and the Church Growth Fund (CGF). The Office of Finance strives to ensure that financial systems, procedures, and controls are in place to support the mission and ministry of these entities and to assist the officers and directors of the corporations in fulfilling their fiduciary responsibilities. The finance staff is available to respond to financial questions from local congregations, classes, and regional synods as together we carefully manage the financial resources with which we have been blessed.

2024 Annual Audits

The 2024 financial statements of the GSC, BOBS, RCA 403(b) Retirement Program, and CGF were audited by Plante Moran, PLLC, certified public accountants. All corporations and the RCA 403(b) Retirement Program received unmodified (or “clean”) audit opinions. The GSC’s Audit and Risk Management Committee reviewed the audited financial statements of each entity, reviewed the post-audit letters from the auditors, and reported the audit results to the boards of the respective corporations. The American Institute of CPAs’ Statement on Auditing Standards no. 137, *The Auditor’s Responsibilities Relating to Other Information Included in Annual Reports*, prevents us from providing any link to the audited financials within the General Synod workbook. Including a link would require us to have the entire General Synod workbook audited; both the timeline and cost of this are prohibitive. Financial highlights of each corporation are presented below. For more information, please contact the Office of Finance.

*Financial Summaries—Fiscal Year Ended September 30, 2024*General Synod Council (GSC)

The GSC’s total income was \$19.6 million and expenses totaled \$14.4 million, resulting in net income of \$5.2 million. This is an increase of \$4.1 million compared to 2023. Market gains on investments and third-party perpetual trust was \$6.3 million, compared to \$2.9 million in 2023, resulting in a \$3.4 million dollar increase. Total contributions and grants saw an increase of \$1.4 million from 2023. This is primarily due to receiving a \$1.25 million grant from the Lilly Endowment, Inc.

Total net assets were \$46.9 million; \$21.5 million of that total is without donor restrictions and \$25.4 million is with donor restrictions.

The generosity of donors—churches, individuals, and foundations—accounted for 47 percent of the GSC’s funding. Assessments contributed an additional 14 percent and continue to be consistently paid to GSC by classes. The chart below presents the full picture of funding sources that support the work of the General Synod, including both the operating budget and all designated and restricted funds.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL SYNOD 51

REVENUE BY FISCAL YEARS ENDING SEPTEMBER 30

	Fiscal Year 2024	Fiscal Year 2023
Contributions and Grants	\$9,312,840	\$7,904,835
Assessments	\$2,841,383	\$3,712,317
Other Income*	\$7,513,371	\$3,923,142
TOTAL INCOME	\$19,667,594	\$15,540,294

**Includes investment earnings and fees for services provided to related entities*

Contributions and grants increased by \$1.3 million. New grant income of \$1.25 million from the Lilly Endowment, Inc. was awarded shortly before year-end. The Church Growth Fund increased its grants to the GSC by \$267,000, and Global Mission received a bequest of \$300,000. These increases were offset by the Employee Retention Credit of \$455,000 recorded in 2023. Other donations to Global Mission were primarily flat compared to 2023.

Assessments decreased by approximately \$870,000 due to the loss of churches following the adoption of recommendations from the Vision 2020 team at General Synod in 2021, including the adoption of rules and regulations related to gracious separation. Additional impact of churches leaving the denomination due to the recommendations of the Vision 2020 team should be minimal going forward.

Investment income was \$3.3 million higher in 2024 due to increases in market values in the endowment fund and third-party perpetual trusts. The endowment fund was up 18.1 percent for fiscal year 2024.

Other income increased approximately \$212,000 from 2023. This increase was due to the increase in the third-party perpetual trust.

The chart below shows expenses by functional category and is followed with a summary of each functional expense category.

EXPENSES BY FISCAL YEARS ENDING SEPTEMBER 30

	Fiscal Year 2024	Fiscal Year 2023
The Center	\$2,858,416	\$3,092,188
Global Mission	\$7,148,382	\$7,081,806
Work of the General Synod*	\$2,277,473	\$2,090,943
Ministry Support Services	\$2,174,795	\$2,167,725
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$14,459,066	\$14,432,662

**Includes GSC, General Synod, and general secretary's office*

The GSC's total expenses increased from the prior year by \$26,000.

The Center for Church Multiplication and Ministry expenses decreased by approximately 7.5 percent due to a decrease in grant expenses.

Global Mission expenses did not change significantly from 2023 to 2024.

Work of the General Synod expenses increased approximately 9 percent due to increased travel and expenses for General Synod, mainly due to inflation and unforeseen costs.

Ministry Support Services expenses did not change significantly from 2023 to 2024.

Board of Benefits Services (BOBS)—403(b) Retirement Program

As mentioned above, audits for the 2024 fiscal year were performed by Plante Moran, PLLC, certified public accountants. The RCA 403(b) Retirement Program and Support and Investment funds were audited separately from the BOBS General Fund and non-qualified RCA Retirement Plan. The RCA 403(b) Retirement Program statements are presented on a modified-cash basis, as this presentation is a more accurate reflection of the financial status of the plan. As of September 30, 2024, the date of BOBS' most recent audit, \$346 million is held in participant accounts in the RCA 403(b) Retirement Program. In fiscal year 2024, participant and employer contributions to the plan were \$9.5 million, and \$6.1 million was reallocated from the non-qualified RCA Retirement Plan. Distributions to participants totaled \$20 million for the same time period.

Together as a denomination, we, through decisions of General Synod, have agreed to contribute at least 11 percent of the eligible salaries of RCA-ordained ministers to their retirement accounts each year. \$696,000 has been identified as funds that have not been paid into participant accounts from local congregations for benefits owed between January 1, 2009, and September 30, 2024. BOBS staff continues to work with ministers, congregations, and classes to obtain necessary information to monitor compliance with the requirements of Formulary No. 5 in the *Book of Church Order*.

For additional information about the retirement plans, see the report of the Board of Benefits Services on pages 129-141.

Board of Benefits Services—General Fund

The BOBS' General Fund provides funding for the retirement programs, life and long-term disability insurances, assistance and retiree chaplains programs, and financial education and well-being programs for active and retired RCA-ordained ministers, their dependents, and surviving spouses. The General Fund is financially healthy, with \$33.1 million in net assets as of September 30, 2024. The General Fund ended fiscal year 2024 with a net surplus of \$5.6 million. Investment earnings on reserves and endowments amounted to \$6.0 million, and other revenue generated \$1.6 million. Administration costs for the retirement plans, which are covered primarily by a fee on employer contributions to the RCA 403(b) Retirement Program and the RCA Retirement Plan accounts, totaled \$440,000 in 2024, and is included in the "other revenue" noted above.

Effective January 1, 2022, BOBS implemented a fee reduction for participants from 19 basis points (bps) to 10 bps. Since 2012, the administrative fee has dropped by 30 bps. Earnings from the ERISA Insurance Endowment Fund and a decrease in operational expenses, plus investment earnings from other sources and increased values in the retirement plans, allowed for BOBS to administer its programs at a reduced fee.

Support for the assistance and retiree chaplains programs came from

designated contributions and annual investment income from endowment funds. Assistance grants and retiree chaplains' ministry expenses were \$525,000 in 2024. The premiums received for life and long-term disability insurances cover the costs of administering those insurances. Financial education and well-being initiatives were funded by annual endowment income and grants from the Lilly Endowment, Inc.

For additional information about the BOBS' General Fund, see the report of the Board of Benefits Services on pages 129-141.

Church Growth Fund (CGF)

The CGF makes affordable-rate loans to current and former RCA churches and related agencies for building projects used in ministry. Loans are funded by current and former RCA churches, agencies, and individuals that purchase CGF savings certificates, which are interest-bearing investments offering a favorable rate of return.

The CGF ended fiscal year 2024 with \$79.5 million in total assets, including over \$34.6 million in cash and short-term investments and \$45 million in loans to churches. The loans were funded by \$24.3 million in savings certificates and \$54.8 million in net assets (capital). The CGF had a net surplus of \$3.3 million. CGF also adopted Financial Accounting Standards Board ASU No. 2016-13, Financial Measurements—Credit Losses (commonly referred to as CECL) in 2024. Implementation of this new standard resulted in an additional increase of net assets of \$660,000. Interest on loans amounted to \$2.3 million, and the CGF earned \$3.5 million in net investment income. The CGF contributed \$900,000 to the GSC to be used for grants related to church plants, church revitalization, and next generation scholarships. Since 2018, the CGF has operated under a goal of being able to contribute up to 50 percent of net operating income back to the denomination annually.

The CGF has very strong liquidity, capital, and cash flow when compared to standards established by the North American Securities Administrators Association. For additional information about the CGF, see the report of the Church Growth Fund on pages 122-128.

Investments

Investments of the GSC, BOBS, and CGF are managed by professional investment managers. Performance and compliance with defined corporate investment policy statements are reviewed twice a year by the GSC Investment Advisory Committee (IAC), which is made up of representatives from the boards of each corporation and at-large members with investment expertise. The IAC makes recommendations for changes to investment policy or management to each RCA board for consideration.

Excess Operating Reserves

Since December 2017, the operating reserves of the GSC, BOBS, and CGF are being managed by Telemus Capital, LLC, an investment firm based out of Ann Arbor, Michigan, in an actively managed portfolio of fixed-income securities. Telemus Capital, LLC, allows for the segregation of funds for each RCA

corporation. The corporate investments for each RCA corporation may then be further segregated and managed under two separate investment policies. The first policy, invested only in fixed income, is the secondary liquidity source after cash and savings for the RCA corporation and uses the benchmark for investment returns of the Barclays 1–5 Year Government/Credit A+ Index. The second policy, allocating assets to longer duration fixed income and equities, is the third source of liquidity for the RCA entities and uses the benchmark for fixed income investment returns of the Barclays Intermediate Government Corporate Bond Index. The total amount invested in fixed income at Telemus Capital, LLC, was \$33.9 million at September 30, 2024.

Endowment Funds

The GSC manages \$29.2 million in funds provided by donors or set aside by management to be invested long term. Some of the endowed gifts entrusted to the GSC date back to the mid-1800s. The investment proceeds from endowed gifts are used for donor-designated purposes while preserving and growing the dollar value of the original gift. LVM Capital Management, Ltd. actively manages 100 percent of the fixed income investments and 80 percent of the equity investments. The remaining 20 percent of equities are invested in passive index funds at the recommendation of the IAC. The benchmark for investment returns is 70 percent S&P 500 and 30 percent Bank of America Merrill Lynch 1–10 Year Government/Corporate Bond Index.

In addition to the GSC and CGF, the endowment pool includes amounts designated for local congregations and RCA seminaries and colleges. In fiscal year 2024, the RCA Endowment Fund distributed \$1.1 million to the GSC, \$37,000 to the CGF, and \$225,000 to organizations associated with the RCA. If you are interested in setting up an endowment for the benefit of the GSC or your local congregation, please contact the RCA's Office of Advancement (advancement@rca.org).

BOBS also manages an endowment fund valued at \$29 million. LVM Capital Management, Ltd., actively manages 100 percent of the fixed income investments and 80 percent of the equity investments. The remaining 20 percent of equities are invested in passive index funds at the recommendation of the IAC. The benchmark for investment returns is 70 percent S&P 500 and 30 percent Bank of America Merrill Lynch 1–10 Year Government/Corporate Bond Index. In 2024, approximately \$693,000 was distributed from the endowment fund to BOBS' General Fund.

RCA Retirement Plan Investment Options for Participants

Fidelity Investments provides recordkeeping and investment management services for BOBS' retirement plans. In collaboration with the IAC, in its fiduciary role, BOBS monitors the performance of the investment options (funds) available under the two retirement plans. BOBS and the IAC are assisted in this task by outside retirement investment consultants from Creative Planning Retirement Services.

Mutual fund options available to retirement plan participants include target-date retirement funds based on a participant's retirement age as well as 17 diversified mutual funds, including three environmental, social, and governance

(ESG) investing options. As of April 1, 2024, a self-directed brokerage account was added to allow participants to invest in funds not currently offered in the investment lineup. As of December 31, 2024, 69 percent of the 403(b) participant funds are invested in target-date retirement funds. An additional 5.2 percent are enrolled in the Fidelity Personalized Planning and Advice program. The total market value of the mutual funds held in the RCA 403(b) Retirement Program was \$346 million, with an additional \$182 million in the non-qualified RCA Retirement Plan, at September 30, 2024.

For additional information about the retirement plans, see the report of the Board of Benefits Services on pages 129-141.

Planned Giving Programs

The GSC manages various planned giving programs, including charitable gift annuities, totaling \$1.1 million. Barnabas Foundation provides investment management and recordkeeping services for these programs. The investments include equities and fixed income to provide cash flow to cover the required payouts. This fund is in a wind-down phase. Those wishing to establish a charitable gift annuity benefiting the RCA or a local RCA church may contact Barnabas Foundation or the RCA's Office of Advancement to do so.

Church Growth Fund Investments

The CGF invests a portion of excess operating cash in four fixed-income accounts and two equity accounts. As of September 30, 2024, Telemus Capital, LLC; Barnabas Foundation; and LVM Capital Management, Ltd., manage these funds. The IAC reviews the investment policy and investment performance semi-annually.

Socially Responsible and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Investing

The investment policy statements for each pool of corporate investments require the investment manager to avoid investments in the securities of companies whose principal business involves gambling, for-profit prisons, the production or distribution of tobacco or alcohol, adult entertainment and pornography, or firearms. BOBS has established policies limiting the investment of its corporate assets in certain types of companies. These policies apply exclusively to BOBS' endowment and operating reserve investments and do not extend to retirement plan assets.

BOBS currently offers three ESG funds to its participants in the Retirement Program. In addition, the newly offered brokerage account offers a greater variety of ESG funds for participants who are interested in investing in funds that align with their personal values. Participants who wish to learn more about ESG investing, the ESG funds available, and the brokerage link may visit www.rca.org/benefits/investment-options-in-the-retirement-plans.

Two General Synod actions taken in October 2021 were related to ESG investments (CA 21-6, *MGS 2021*, p. 206; ONB 21-9a, *MGS 2021*, p. 119). Both actions were tasked to the IAC for follow up. The IAC created an ESG subcommittee to specifically review these actions. The subcommittee

membership includes the moderator of the Commission on Christian Action, and continues to meet annually.

The subcommittee recognizes that the industry standards for ESG ratings and definitions are a work in progress. The criteria and scoring methods are constantly evolving. There is also a significant amount of pushback, both political and regulatory, regarding ESG standards. The subcommittee does not believe that the RCA is behind the industry standard on incorporating ESG criteria into our corporate investment policies. In this frequently changing environment, the IAC is being cautious and prudent, and continues to believe it is not a good time to integrate ESG criteria into our investment policies. We are committed to balancing investment growth, fiduciary responsibility, and our ESG impact.

2025 Budget Process

Alignment of Resources with the Center and Global Mission

The general secretary has identified four ministry priorities that are in line with the GSC's ends policies—leadership, mission, multiplication, and a future that is multicultural, multiracial, and multigenerational. GSC staff focuses on equipping churches and church leaders in these four areas so that they are better able to follow the unique call that God has given their church. Budget managers developed 2025 budgets with the aim of making sure that we are utilizing resources wisely in light of decreased assessment revenue.

The covenant shares and contributions provided by RCA churches and members enable the GSC staff to come alongside RCA congregations in many ways, start new churches, and reach people with the love of Christ through RCA mission efforts. For more on how the RCA's financial resources were used in ministry during the past year, please see the reports on the Center for Church Multiplication and Ministry and on Global Mission on pages 106 and 114.

General Synod Council Operating Budget Process

The GSC operating budget is primarily funded by covenant shares, contributions, and operating reserves. Operating expenses for BOBS and CGF are covered under separate budgets. The 2025 budget was finalized by determining revenue available from covenant shares, contributions, investments, and other income. In June 2024, the General Synod approved a covenant share percentage of 2.5 percent of contribution revenue reported on Line 21 of the 2023 Consistorial Report Form (CRF) for the 2025 calendar year. \$207,500 of covenant shares was earmarked for theological education and \$30,000 was reserved for future General Synod initiatives. The fiscal year 2025 budgeted assessment revenue to the GSC (excluding the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency) is \$2.7 million, representing a decrease of \$50,000 from the 2024 budgeted assessment revenue.

Contributions to the On Mission Fund are unrestricted contributions to the RCA, and one-quarter of these contributions are transferred to Global Mission. For 2025, contributions to the On Mission Fund are budgeted at the same amount as 2024. Based on Partnership-in-Mission (PIM) shares pledged to support missionaries, Global Mission expects to see an overall increase in contributions

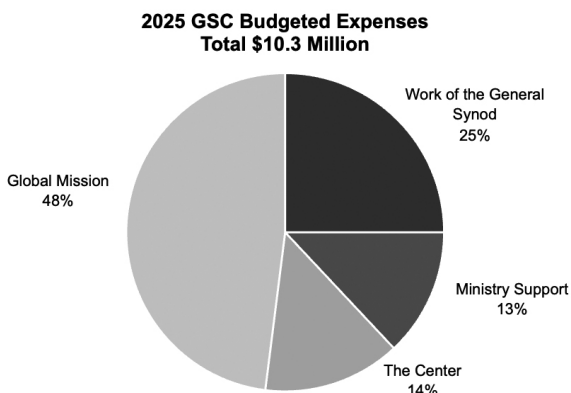
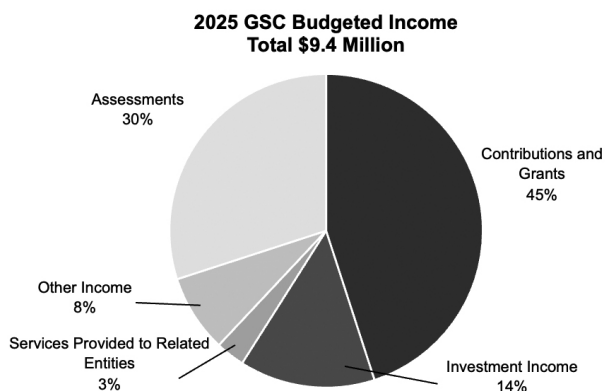
of about \$100,000 compared to prior year giving.

Personnel costs, including salaries and benefits, make up 69 percent of the total budget. The remaining 31 percent of the budget is used for meeting and travel costs for the GSC, commissions, and General Synod; office costs, including rent and utilities; and other costs necessary to carry out the work of the GSC.

The 2025 budget was prepared assuming a draw on reserves of about \$820,000, which is an improvement over the prior year by \$300,000. Continued spending out of operational reserves will decrease over the next three years to achieve the goal of a balanced budget.

General Synod Council 2025 Fiscal Year Budget

The following charts show the budgeted operating income and expenses for 2025. This budget includes the four strategic priorities, the work of the General Synod, and ministry support services. The budgets do not include donor-restricted activity.



In addition to the operating budget, gifts and grants designated for specific purposes typically provide about \$4 to \$5 million annually. These specific purposes include funds for disaster relief, Global Mission projects, grants from foundations, and other projects beyond the scope of operational work.

During the summer of 2025, staff will finalize the 2026 operating budget while continuing to work toward the three-year goal of achieving a balanced budget that began in 2024. The 2026 budget will be shaped by the approved covenant shares percentage rate and projected revenue for the year. It will remain centered on advancing the key priorities of leadership, mission, and multiplication, with a vision for a future that is multicultural, multiracial, and multigenerational.

2026 Covenant Shares

In June 2024, General Synod approved a covenant shares percentage of 2.5 percent of Line 21 of the CRF, including the limitation that a church's GSC covenant shares amount cannot increase or decrease by more than 10 percent over the previous year, to provide funding for the General Synod Council (GSC), theological education, and the establishment of a fund for future General Synod initiatives. This reflects a decrease from 2.7 percent in 2024, the first year of the new covenant shares methodology. Classes and regional synods may also assess churches separately; those assessments are not covered in this report and are not approved by the General Synod.

The transition from regional synods to middle assemblies represents a significant structural shift that will require substantial investment of time, resources, and support from denominational staff to implement well. While staff continue to recognize the importance of lowering covenant shares to respond to the financial challenges facing many congregations, there will be significant cost and effort involved in resourcing this transition faithfully. With that in mind, GSC is recommending to hold the covenant shares rate at 2.5 percent for calendar year 2026.

The general secretary fully understands the financial constraints many churches are currently facing, and we remain committed to addressing those challenges with compassion and care. The general secretary continues to hold the goal of reducing covenant shares over time as a high priority. However, due to the demands of the restructuring process in the coming year, no additional decrease is recommended for the next fiscal year. The intent is to revisit this goal once the necessary supports for middle assemblies are firmly in place.

The GSC will calculate the amount due from each classis based on the total contributions received by each church within its bounds, as reported on Line 21 of the Consistorial Report Form (CRF), multiplied by the General Synod–approved percentage rate.

The change in the total dollar amount of a church's covenant shares will be limited to no more than 10 percent—either up or down—compared to the previous year's covenant shares amount. Stated clerks were able to make adjustments and corrections to CRF information submitted by their congregations until April 15. Preliminary calculations indicate that a covenant shares rate of 2.5 percent will generate approximately \$2.95 million in total

assessment revenue (including the theological education assessment), representing a decrease of approximately \$40,000, or 1.3 percent, compared to the 2025 assessment.

To find out more about covenant shares and how they provide funding to the denomination, please review the following resources on the RCA website: www.rca.org/assessments-and-financials and www.rca.org/assessments-and-financials/why-pay-covenant-shares.

Proposed Utilization of Covenant Shares Revenue

The GSC (excluding Global Mission and the MFCA) has an operating budget deficit of \$520,000 in 2025. This is an improvement over the \$931,400 deficit in 2024. The general secretary has developed a plan to balance the budget by fiscal year 2027. While the restructuring team's recommendation to set a limit on the covenant shares percentage was not ultimately adopted by General Synod 2024, the general secretary's goal is still to reduce the covenant shares rate while also balancing the budget.

The general secretary's plan assumes no change to the theological education assessment amount for 2026, which remains at \$207,500. Also, as of December 31, 2024, PFOB had a balance of unspent funds of approximately \$44,000 at its disposal.

Assessment revenue has declined significantly in the past five years due to churches leaving the denomination. In calendar year 2020, the GSC received \$6 million in assessment revenue. If the covenant shares recommendation that follows is adopted, the projected \$2.95 million in covenant shares revenue for calendar year 2026 would be allocated as follows:

- Theological Education: \$207,500
- General Synod Council (GSC): \$2,742,500
- General Synod Initiatives Fund: The fund, established in 2024, will be maintained at a minimum balance of \$30,000. If the balance falls below this threshold at the start of a new fiscal year, a portion of covenant shares collected that year will be used to replenish it. The fund will carry forward year to year unless a General Synod action authorizes the use of a portion of the funds for a specific purpose. If a General Synod action requires funding beyond the available balance, an additional assessment must be approved by a vote of the General Synod.

The covenant shares assessment of \$2.7 million (this figure excludes the portion reserved for theological education) is expected to provide approximately 58 percent of the GSC's 2026 budgeted operating revenue (excluding Global Mission and MFCA), which is a slight increase from 2024. The remainder of the GSC's operating revenue will come from contributions and grants, investment income, endowment distributions, and fees for services.

The GSC budget funds ministry priorities aligned with the GSC's Ends policies, including support for the annual General Synod meeting, GSC meetings, commissions, racial and ethnic councils, and general administrative services.

The GSC staff continue to work diligently to identify ways to be more efficient and strategic with the budget in order to meet the goal of a balanced budget, ensuring that available resources are aligned with the denomination's priorities. Planning for the 2026 budget will take place in the summer of 2025 and will be based on the approved covenant shares percentage and assessment allocations. While reductions may still be necessary, the goal remains to steward resources wisely while maintaining focus on the work that matters most.

The general secretary and the GSC staff realize the tremendous blessing and responsibility we have been given to manage the past and present funds entrusted to us by donors and congregations. We commit to careful stewardship of the funds with which God has blessed us.

Recommendations

As explained above, the GSC recommends that the General Synod approve a 2026 covenant shares rate of 2.5 percent of Line 21 of the CRF, with a 10 percent increase or decrease limit per church over the previous year's amount. Of the assessments collected, \$207,500 would be allocated to theological education and a designated amount would be allocated as needed to maintain the General Synod initiatives fund at a minimum annual balance of \$30,000.

F 25-1

To approve a General Synod 2026 covenant shares rate of 2.5 percent, of which \$207,500 would be provided to theological education. (ADOPTED)

General Synod Special Initiatives Fund

The GSC recommends that the General Synod approve the following regarding the allocation of covenant shares funds to the General Synod Initiatives Fund:

F 25-2

To instruct the general secretary to allocate funds as needed to maintain the General Synod Initiatives Fund at a minimum annual balance of \$30,000, with any unused funds carrying over into the next fiscal year. (ADOPTED)

Requested Allocation from General Synod Initiatives Fund

While the pending constitutional changes to restructure the denomination (CO 24-4 and RF 24-1) were being considered by classes this year, denominational operations staff formed a staff task force to proactively identify and prioritize what will need to be done operationally by GSC staff in a transition to middle assemblies.

This staff task force has been meeting monthly since the beginning of 2025. It began by identifying as many of the administrative changes that will need to be made and processes and procedures that will need to be altered or

redeveloped for the new structure as possible, then prioritized those changes and began to chart a path to implementation for each.

The restructuring transition will have a significant impact on a number of the GSC's administrative and operational functions. A few examples include:

- Database and directory: New change forms need to be developed in order to document the formation of new middle assemblies, their rosters, and their leadership, and any disbanding of classes. Every minister of Word and sacrament and every church in the denomination will need to be accounted for in a middle assembly; staff will need to confirm the landing assembly for every minister and every church. Thousands of database entries will need to be changed.
- Covenant Shares billing: Because the General Synod bills classes for assessments and not individual congregations, all covenant shares bills will need to be recalculated as classes are reconfigured into middle assemblies. Presuming that changes to classis configurations will take place over an extended period of time—likely several months or more—a clear and fair way to determine and track which assembly is billed for which congregation at what point in time will need to be determined and implemented.
- Consistorial Report Form and public statistical data: The CRF system is structured by classis and regional synod, so all church user accounts will need to be reprogrammed into their new middle assembly, and clerks of the new assemblies will all need accounts with access to the correct churches' submissions.
- Stated clerks' resources: Denominational staff maintains a private site for stated clerks that hosts a large number of resources clerks need to fulfill their many duties. Many of those resources will either become obsolete or need significant updates following the restructuring.

With the shift from per-member assessments to covenant shares in 2024, the General Synod no longer votes on an additional per-member assessment for each General Synod initiative with financial implications. Instead, the General Synod has thus far set aside a small portion of the overall covenant shares collected during the year in a General Synod Initiatives Fund. The fund received an initial \$30,000 from 2024 covenant shares (*MGS 2024*, p. 49), and will be adding an additional \$30,000 throughout 2025 (F 24-1, *MGS 2024*, p. 53). The General Synod has not yet needed to allocate any of these funds toward General Synod initiatives.

GSC is requesting that the 2025 General Synod approve the allocation of up to \$30,000 from the General Synod Initiatives Fund to be used for denominational administrative and operational changes related to restructuring. The wording of "up to" is intentional; the scope of the additional costs is not fully known, so if less than \$30,000 is needed, any extra funds would be returned to the General Synod initiatives fund for future General Synod use.

Just a few potential uses for this funding include:

- Hiring temporary data entry assistance to process database changes.
- Holding a second stated clerks' gathering this year to help clerks navigate the significant amount of additional work they will have and

- enable them to better collaborate with and resource one another.
- Providing a small honorarium for non-staff clerks who volunteer significant amounts of time to help update stated clerks' resources.

F 25-3

To allocate up to \$30,000 from the General Synod initiatives fund to assist with denominational administrative and operational changes related to restructuring. (ADOPTED)

REPORT OF THE GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL ON ADVANCEMENT

The advancement team's responsibility is to encourage churches and individuals to generously give of the financial resources God has entrusted to them in support of the mission and ministry of the Reformed Church in America. The team coordinates all General Synod Council (GSC) fundraising efforts while striving to develop and strengthen relationships with donors, potential donors, church leaders, business allies, and others that will inspire financial partnerships, but also promote the mission and vision of the RCA.

Team members raise financial support through outright cash gifts, will bequests, life income plans, and grants. These funds are primarily given as a result of personal solicitation on the part of an advancement team member and/or a member of the GSC staff Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) or via direct mail appeals. The team's primary fundraising responsibility is to raise money in support of the On Mission Fund. Twenty-five percent of On Mission Fund giving supports RCA Global Mission, and seventy-five percent of On Mission Fund giving supports the General Synod Council and the Center for Church Multiplication and Ministry. Your gift to the On Mission Fund makes ministry possible.

The Center for Church Multiplication and Ministry comes alongside groups of RCA churches to strengthen and support existing congregations and new churches in the following areas:

- Race relations and advocacy
- Leadership development
- Disability advocacy
- Women's transformation and leadership
- Discipleship building and training
- Church planting and multiplication
- Local missional engagement
- Next generational engagement

Advancement team members work with GSC staff in seeking to secure financial resources that enable the RCA to further its work. We seek to secure mutually beneficial partnerships that provide the financial resources to allow us to do our work well—money following mission. The RCA enjoys these mutually beneficial partnerships with Lilly Endowment Religion Department (Economic Challenges Facing Pastoral Leaders, Generation Spark, and Renovations grants) and the RCA Church Growth Fund (Flourishing Churches grants, Congregational Revitalization grants, Church Multiplication grants, and Next Generation mission scholarships). We thank God for these partnerships and pray God will open more of these doors in the future.

The mission and ministry of the RCA is largely possible because of the generosity of God's people. In fiscal year 2024, 47 percent of the RCA's total revenue was received via voluntary support (contributions, grants, and Partnership-In-Mission shares). For a brief synopsis of the 2024 budget, please refer to page 27 of the most recent Ministry Impact Report (October 2023 through September 2024). You may request a Ministry Impact Report by calling 616-541-0881 or by emailing advancement@rca.org.

The ongoing funding structure of the denomination relies heavily upon the generosity of individual donors, foundations, corporations, and churches that give over and above assessments. We remain truly grateful for all those who have chosen to invest in the mission and ministry of the RCA.

The RCA continues to partner with Barnabas Foundation for resources around estate planning, planned giving, and planned gift management. The easiest gift, and oftentimes the gift with the most impact, is the gift that is made through your estate plan. For information about how you can include the RCA in your final estate plan or how you can receive income for the remainder of your lifetime from a planned gift that will benefit the RCA at the time of your passing, please contact Daniel DeCook at ddecook@rca.org or 616-541-0840.

The mission and the ministry of the Reformed Church in America only happens because of the generosity of people like you throughout the denomination. Please consider including a gift to the RCA in your regular giving and/or in your estate planning. For more information on how to make a gift, please visit www.rca.org/give or contact one of our team members:

Daniel DeCook, chief communications and advancement officer,
ddecook@rca.org or 616-541-0840

Natalie Lopez, executive assistant, nlopez@rca.org or 616-541-0881

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Frequently during sessions of the General Synod a summary history of a bequest by Dominie Elias Van Bunschooten in the early 1800s is read. During his oral report to the General Synod, RCA chief communications and advancement officer Daniel DeCook read the following of the summary history:

At a meeting of the General Synod in New York City on June 9, 1814, Dominie Elias Van Bunschooten walked up the aisle and laid down on the table ten bonds amounting to \$13,800 as well as \$800 in cash and asked the Synod to accept the gift for the education of pious youth for ministry.

On January 10, 1815, in his 77th year, Dominie Van Bunschooten went home to his reward and was buried in the churchyard of First Reformed Church in New Brunswick, New Jersey. In his last will and testament he added over \$3,000 to his former donation, making a total gift of more than \$17,000, which adjusted for inflation, is almost \$320,000 in today's currency.

We recognize that God takes imperfect persons to accomplish his work. Elias Van Bunschooten is such a person. As slaveholders, he and his family were among the many Dutch settlers who profited from, maintained, and normalized the ownership of human beings in pursuit of wealth, social mobility, and power.

His profit comes with a great cost borne by enslaved people. The cost of their blood, sweat, tears, lives, and the lives of their children is furthered when their significance as human beings is made invisible, marginalized, and minimized through historical accounts that are void

of their contributions. Slavery profited individuals, communities, and nations and the depth of violence in slavery provided fodder for a racial and cultural divide that persists today. More than that, slavery diminished the image of God in every person. There exists a tension between the accumulation of wealth and the cost of human depravity as evidenced in the direct, structural, and cultural violence against people of African descent.

As members of the Reformed Church in America, we belong to an institution that profited from the enslavement of people. We perpetuate a shroud that contributes to an incomplete and weighted historical record when we fail to acknowledge institutional and societal wrongs, and when we fail to honor and affirm the influences of all people whose voluntary and involuntary contributions led to the formation of the Reformed Church in America.

Dominie Elias Van Buschooten's example of financial generosity may be followed from time to time by others, thus realizing the desire expressed in his final bequest; to accept the gift for the education of pious youth for the ministry. The contributions exacted from the enslaved people shall never again be replicated and must never be forgotten. It would be impossible to catalogue all the results that have flowed from contributions similar to that of Dominie Van Bunschooten. For more than a century they have made possible the education of candidates for the ministry, for work both at home and abroad. We honor the generosity of Dominie Van Bunschooten even as we acknowledge and lament his involvement in human slavery. As we honor all those whose contributions, visible and invisible, have made possible the work of God in the Reformed Church in America.

REPORT OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN BLACK COUNCIL

This report outlines the significant ministry activities carried out over the past fiscal year by the African American Black Council (AABC) and its partners. The report highlights the launch and progress of the Aaron and Hur Cohort, the development of a new catalyst for ministry, and the latest Black Church Empowered webinar. These initiatives continue to embody the mission of revitalization, innovation, and equipping AABC leaders and congregants for impactful ministry in the 21st century.

Aaron and Hur Cohort

The Aaron and Hur Cohort, a collaboration between the Reformed Church in America and Influential Global Ministries, was designed to reimagine the Black church's role in modern ministry. Inspired by Exodus 17, where Aaron and Hur supported Moses in the battle against Amalek, this initiative provided coaching, peer learning, and resources for Black church leaders seeking to implement new ministry expressions.

Participants engaged in monthly peer coaching calls and bi-monthly learning sessions focused on rediscovering historical and cultural contexts, self-assessments, visioning, and ministry redesign. At the conclusion of the cohort, participants shared tangible changes taking place in their ministries, including new church plants, digital ministry strategies, and strengthened congregational engagement.

New Catalyst Development

In alignment with the RCA's commitment to ministry innovation and the development of new disciples, the past fiscal year also saw the emergence of a new catalyst for ministry development. This role is designed to support leaders who are engaging in traditional and nontraditional ministry spaces. The catalyst provides guidance, mentorship, and resources for churches and leaders seeking to expand their impact beyond traditional church walls.

This initiative has helped churches reimagine their engagement with local communities by integrating social justice advocacy, economic empowerment, and digital ministry strategies.

Black Church Empowered Webinar

The latest Black Church Empowered webinar hosted by the AABC focused on equipping Black church leaders, marketplace professionals, and next-generation leaders with tools for sustainable ministry. The webinar structure featured four key themes:

1. **Leadership Development:** Facilitated by Elder Tony Davis, this segment explored the role of a leadership catalyst in empowering others, fostering new voices, and creating sustainable leadership structures. Topics included discipleship, advocacy, innovation, and long-term sustainability within church leadership.
2. **Racial and Social Justice:** Led by Laura Waddell, this session examined the historical role of the Black church in justice work and

- discussed strategies for advocacy while maintaining a prophetic voice. Discussions included voter mobilization, community organizing, and leveraging digital platforms for justice initiatives.
3. Church Growth: This segment explored innovative approaches to church expansion, balancing spiritual discipleship with community engagement. Panelists shared strategies for church planting, digital outreach, and sustaining congregational growth in evolving urban and rural contexts.
 4. Economic Development: Facilitated by Pastor Winfred Burns II, this session addressed financial sustainability for Black churches. Key topics included stewardship, wealth-building, investment strategies, and funding models that empower both the congregation and the church.

The panel discussion provided space for deep reflection on the historical and contemporary roles of the Black church in social transformation. Each segment concluded with actionable insights, encouraging churches to implement leadership pipelines, justice initiatives, financial literacy programs, and discipleship frameworks.

The call to action at the close of the webinar emphasized the need for continued investment in leadership development, economic empowerment, and community advocacy. Upcoming follow-up initiatives include:

- The Black Church Empowered: Strategy and Implementation Summit (half-day or full-day event)
- The Black Church and Economic Power: Financial Sustainability Bootcamp (two to three sessions)
- Clergy and Community Advocacy Training: Mobilizing for Justice (two-part series)
- The Black Church and Next-Gen Leadership Forum
- The Black Church Empowered Church Planting Summit (in-person, one-day summit)

Participants left the webinar with practical next steps and access to additional training opportunities to sustain the work of church leadership, advocacy, and economic transformation.

The following portion of the report will focus on:

1. AABC reorganization
2. General Synod bylaws statement in the *BCO* about the purposes of the racial and ethnic councils
3. The “semi-formal” conversation a small team of AABC leaders had with a small team from the GSC

Part 1: AABC Reorganization

In 2023, GSC approved a critical set of AABC bylaws revisions. We completed the transition to the new structure in 2024. Below, the AABC shares the key reasons and pieces of the restructuring. We are already seeing invigorating decisions and actions resulting from those revisions. These decisions and actions are having a fruitful effect on ministry thought and development among

the AABC's constituents.

1. The former council structure was unwieldy with a diminished capacity to deliver on the council's mission.
 - a. We could not ensure regional or youth representation.
 - b. The structure required a high level of volunteerism, which, across denominational and national cultures, has significantly declined.
 - c. The lack of volunteerism overburdened staff and a few volunteers.
 - d. GSC budgetary support for both the coordinator and assistant positions diminished, as did the support for council activities.
 - e. Historically, critical AABC work was done in large gatherings and meetings. For ministry purposes, that format no longer led to ministry breakthroughs as it did in the past.
 - f. The AABC constituency was quite advanced in age; few churches had Generations X to Z in leadership.

These are the plethora of realities the AABC faced on how its structure did or did not facilitate effective, sustainable ministry. We also note that these realities are not particular to the AABC. Many of them shape life in other RCA entities and in wider local and regional cultures.

2. Unlike the other councils, the AABC has always had three levels of membership: executive committee (typically would have 7 to 10 positions), Council (typically 22 to 25 selected constituents that met twice yearly), and Fall Assembly (annual gathering of all constituents). The decision-making power resided in both the staff coordinator and the middle body or Council. For reasons stated in #1 above, this structure waned in its effectiveness. In reorganization,
 - a. The middle body—Council—was abolished. (This makes the AABC structure similar to the other councils: executive committee and annual constituent meeting.)
 - b. Most of the decision-making authority previously held in the middle level was placed in the executive committee.
3. The executive committee membership was radically changed. While it kept the chair, vice chair, and secretary positions, the AABC eliminated the positions that required regional and youth representation. Instead, four ministry catalyst positions were created, to be filled by volunteers. The term “catalyst” was selected for a variety of reasons.
 - a. We expected each position to catalyze congregational and personal ministry per the AABC's mission statement foci: church development, leadership development, social and racial justice, and economic development.
 - b. We wanted persons with specific everyday life achievements in each catalyst position.
 - c. We desired to free catalysts from most of the usual AABC governance meetings so they could focus on catalyzing ministry among our constituents and the churches that serve them.
 - d. The three traditional executive committee positions and staff would give much support and encouragement to the catalysts in

- their ministry areas.
- e. We chose the term “catalyst” over terms like “missionary.” Missionary, while familiar and oftentimes beloved, carried certain ministry connotations we did not want to adopt. We also felt that “catalyst” would be more compelling to people of Generations X to Z.
4. The positions of chair and vice chair were reworked. Typically, the chair leads and manages most things while the vice chair fills in when the chair cannot attend a meeting. The AABC sought to increase volunteer engagement by refocusing responsibilities and considering which spiritual gifts might serve which position better. The chair takes the lead, in consultation with the vice chair, on external AABC responsibilities. The vice chair takes the lead, in consultation with the chair, on internal, administrative AABC responsibilities.

This new, reorganized structure, while still in its early stages, is yielding good results. More ministry is being done without the need for as many formal meetings.

Part 2: General Synod Bylaws

The General Synod bylaws, in Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 2b of the *BCO* (2024 edition, p. 109) states the following about the racial and ethnic councils:

The General Synod Council shall have racial/ethnic councils which express the collective vision and voice of racial and ethnic congregants and congregations as they develop ministries and advocate for policies of racial and ethnic inclusion, economic, social, and racial justice, both within the Reformed Church in America and ecumenically.

The AABC interprets that statement in the bylaws to state that the councils serve as standing advisory committees to GSC. Historically, the councils and the GSC have been content for that advisory expression of “collective vision and voice” to be in the form of annual reports from councils to GSC.

In recent years, the AABC has come to view that the bylaws specify nothing about frequency or form in which the expressions are to occur.

Over the last two years, the AABC has opted to advise GSC in other, hopefully, more fruitful ways than merely through the standard annual report format. In 2023-2024, the AABC surveyed its constituents and identified a number of actions and behaviors that, collectively, led the AABC to conclude that the *BCO* itself violates the tenets of the anti-racism policy adopted by General Synod in 2022. The AABC developed two reports to GSC with specific recommendations to help make the *BCO* more consistent with the anti-racism policy. (The reports were submitted in December, not in the customary annual report time of March.) In turn, GSC adopted most of the recommendations.

The recommendations that proposed amendments to the *BCO* were brought to General Synod 2024 and were largely adopted.

GSC adopted two AABC recommendations that did not require *BCO* changes.

One recommendation involves developing best practices from New Brunswick Theological Seminary's work to become an anti-racist institution and publicize them for use by the denomination. The AABC has learned that that work will be or is available on the RCA website and on Faithward. We appreciate both efforts.

However, the AABC asks GSC to have those best practices be incorporated into the anti-racism work facilitated by the GSC staff in its trainings and learning cohorts.

***Note:** see p. 71 of these minutes for the GSC's response to this recommendation from the AABC.

Accessing the information largely through searching the web is a passive form of supporting adopting anti-racist principles and practices. Incorporating the best practices into training and learning cohort environments is a much more active approach to engaging the denomination for anti-racism.

The other recommendation involves establishing racial equity lenses. The latest information the AABC has is that an implementation plan is still being developed.

The AABC considers actions such as this as a far more faithful, fruitful way of engaging its advisory obligations to GSC: surveying constituents, to identifying patterns, to determining what patterns to advise GSC about, to making recommendations to GSC.

Part 3: Meeting with GSC Representatives

In 2024, representatives of AABC expressed to members of GSC concerns over the closure of the staff position on diversity and belonging, the termination of three staff who are people of color via position closures, and the hiring processes of a senior staff member. The AABC called the meeting a "semi-formal" one, where "informal" was similar to a casual conversation, "formal" included proposals and recommendations for the GSC to consider, and "semi-formal" was somewhere in between, where each group can continue to work on the conversation's subjects.

The AABC representatives asked that the GSC members consider the conversation through the following lenses:

1. "Trust" vs. "trustworthiness," with "transparency" as a crucial marker.
2. To consider whether the way the Carver governance model is currently in use continues to serve the GSC and, by extension, the RCA best.
3. Determine if lines of inquiry are racist in nature or are legitimate lines of leadership and/or management.

The seven participants in the conversation agreed that the discussion was illuminating, adequately addressed concerns, and provided fruit for further work.

The AABC's summary of that meeting, distributed to its executive committee, is

available for the GSC's review. Additional steps may be taken.

Respectfully submitted,

Kelvin Spooner, chair

For the AABC executive committee members Anthony Davis, Earl James, Laura Waddell, Sharon Atkins, and Winfred Burns

GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL RESPONSE TO AABC RECOMMENDATION

At its March 25-26, 2025, stated meeting, the GSC received the AABC's report and considered its recommendation. In response to that recommendation, the GSC adopted the following:

GSC 25-28

To encourage the general secretary to incorporate the best practices from NBTS related to anti-racism into the work facilitated by the GSC staff, including any training and learning cohorts offered.

REPORT OF THE COUNCIL FOR PACIFIC AND ASIAN AMERICAN MINISTRIES

The *Book of Church Order* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 2b (2024 edition, p. 109) states that “the General Synod Council shall have racial/ethnic councils which express the collective vision and voice of racial and ethnic congregants and congregations as they develop ministries and advocate for policies of racial and ethnic inclusion, economic, social, and racial justice, both within the Reformed Church in America and ecumenically.” To that end, the Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries (CPAAM) continues to express the collective vision and voice of our constituents while supporting the rights of our people and strategizing on positive solutions according to God’s Word, for God’s people, and for God’s glory.

CPAAM Annual Consultation 2024: “Trauma to Triumph”

The 2024 CPAAM Annual Consultation took place at New Brunswick Theological Seminary from November 11 to 12, 2024, and it was a great success. The consultation began with a discussion on trauma and race by Dr. Micah McCreary, president of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, who served as our keynote speaker. The discussions focused on trauma, race, and their impact within the Asian American context. Through this, we explored ways to foster a healthy ministry and promote spiritual well-being in our churches and communities.

We were also joined by RCA general secretary Rev. Eddy Alemán, who shared valuable insights on the current state of the RCA and the ongoing restructuring process. He encouraged us to embrace the Great Commission and emphasized the significance of discipleship.

Additionally, General Synod president Rev. Joshua Scheid delivered an inspiring sermon from Mark 5:1-11, urging us to reflect on our calling to follow Jesus in this season as we serve in our respective RCA churches. He reminded us to serve with willingness, a commitment to risk, and readiness for growth and abundance in Christ.

Dr. Felix Theonugraha, president of Western Theological Seminary, provided insightful perspectives on intergenerational ministry within Asian American churches. He introduced the 1-2-1 model—an effective strategy for immigrant churches that emphasizes one vision, two households, and one family. Dr. Theonugraha highlighted the importance of allowing the next generation to grow and thrive as we continue to guide them, while also stressing the need to create a “third space” for developing healthy leaders and cultivating thriving church communities.

Overall, we were blessed and rejuvenated by this event, which provided invaluable opportunities for rest, worship, networking, connection, and learning from various leaders.

CPAAM Executive Committee (EC) for 2025

EC representatives for 2025

- Mr. Leo Poluan, English-speaking representative and president
- Mrs. Peihuang Chen, women's representative and vice president
- Mrs. Gerri Yoshida, secretary
- Mrs. Shirley Lin, Taiwanese representative and treasurer
- Rev. Tristan Lin, youth representative
- Rev. Das Rendla, Indian representative
- Rev. Jelty Ochotan, Indonesian representative
- Rev. Jae Hyun Ahn, Korean representative
- Mr. Felix Fan, Chinese representative
- Rev. Ancela Fransisca Rumokoy, ex-officio

CPAAM EC at the Racial and Ethnic Joint Council Meeting

The joint council meeting was a great time meeting with RCA staff and all the other ethnic councils on January 14, 2025. We learned a lot from each other, and we were inspired to make new disciples, especially by reaching out to the next generation. We learned how to ask for support and connect with other racial and ethnic leaders and GSC staff. We are hoping to collaborate with RCA staff including Rev. Liz Testa for the Sankofa project in 2026 with the Asian American churches on the East Coast.

We are excited and encouraged to work with Rev. Hanoi Avila and the Center for Church Multiplication and Ministry to plant new churches, innovate, and revitalize churches. We are also looking forward to engaging with Generation Spark for our CPAAM Annual Consultation this coming year to focus on reaching the next generation for active participation, discipleship, and raising up new leaders.

Asian American Churches on the Challenges with Racism and Immigration

Racism continues to be a challenge in the Asian American churches and context. We continue to fight against racism, microaggression, and discrimination. We are so grateful for the initiative of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging led by Rev. Liz Testa. This helps many of us in raising the awareness of the racial dynamics of the Asian American churches in North America and our denomination.

There is fear around immigration issues for many CPAAM churches. We encouraged the RCA to provide more support and appropriate resources for ethnic immigrant churches to address this issue effectively. We need to collect more information and resources as we continue to build communication and relationships for support to navigate this challenge.

Ministry Updates

Taiwanese representative Mrs. Shirley Lin reported about the Taiwanese churches' continued struggle due to the COVID-19 pandemic even though in-person activities have resumed. Congregants are getting older. Efforts to make

the church bloom are being made. Rev. Peter Chen is making a partnership between older and younger people. There are Bible studies in Taiwanese and English throughout the week.

The Korean ministry, as reported by Rev. Jae Ahn, stated that the Korean American churches are looking forward to forming a middle assembly under RCA restructuring guidelines. It has been hard for them to fully participate in their classis meetings due to language and cultural barriers. They are trying to work well together and are looking forward to the new restructuring to participate effectively.

Indonesian ministry representative Mr. Ronald Tinggogoy reported a huge significant growth in the Reformed Church of Metuchen, New Jersey, led by Rev. Ancela Fransisca Rumokoy, and First Reformed Church of New Hampshire, led by Rev. Jelty Ochotan. There has been huge growth for the Indonesian ministry and high demand for more Indonesian American churches and services in recent years. They are now focusing on youth ministry to reach the second generation. They are also looking forward to planting new churches in the coming years.

The Chinese ministry, as reported by Rev. Tiffany Fan, continues to grow in leading Bible studies and food pantries in New York. Cross-generational Chinese and English ministries continue to grow despite tensions over worship music, voices, and practices from different generations. They are also addressing challenges related to the influx of immigrants, trauma issues, and family crises.

The Indian ministry continues to grow, as reported by Rev. Das Rendla. He was recently ordained as a pastor in Long Island, along with Rev. Savitri Mark in upstate New York and Rev. Jebasingh Jebamony, a pastor in Chicago. They continue to grow and are looking to reach younger generations while also providing space for people to explore their faith.

The youth Asian American ministry had the annual Jesus Retreat on November 11, 2024, which turned out to be a successful and a blessed event for the youth and young Asian American next generation ministry. For English-speaking Asian ministries, many second-generation Asian Americans struggle to attend ethnic churches due to cultural differences. Despite the challenges of intergenerational and political conflicts, we continue to reach out, hope, and pray for our next generation.

Conclusion

As we look ahead to 2025, CPAAM remains committed to its mission of advocating for racial and ethnic inclusion, justice, and ministry that reflects the needs and experiences of Asian American communities within the Reformed Church in America. Our ongoing efforts to address the challenges of racism, intergenerational conflicts, and immigration issues are crucial as we continue to support Asian American churches and seek to uplift the next generation of leaders.

Through our Annual Consultation and collaborations with other ethnic councils, we are encouraged by the growing commitment to discipleship, church

revitalization, and cross-cultural engagement. The leadership of our executive committee is pivotal in shaping the future of CPAAM, and we look forward to deepening our partnerships in the denomination to support our shared mission.

We are also deeply grateful for the leadership of Rev. En Young Kim and Rev. Ancela Fransisca Rumokoy, whose unwavering support, guidance, and advice have been instrumental in helping all members of CPAAM to work effectively and courageously. Their dedication continues to inspire and strengthen us all.

We are grateful for the strength, resilience, and faith of our communities as we move forward. As we continue to build stronger relationships and foster a culture that is centered on Christ, we trust that God will guide and empower us to meet the challenges ahead, ensuring that the voice and vision of Pacific and Asian American ministries are heard and acted upon for his glory.

Respectfully submitted in Christ,

Mr. Leo Poluan
Mrs. Peihuang Chen
Mrs. Gerri Yoshida
Rev. Ancela Fransisca Rumokoy
Rev. Das Rendla
Mrs. Shirley Lin
Rev. Tristan Lin
Rev. Jelty Ochotan
Mr. Felix Fan
Rev. Jae Hyun Ahn

REPORT OF THE GLOBAL COUNCIL FOR HISPANIC MINISTRIES

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

To the General Synod Council (GSC) of the Reformed Church in America (RCA), peace and God's blessings in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We pray that our Triune God will guide our beloved denomination through its transition process as approved by General Synod 2024. The Global Council for Hispanic Ministries (GCHM) submits the following as our report to GSC for 2025.

It has truly been a transformative year, characterized by changes, innovation, and substantial growth within our Hispanic community in the RCA. Furthermore, we are pleased to announce that the GCHM has joined forces with the RCA's Center for Church Multiplication and Ministry ("the center"), now under the leadership of Rev. Hanoi Avila, our chief ministry officer. This collaboration marks an exciting new chapter for us all.

Our unwavering commitment to GSC's Ends Policy E-5 has encouraged us to re-envision our future, thus embracing further the idea of becoming a Revelation 7:9 denomination, committed "to a multicultural, multiracial, and multigenerational future engaging all of God's people locally and globally in mission and ministry free from the sins of racism, sexism, and ableism" (GSC Ends Policy E-5).

To accomplish this work, we have realized that we cannot do this alone. We must engage with the broader efforts of the center, the denomination, and the other racial and ethnic councils. Our aim moving forward is to break down the historical silos that have separated our racial and ethnic councils and create a more integrated and inclusive path forward. We believe this can be achieved by partnering and integrating in the work of equity-based hospitality (EBH), now led by Rev. Liz Testa, and the implementation of our Sankofa journeys. These journeys will be led by each of the racial and ethnic council coordinators in collaboration with the work of EBH. We are excited about this collaborative approach and look forward to the progress we can make together.

In addition to the work entrusted to us as outlined in the *Book of Church Order (BCO)* and in partnership with the center, we will be taking on a new initiative. Over the next 10 years, alongside the church multiplication, discipleship, and church revitalization departments, we will assist in developing five Revelation 7:9 classis/middle assembly ambassadors and their teams. Our goal is to provide them with the necessary training in church multiplication, discipleship, and church revitalization. We recognize the shifting demographics around many of our churches and believe it is crucial to facilitate relevant training and equipping for leadership in multiethnic and multicultural communities.

Ministry and Mission Efforts*Yearly Hispanic Summit*

The GCHM held its annual meeting in Dallas, Texas, on August 15 to 17, 2024; this meeting marked our 50th anniversary. The theme for our event was "Celebrating Growth: Empowering to Innovate in the 21st Century." More than

90 participants attended the gathering.

Equity-Based Hospitality

Equity-based hospitality was introduced to our executive team at the joint racial and ethnic councils meeting in Orlando, Florida, in mid-January 2025. We will encourage our congregations to engage in the nine EBH values over the coming year. In addition, we will be using these values to ensure our Sankofa journey is hospitable and equitable for the diverse community invited to attend.

Sankofa Journey

In 2024, the GCHM coordinator, Rev. Dr. Pedro Agudelo, participated in a Freedom Road Pilgrimage (freedomroad.us/what-we-do/freedom-road-pilgrimages/seven-pillars-of-freedom-road-pilgrimages) centering the Latino experience in Southern California. The knowledge gained is being used to help develop a fall 2025 Sankofa journey in collaboration with the director of EBH, Rev. Liz Testa. Diverse members of the RCA will be invited to participate as we embrace the Revelation 7:9 vision, share stories, explore the history of Latinos in the RCA and in North America, and build an authentic, reconciling community.

Joint Classis Meeting

We planned and implemented a joint classis meeting in Orlando, Florida, in February 2025 with two representatives each of classes that are predominantly working with Hispanic congregations (las Naciones, International Texas, Americas, and Southwest). Classes shared their needs, challenges, and strategies in supporting Latino church plants: guiding pastors' access to education (BA and seminary), dealing with the challenge of tent-making pastors while at the same time fulfilling the BCO requirements when processing calls and contracts (BOBS), organizing churches' processes, and collaborating with the MFCA in ordaining processes. They also shared their experiences in planting churches outside the U.S. and Canada.

Theological Education and Leadership Development

GCHM continues to assist pastors and leaders in obtaining seminary training through New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS) and Western Theological Seminary (WTS). We affirm the historical value of higher education, as expressed through the creation of institutions such as NBTS, WTS, Northwestern College, Central College, and Hope College. Additionally, we are collaborating with Universidad Reformada Global, which addresses four main barriers to Latino access to higher theological education:

1. Lack of a bachelor's degree and the necessary academic preparation for pursuing M.Div., MA, and doctoral programs.
2. Culturally sensitive academic training with support and coaching to obtain a bachelor's degree.
3. Affordability and flexibility of academic programs adapted to Latino students' schedules and locations.
4. Lack of relationships with seminaries that can provide structured pathways for Latino students.

GCHM also works with RCA assemblies (Regional Synod of the Far West, the classes of New Brunswick, Greater Palisades, Delaware-Raritan, Las Naciones, Americas, International Texas, California, and others) to explore ways to revitalize churches, plant new congregations, support pastors in the classis process, and assist future leaders in accessing institutions of higher education.

The number of students enrolled in certificate, BA, MA, M.Div., and D.Min. programs who need RCA scholarships continues to exceed the number of students receiving scholarships. We ask for your prayers and any possible assistance in addressing this urgent need.

Furthermore, the continuous growth of the Latino population in the U.S. and the interest of the Global South in the Reformed tradition calls us to develop leaders who are disciples that make disciples while serving and leading in the RCA.

Racial Justice and Advocacy

GCHM actively collaborates with all racial and ethnic councils and the Commission on Race and Ethnicity to promote an anti-racist culture. Additionally, we support Women's Transformation and Leadership in implementing the *Ella Es Llamada—She Is Called* discipleship movement within Latino churches in the Northeast U.S.

Prayer, Training, and Youth Engagement

GCHM hosts a weekly prayer Zoom meeting every Monday, which also serves as a platform for training and relationship-building. We firmly believe that Jesus Christ is in control of his church and that the Holy Spirit is guiding and empowering the RCA to lead and innovate in the twenty-first century. The last Monday of each month is dedicated to youth ministry, as we encourage classes to develop intergenerational ministry strategies.

Response to GSC 23-31: BCO Review for Racial and Ethnic Inclusion

The *BCO* states that “the General Synod Council shall have racial/ethnic councils which express the collective vision and voice of racial and ethnic congregants and congregations as they develop ministries and advocate for policies of racial and ethnic inclusion, economic, social, and racial justice, both within the Reformed Church in America and ecumenically” (*BCO* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 2b [2024 edition, p. 109]).

To that end, GCHM continues to express the collective vision and voice of our constituents, advocate for the rights of our people, and work together on positive strategies to address issues that divide us as God's people.

Further, in response to the General Synod Council's invitation for all councils to review the *BCO* and provide recommendations for a more anti-racist and culturally inclusive process, we submit the following:

Recommendation 1

Following a comprehensive review of the *BCO*, GSC policy manual, GSC bylaws, and certificate of incorporation, and attentive listening to our

constituents' desire for commission participation, the council has recognized a significant obstacle. The lack of a reliable translation and interpretation system has hindered our ability to thrive in leadership development, discipleship, church revitalization, and church multiplication.

To address this challenge and move forward, we propose the following recommendation to GSC:

Recommendation 1:

Part A. Translation of more written materials, especially core documents such as the GSC bylaws and the GSC policy document.
Part B. Create and fund a process that enables commissions and GSC to access simultaneous interpretation services (like at General Synod, but for a smaller meeting) and provides resources so that commission and GSC members who do not speak English can participate; lack of interpretation services is currently a significant barrier to participation.

Recommendation 2

At the end of this report, labeled Exhibit A, you will find a report to help grasp the idea of current racial and ethnic representation on commissions and General Synod agency boards. In conversation with the center, commission moderators, and other departmental leaders of the GSC staff, we realized that we lacked a reliable translation system to allow commissions and boards to operate in different languages as other institutions have and have learned to master. In our commitment to Revelation 7:9 as stated in Ends Policy E-5, we understand that embodying this commitment starts with leadership; therefore, we believe that our commissions and General Synod boards and agencies must begin to look more like Revelation 7:9, including not only members of the Hispanic Council, but members of other racial and ethnic councils as well.

Just as the *BCO* requires that the General Synod Council must include “[o]ne member recommended by each racial/ethnic council and elected by the General Synod upon nomination by the Commission on Nominations (*BCO* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 1e [2024 edition, p. 108]),” following an attentive listening to our constituents’ desire for commission participation, the council made the following recommendation to GSC:

Recommendation 2:

Have at least two members from each racial and ethnic council on all of the eleven commissions and the General Synod boards and agencies, so their membership would increase by two members per council.

Note: The General Synod Council considered these two recommendations from the GCHM at its March 25-26, 2025, stated session. The GSC’s responses and actions taken can be found at the conclusion of this report (following Exhibit A), on pp. 83-84.

Conclusion

We are grateful for the work and support of the center, our general secretary, the GSC, and all RCA agencies. We pray for our beloved RCA and are excited

to witness how God continues to work in and through our denomination. We submit this report as a blessing and reaffirm our commitment to making disciples for the glory of God.

Respectfully submitted,

The Executive Committee of the Global Council for Hispanic Ministries

**EXHIBIT A: RACIAL AND ETHNIC REPRESENTATION ON
RCA COMMISSIONS, BOARDS, AND AGENCIES**

**Data as of 3/7/2025*

GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL | 30 Members

One member recommended by each racial/ethnic council (they do not need to be on a council)

Current Analytics

Racial and ethnic representation (as self-identified on their profile):

- 3 African American/Black
- 1 Hispanic
- 1 Native American Indigenous
- 2 Pacific/Asian American

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN ACTION | 9 Members + 2 Ecumenical Observers

No specific requirements

Current Analytics

Racial and ethnic representation (as self-identified on their profile):

- 2 African American/Black
- 0 Hispanic
- 0 Native American Indigenous
- 1 Pacific/Asian American

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP AND EDUCATION | 7 Members

No specific requirements

Current Analytics

Racial and ethnic representation (as self-identified on their profile):

- 1 African American/Black
- 0 Hispanic
- 0 Native American Indigenous
- 0 Pacific/Asian American

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN UNITY | 9 Members

No specific requirements

Current Analytics

Racial and ethnic representation (as self-identified on their profile):

- 0 African American/Black
- 1 Hispanic
- 0 Native American Indigenous
- 0 Pacific/Asian American

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN WORSHIP | 7 Members

No specific requirements

Current Analytics

Racial and ethnic representation (as self-identified on their profile):

- 1 African American/Black
- 1 Hispanic
- 0 Native American Indigenous
- 0 Pacific/Asian American

COMMISSION ON CHURCH ORDER | 5 MEMBERS

No specific requirements

Current Analytics

Racial and ethnic representation (as self-identified on their profile):

- 0 African American/Black
- 0 Hispanic
- 0 Native American Indigenous
- 0 Pacific/Asian American

COMMISSION ON HISTORY | 6 Members

No specific requirements

Current Analytics

Racial and ethnic representation (as self-identified on their profile):

- 0 African American/Black
- 0 Hispanic
- 0 Native American Indigenous
- 0 Pacific/Asian American

COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL BUSINESS | 8 Members

No specific requirements

Current Analytics

Racial and ethnic representation (as self-identified on their profile):

- 1 African American/Black
- 0 Hispanic
- 0 Native American Indigenous
- 0 Pacific/Asian American

COMMISSION ON NOMINATIONS | 13 Members

One representing African Americans; one representing Hispanics; one representing Native American Indigenous; one representing Pacific and Asian Americans. Does not need to identify as any particular ethnicity or be a member of the racial and ethnic council. Nominated by their respective councils or representative bodies.

Current Analytics

Racial and ethnic representation (as self-identified on their profile):

- 2 African American/Black
- 1 Hispanic
- 1 Native American Indigenous
- 1 Pacific/Asian American

COMMISSION ON RACE AND ETHNICITY | 8 Members

At least one person recommended from each of the racial and ethnic councils of the GSC

Current Analytics

Racial and ethnic representation (as self-identified on their profile):

- 2 African American/Black
- 1 Hispanic
- 1 Native American Indigenous
- 2 Pacific/Asian American

COMMISSION ON THEOLOGY | 10 Members

No specific requirements

Current Analytics

Racial and ethnic representation (as self-identified on their profile):

- 1 African American/Black
- 0 Hispanic
- 0 Native American Indigenous
- 0 Pacific/Asian American

COMMISSION FOR WOMEN | 8 Members

No specific requirements

Current Analytics

Racial and ethnic representation (as self-identified on their profile):

- 1 African American/Black
- 0 Hispanic
- 0 Native American Indigenous
- 1 Pacific/Asian American

BOARD OF BENEFITS SERVICES | 8 to 16 Directors

No specific requirements

Current Analytics

Racial and ethnic representation (as self-identified on their profile):

- 1 African American/Black
- 1 Hispanic
- 0 Native American Indigenous
- 0 Pacific/Asian American

CHURCH GROWTH FUND BOARD | 6 to 12 Voting Directors

No specific requirements

Current Analytics

Racial and ethnic representation (as self-identified on their profile):

- 1 African American/Black
- 1 Hispanic
- 0 Native American Indigenous
- 0 Pacific/Asian American

MINISTERIAL FORMATION CERTIFICATION AGENCY BOARD | 9 Voting Members

No specific requirements

Current Analytics

Racial and ethnic representation (as self-identified on their profile):

- 2 African American/Black
- 1 Hispanic
- 0 Native American Indigenous
- 0 Pacific/Asian American

PASTORAL FORMATION OVERSIGHT BOARD | 13 Members + General Secretary

No specific requirements

Current Analytics

Racial and ethnic representation (as self-identified on their profile):

- 3 African American/Black
- 1 Hispanic
- 0 Native American Indigenous
- 1 Pacific/Asian American

GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO GCHM RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Synod Council considered the GCHM's two recommendations at its stated meeting on March 25 and 26, 2025.

In response to the first recommendation, regarding increasing access to translation and interpretation services, the GSC adopted the following motion:

GSC 25-29

To direct the general secretary to do a feasibility study of the cost of:

- Providing translation of more written materials, especially core documents such as the GSC bylaws, the GSC policy document, and General Synod and GSC materials.
- Creating and funding a process that enables commissions and GSC to access simultaneous interpretation services (like at General Synod, but for a smaller meeting) and provides resources so that commission/GSC members who do not speak English can participate;

And to report back before the next budget year.

Reasons:

1. GSC supports the idea of increasing translation and interpretation in order to enable increased participation and recognizes the importance of having resources available for those in the RCA who speak a language other than English.
2. Translation and interpretation services can be costly, and the GSC's budget is tight. Therefore, GSC asked the general secretary to work with his staff to further explore costs and scope in order to provide GSC with more information.

In response to the GCHM's second recommendation, regarding adding additional representatives from racial and ethnic councils to commissions, boards, and agencies, the GSC adopted the following motion:

GSC 25-31

To direct the GSC moderator to send a communication to the GCHM to inform the council of the feasibility of their request, and to address the underlying concerns.

Reasons:

1. The composition and membership size of the commissions is defined in the Bylaws of the General Synod (Chapter 3, Part I of the *BCO*); the composition and membership size of the boards and agencies is set in each entity's bylaws. GSC does not have the authority to add members to these bodies. That would require amending the various bylaws.
2. This recommendation would significantly increase the size of commissions, boards, and agencies at a time when the GSC has also been tasked with RF 24-6—to explore adjusting the membership size of the commissions for a smaller RCA.
3. GSC understands the concerns behind the request, and would like to work with the GCHM to address that concern in a different way.

REPORT OF THE NATIVE AMERICAN INDIGENOUS MINISTRIES COUNCIL

The Native American Indigenous Ministries Council (NAIM) was reconstituted as one of RCA's four racial and ethnic councils in 2024. NAIM consists of six churches from several regions within the North American continent: Apache Reformed Church, Jicarilla Apache Reformed Church, Comanche Reformed Church, Mescalero Reformed Church, Winnebago Reformed Church, and Calling Lake Church Plant (via Athabasca Reformed Church).

In 2023, the General Synod Council (GSC) asked four NAIM leaders and a former NAIM pastor to draft bylaws for the council: Jeffrey Botella, Nancy Gillis, Nathan Gullion, George Montanari, and Vincea Nez. After integrating feedback from GSC, the completed NAIM bylaws were presented to the 40 delegates attending the three-day NAIM gathering in Oklahoma City in April 2024. Representatives from all six congregations were present. The bylaws were read and adopted by the council. Then the council nominated, elected, and installed its first executive committee of officers. Elected officers were president Nathan Gullion (Calling Lake Church Plant), vice president Nancy Gillis (Winnebago Reformed Church), and secretary Vincea Nez (Mescalero Reformed Church).

The president presides over and helps with planning all meetings, calls special meetings, and implements council decisions. The vice president assists or substitutes in these duties when the president is absent. The secretary distributes the meeting records and shares NAIM budget updates with the council. The officers also identify individuals from NAIM congregations for possible service on RCA commissions (as needed).

On May 8, 2024, the General Synod Council accepted the bylaws approved by NAIM in April 2024. With these two actions, the Native American Indigenous Ministries Council was officially reconstituted.

NAIM's bylaws identify several key purposes of NAIM: to encourage, strengthen, and support each other; to serve God; to proclaim the good news of Jesus in our communities; to celebrate the cultural uniqueness and diversity of our tribes; and to share our collective voices with the RCA. The bylaws emphasize the importance of close bonds between the NAIM congregations, and of connecting these churches to the other racial and ethnic councils. The executive committees of each of the four councils met in January 2025 before the Mission 2025 conference in Orlando, Florida. NAIM is thankful for Eddy Alemán, Hanoi Avila, and many RCA staff and congregation members (past and present) who worked with us to reconstitute this council. Special gratitude is extended to Kris Woltjer, who added the NAIM coordinator duties to her regular workload for several months during staff transitions.

NAIM affirms its calling as one of the RCA's four racial and ethnic councils that "express the collective vision and voice of racial and ethnic congregants and congregations as they develop ministries and advocate for policies of racial and ethnic inclusion, economic, social, and racial justice, both within the Reformed Church in America and ecumenically" (*Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 2b [2024 edition, p. 109]).

REPORT OF THE GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL ON COMMUNICATION

Since its origins in 1628, the RCA has given testimony to the goodness and faithfulness of God. Today, we continue to share stories of how God is at work among us. We also share ideas, goals, concerns, prayer needs, and other information and resources. This happens in a wide variety of ways, utilizing longstanding communication channels alongside new ones.

Supporting Denominational Priorities and Sharing Stories

In response to shrinking budgets over the past few years, GSC communication staff have changed the way they work and pared down communication vehicles, focusing on the things that are most important and most valued. This includes communicating about and providing marketing support for key RCA initiatives, including RCA Global Mission and the Center for Church Multiplication and Ministry. The communications team continues to work collaboratively with GSC staff departments to serve the denomination and promote the gospel.

In fiscal year 2024, one story from each RCA classis was shared across a variety of communication channels. These stories from across the denomination elevated the diversity of the Reformed Church in America and celebrated the ways God works through lay leaders, chaplains, missionaries, pastors, small groups, communities, churches, and beyond. This story sharing initiative sought to build connections within the denomination; provide hope, encouragement, and inspiration; and strengthen and grow God's church. Ongoing storytelling serves the RCA by supporting and equipping the work of its churches, assemblies, leaders, and partners.

Resourcing the RCA and the Wider Church through Faithward

A discipleship website the RCA launched in 2019 has reached more than 9.5 million users in its first six years and continues to be a resourcing hub for the RCA and the wider church. [Faithward.org](https://faithward.org), focused on moving faith forward, includes ideas for living out your faith, reflections on Scripture, calling stories and testimonies, and resources for your church. The website contains many resources for RCA leaders and church members, but it also serves a much wider audience. In the last year alone, Faithward has reached more than 3.1 million users, from pastors looking for tools to teens struggling with their faith. People have visited Faithward from nearly every country in the world.

All Faithward content, including a monthly newsletter, is now available in English and Spanish, and the number of Spanish-language visitors has grown larger than traffic in English. The RCA's Women of the Bible study series and Jesse Tree Advent resources, in both English and Spanish, remain as the most viewed webpages on Faithward. Other popular content from the past year includes stories about discernment, practical guides for dismantling racism, and resources related to migration and immigration.

After engaging with the Women of the Bible study, participants reported new insights and inspiration for following God's call in their own lives. One shared:

Each week as I read and studied each chapter, I felt God speaking to

me to apply the truths of each lesson to what was going on in my life at that time. I was surprised by new ways to interpret and understand stories I was very familiar with as well as surprised by women I didn't hear about or forgot because they are never preached about in sermons. I am challenged to dig deeper beyond surface readings and to consider the point of view or opinions of others that are different than mine.

Stewarding Digital Communications and Print Resources

The RCA website, www.rca.org, continues to resource RCA leaders with RCA-specific materials, including creeds and confessions in several languages, liturgies, and information about governance. RCA.org is fully available in Spanish, Portuguese, and Korean as well as English.

As the RCA grows in diversity, the need for translated materials has also grown in recent years. The *Book of Church Order* is available in Korean, Mandarin, Portuguese, and Spanish, along with any proposed amendments for classes' vote; recommendations from the General Synod Workbook are translated into Spanish for Spanish-speaking delegates; live English-to-Spanish interpretation is available at General Synod; and other resources are translated and available in English and Spanish, online and in print.

A News & Resources email newsletter provides dynamic, responsive resourcing to church leaders twice a month and keeps them connected to what is happening in the denomination. Other email newsletters provide updates related to particular topics or initiatives. Subscribe at www.rca.org/subscribe.

Other digital communications and print resources are reviewed and updated in order to continue to serve the church, with a mind toward accessibility and cost-efficiency. This past year, updated resources include *Worship the Lord* in Spanish, *Building God's Church Together* in English and Spanish, a leadership workshop for women in Spanish and English, and a liturgical calendar and schedule of RCA observances, now available as free PDF downloads.

REPORT OF THE GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL ON THE RCA ARCHIVES

Reformation and Transformation in the RCA Archives

As the Reformed Church in America approaches its quartercentenary, I (Dr. Elizabeth Pallitto, RCA archivist) am humbled to preside over the four centuries of history that reside in the RCA Archives. Notwithstanding this venerable history, the Archives is also the home of current records. The general role of archives is to preserve the legal, financial, historical, and administrative records of a corporate body; however, the RCA is not just a corporation. It is a group of people called by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to do righteous works in the world. Archival records tell the story of how our faith has been lived out and chart the course for how we will live into a righteous future. At times, our understanding of this calling requires change, correcting course toward justice and mercy in the practice of our faith. As the oldest Protestant denomination with a continuous North American ministry, the RCA is always transforming.

The RCA today differs in approach from that of our ancestors in the faith, but a transformational faith harkens back to the Protestant Reformation. Visionaries such as Jean Calvin understood the ultimate authority of God, even as worldly rulers used religion for their own ends. The RCA Archives not only holds treaties with kings and governors, but also records denominational changes such as women's ordination, the Belhar Confession, and ongoing anti-racism initiatives. Today the RCA stands at a crossroads. We are called to become more welcoming and more Christ-centered, to live into the vision of Revelation 7:9, and to oppose the alternative forms of "religion" that persecute, exclude, and oppress.

These are dramatic changes; not all records are breathtakingly historical. The RCA Archives play a central role in the day-to-day operations of the RCA, whether that is requesting materials for a presentation or storing materials, including legal, financial, and administrative documents (e.g., minutes). Everyone from the general secretary to denominational staff, classis clerks, pastors, seminary students, and independent researchers can request archival materials. The records in the RCA Archives document the denomination's history and its impact upon North American history, such as the Great Awakening and women's ordination. Archival records also reveal the thoughtful processes of legislation that inform the RCA's unique governance.

Archival Initiatives, Progress, and Needs

The following highlights a few initiatives in the Archives related to the living theology of the RCA. Toward the end of realizing a future aligned with the vision of "many tribes," we are applying for two grants. The first grant is specifically for digitizing religious archives: preserving the history of our Native American missions and classifying these materials, with active respect for Native American nations. Native RCA churches, such as Winnebago Reformed Church, have reached out as partners with us in this initiative.

We are awaiting the results of a successfully submitted grant for a Preservation Assessment, which has never been done in the RCA Archives. The aim is

to steward our most vulnerable materials, which are also the oldest—the Collegiate Church records, dating back to 1639 and earlier, which arrived at the Archives from the Collegiate Church in 2022. Their historical potential makes the Collegiate Collection a prime candidate for preservation, especially since Native Americans and African Americans are represented in the earliest of these records. While a look at history requires honesty, we can encompass various “nations, tribes, and tongues” with a reset that represents our values of Christ-centeredness and inclusion. With access to primary archival sources, these relationships can be recontextualized.

Fruits of Recent Research in the Archives

Here are just a few research projects that utilized the RCA Archives that are published, broadcast, and available to the public:

- John Daniel's article on his family's role in the Revolutionary War, based upon research in the RCA Archives, was published in the *Somerset County Historical Society Quarterly*.
- Documentary research by Dexter Plato and Maria Garcia-Abadillo at the U.K.-based firm Barker Langham. Using RCA archival materials, they have created a documentary for Qatar National Library on the history of medicine in the Arabian Peninsula, highlighting Reformed Church medical missions.
- Historical Series books by RCA pastors and RCA-adjacent and independent researchers. The just-published *History of the Woodstock Reformed Church*, by Dr. William Rhoads, is one example of fruitful archival research.
- Social justice research by Shayne Aldrich, Daniel Anger, and Zachary Doe, exploring the burials of people of African descent (research similar to that of NBTS professor Nathan Jérémie-Brink).
- Reformed Church Center Fellow Mary Risseeuw shared her research on Reformed Church women in medicine on March 22, 2025.
- Educator and researcher Carin van Bodegraven, recommended by Dr. Deborah Hamer of the New Netherland Institute, researched 17th century Dutch colonial children's education for an article.
- Rutgers University faculty supervised student projects in the departments of Religion and Global Studies, leading to a conference, “Networks of Exchange,” at Rutgers University in 2024.
- The forthcoming book *Rutgers Meets Japan: A Trans-Pacific Network of the Late Nineteenth Century*, by Dr. Fernanda Perrone and Prof. Haruko Wakabayashi, illustrates connections between Japan, the Reformed Church, New Brunswick Theological Seminary, and Rutgers University.
- The digital RCA Museum is back. View digital exhibits on Islay Walden, “Ordination of Women in the RCA,” “Black Manifesto,” and a response to the Manifesto at <https://rcaarchives.omeka.net/collections/browse>.

The State of the Archives

Stewardship: The archivist is working with the finance department to steward RCA resources. The Archives has also received donations from individuals who are pleased with their archival research.

Physical storage: Ongoing progress is occurring in transforming unprocessed materials: box by box, shelf by shelf, and alcove by alcove. Off-site search assistance is improving as we work with Information Management Associates in Grand Rapids as well as Vital Records Control in New Jersey.

Equipment and building: A CZUR Pro scanner has been purchased for scanning documents and photographs. Archival work will be facilitated by construction in Sage Library of a book lift this spring.

Church Herald Digitization: Issues of the *Church Herald* from 1944 to 2009 are now digitized. They need to be indexed, but researchers can access these issues by arrangement with the archivist.

All of these initiatives are a part of the RCA's transformation toward a more just, more righteous unity (*eendracht*). From the perspective of archival history, our quatercentenary offers an opportunity to look back while engaging in new good works.

REPORT OF THE GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL ON DATA MANAGEMENT

You might not be particularly eager to read a report about data management. Most people probably don't think too much about what goes into maintaining a denominational database—or why we even need one in the first place. Please read on anyway.

Many of our denominational systems depend on the accuracy of the database in order to function properly. Maintaining the accuracy of a large volume of information across a diverse denomination with multiple levels of governance is not a small task. The denomination's operational staff and stated clerks work together to ensure information is kept up to date and that changes are made in a timely manner.

During the anticipated transition to middle assemblies, the task of maintaining the information in the database will become exponentially larger. Operational staff are committed to processing the upcoming changes as efficiently and accurately as possible, but to do that, the staff and stated clerks need your help.

Your classis's stated clerk needs to file a form with the denomination every time there is a change in the status of a minister, commissioned pastor, preaching elder, or church within the classis. These forms are how the denomination keeps its information current on the composition of its assemblies. Our data is only as up to date as the information that we have received from clerks, and stated clerks can only submit forms if they're made aware of changes. This includes changes to information for retired ministers, specialized ministers, and chaplains, not just local church pastors. If a minister of Word and sacrament moves, they need to notify their classis clerk right away—and their stated clerk needs to file that change with the denomination right away. Without up-to-date mailing addresses, important documents like information regarding benefits and retirement from the Board of Benefits Services will not reach participants.

It's always important that forms are filed as soon as possible after the change takes place, since denominational staff cannot update information until it is officially provided to us by an assembly's stated clerk. However, timely filing will become even more critical during the transition to middle assemblies, since thousands of changes will need to be made in a relatively short window of time.

To ensure that no minister or church is left behind, data staff will be providing every current stated clerk with a roster of every church and every minister (including specialized ministers, ministers without charge, and retired ministers) that is currently part of the classis according to the denomination's records. Two new change forms are being created for the transition; one will be used by current classis stated clerks to make sure that every minister and church on their roster has a destination middle assembly, and the other will be used by new middle assembly stated clerks to identify the final roster of the middle assembly.

If these forms are not submitted in a timely manner, it will have cascading implications. One of the most significant implications is for the annual

Consistorial Report Form (CRF) process. The CRF system is organized by regional synod and by classis; after the transition, it will be organized by middle assembly. Since stated clerks need access to the forms of the congregations in their assembly and only their assembly, the database record for every church that fills out a CRF must be connected to the correct middle assembly in the CRF system.

Usually, the CRF system is made active and churches can begin submitting their annual data on January 1. However, if final information regarding middle assembly composition is not submitted until December 30, the necessary database changes cannot be made by January 1. This means the entire CRF process would need to be delayed, because once the system is active, the composition of assemblies can no longer be changed in the system. This means that clerks cannot give out login information and churches cannot access the system until every organized and organizing church has been connected to a middle assembly. This is one of the major reasons the GSC is recommending that all change forms be submitted at least two months prior to the effective date of the constitutional changes.

Another significant implication is the timeline for naming General Synod delegates. Many classes begin the delegate selection process for the next summer's General Synod meeting at or shortly after their fall classis meeting. During the year of the transition to middle assemblies, this process will be delayed (assuming the effective date is the end of the calendar year, as proposed). Middle assemblies will not be able to identify delegates until they know which ministers and churches are part of the assembly, nor will they know how many delegates they will be eligible to send until the composition of the assembly is finalized and the total number of confessing members in the middle assembly is known.

Other things that will be affected by the timeliness of the flow of information include the online denominational directory (my.rca.org) and online statistical tables (www.rca.org/stats)—resources you may use for information on a regular basis.

As we prepare for this upcoming transition, the operations staff asks in advance both for your partnership in providing information in a timely manner and for your grace as we process all of the database changes. Please do let us know if you find inaccuracies in public denominational information during the transition period so that we can correct them, but please also be patient. We will be making changes, following up on questions, and troubleshooting errors in as timely a manner as possible. We also encourage you to be patient with your stated clerks—they will be responsible for gathering and submitting a large amount of information, and will also likely be assisting with many questions. One important way that consistories and ministers can support stated clerks during this transition is by responding promptly when they request information and making sure that the information you provide is accurate.

Thank you in advance to churches and ministers for providing your clerks with needed information during the transition, and thank you to stated clerks for submitting that information to the denomination in a timely manner.

REFERRALS FROM GENERAL SYNOD 2024

Response to *MGS 2024, EC 24-9, p. 43*

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 a preliminary report to General Synod 2025, with a recommendation given to General Synod 2026 for church multiplication outside North America in the RCA.

The International Planting Task Force has been put together to study the opportunities and challenges involved with classes planting or adopting RCA congregations outside of the United States and Canada. Members of the task force were identified toward the end of 2024, and the task force met virtually three times—most recently on April 24, 2025.

At these meetings, we've begun to discuss our task and start to identify the opportunities and challenges. We will continue to meet in order to more fully discuss the identified opportunities and challenges and also to work through ways that the opportunities can be realized while the challenges can be addressed. The task force will conclude its work at General Synod 2026 with a final report to the General Synod.

Members of the task force are Dale Assink (International Classis of Texas/Classis of Central Plains), Hanoi Avila (RCA church multiplication), Dan Beyer (Great Lakes City Classis), Ruggles Church (Commission on Theology), Philip De Koster (Commission on Church Order), Scott Engelsman (RCA Global Mission), Yong Bok Kim (GSC), Jon Opgenorth (GSC), Luis Ruiz (Classis de las Naciones), Andres Serrano (Classis of the Americas), Douglas Shepler (Commission on History), and Doug Smith (Classis of Canadian Prairies).

Response to *MGS 2024, RF 24-11, p. 99*

To instruct the General Synod Council to include in the GSC Employee Handbook a basic, general, simple explanation of the legal situation regarding how unemployment insurance relates to GSC staff and how non-disclosure agreements are used when the relationships to staff members are ended, and to make such information available in a publicly accessible location for such times when inquiries are made by RCA members or assemblies, for report to the General Synod of 2025.

GSC human resources staff worked with a human resources consultant to develop language for the staff handbook fulfilling General Synod's instruction. The section addressing employer-initiated termination was expanded to explain the use of non-disparagement clauses, and the section explaining the GSC's relationship to unemployment insurance was also expanded. Following are the portions that were added to the GSC employee handbook, effective October 1, 2024 (underlined sections indicate added text):

Employer-initiated termination

There are times when an employment relationship must be terminated for disciplinary or other reasons. In most instances, this is after considerable coaching and/or the use of a performance improvement plan. The GSC seeks to provide a severance package to help ease the transition and bridge the gap. Severance packages often include agreements of confidentiality and following best employment practices, typically include non-disparagement clauses. Nothing in this policy is intended to restrict or discourage employees from engaging in legally protected activity, or to infringe on employees' rights to engage in concerted activity under Section 7 of the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA). Employees who feel they have had unfair treatment have other avenues to report their experiences that does not affect their severances.

Unemployment compensation

The GSC organization is a reimbursing organization, which means it does not pay into unemployment insurance except in those states where participation is mandated. The GSC organization will respond to inquiries from the state with regard to requests for information and participation in unemployment matters and will reimburse requests from the state as they are provided. The state ultimately makes the determination as it pertains to qualification and eligibility, not the GSC organization.

As directed in RF 24-11, these additions are reported to the 2025 General Synod as part of this written GSC report to the synod. The minutes of the 2025 General Synod will then also be able to serve as the publicly accessible location where this information resides in response to inquiries from RCA members or assemblies, as directed in the recommendation.

Response to MGS 2024, RF 24-6, p. 134

To instruct the General Synod Council, in consultation with the Commission on Nominations and the Commission on Church Order, to study the size and membership requirements of the General Synod's commissions to adjust the number of members on commissions and possibly simplify the requirements for commission representation in order to right-size the volunteer requirements for a smaller denomination, keeping in mind the workload required to advise the Synod on its essential duties after the restructure and the need for commissions to be able to have at least one in-person meeting per year, recommending suggested revisions to the General Synod bylaws (*Book of Church Order* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5 [2023 edition, pp. 112-121]) with a preliminary report to the General Synod of 2025.

The General Synod Council (GSC) created a committee to do this work, with representation from each of the three named bodies. This committee has met three times so far, and provided this preliminary report to the GSC at its March 2025 stated meeting. Committee members are Randy Karcher, Neale Roller, and Greg Town (representing the GSC); Amanda Bruehl (representing the Commission on Church Order [CCO]), and Patricia Sealy and Al Plat (representing the Commission on Nominations [CoN]). Liz Brand has provided

staff support as needed.

The committee reviewed the size and membership requirement of each commission, recognizing the varying requirements of each. It was noted that two commissions (Commission on Judicial Business [CJB] and CoN) will be largely impacted by the restructuring and thus were somewhat out of this committee's hands.

Committee members wondered about several possibilities for amending the number of members and requirements for the commissions, including reducing the membership to a range (perhaps 5 to 8) instead of a set number, having the same range for all the commissions (except CJB and CoN), removing or reducing the need for specific "experts," and others. It was noted that CCO has only five members, and this group has become efficient in its work, with all commission members heavily involved in the group's assignments. Commissions with a larger number of members operate differently, and sometimes individuals don't feel connected to the work of the commission, don't take initiative, or aren't asked to contribute. Would reducing the number of members in these commissions create a greater sense of ownership and initiative? It is likely that what is needed in commission membership is quality, not quantity.

After conversation and consideration, the committee decided it would be best to compile a survey of questions designed to gain input from the moderators of the commissions. This survey contained questions such as how the actual tasks of the commission compare to the responsibilities listed in the *BCO*, insight into the commission's ongoing workload and workload patterns, speculation as to the smallest and largest number of members that would enable the commission to accomplish its responsibilities, and the ways in which the commission meets.

These questions were reviewed and refined by Liz Brand, who sent out the survey to commission moderators on March 4. The committee met again in mid-March to process feedback from the moderator surveys.

The committee also wondered how other agencies and boards might be downsizing their memberships with the changes in the RCA, and whether this would fall under the purview of GSC, the General Synod, or the particular agency. It also wondered about the need for each of the commissions to continue as well, given the restructuring.

The committee plans to continue its work after General Synod this summer.

Response to MGS 2024, CA 24-2, p. 208

To direct the General Synod Council to undertake study on spiritual abuse, utilizing resources from CBE International, Tears of Eden, and others listed in the Commission on Christian Action's report to the 2024 General Synod, as well as opening communication with My Sanctuary Healing and other RCA connected spiritual abuse professionals to explore resources that may be shared and/or developed for use in RCA congregations, assemblies, and affiliated institutions; and further,

To provide an initial report to the 2025 General Synod and a second report to the 2026 General Synod.

The General Synod Council (GSC) formed a subcommittee in response to General Synod 2024's directive in CA 24-2 to study spiritual abuse. Committee members were Calvin Brouwer, Maudelin Willock, and Eric Nichols. The subcommittee utilized resources from CBE International, Tears of Eden, My Sanctuary Healing, and other RCA-connected professionals. Initial findings will be reported to General Synod 2025, with a final report in 2026.

Meetings in 2025

- January 6: The subcommittee (Cal Brouwer, Maudelin Willock, Eric Nichols) met to outline tasks and agreed to contact the Commission on Christian Action (CCA) for further discussion.
- January 20: Cal and Eric met with Rev. Anne Troost (moderator of CCA), Rev. Leah Ennis-Gasero, and Matt Ennis-Gasero to gain insight into spiritual abuse cases within the RCA, based on the work of CCA, and the subcommittee was invited to attend the next CCA meeting.
- February 2: The subcommittee attended the CCA meeting for the first 45-minute discussion on next steps. Key ideas included:
 - Hosting a dedicated session on spiritual abuse at General Synod.
 - Providing denomination-wide support resources (e.g., counseling contacts).
 - Establishing regional response teams for handling spiritual abuse cases.
- March 11: The full committee reviewed research and next steps. A three-phase approach was identified:
 1. Awareness: Bring awareness to the topic on a broader scale, and, if agreed to by GSC, introduce the issue at General Synod 2025.
 2. Denomination-wide education on the topic: Develop resources for RCA congregations to learn more about the topic of spiritual abuse.
 3. Support: Establish long-term assistance for people who may have been victims of spiritual abuse.

A Call to Appropriately Acknowledge and Respond to Spiritual Abuse

The RCA must confront the reality of spiritual abuse, which results from the misuse of power to manipulate, control, or exploit individuals. Left unchecked, this can lead to further harm, contradicting the core principles of our faith. Addressing this issue requires repentance, healing, and a commitment to making the church a place of dignity and safety for all.

To that end, at the recommendation of the subcommittee, GSC brings the following recommendation to this General Synod:

RF 25-1

To direct the General Synod Council (GSC) to establish a six-member working group to define and address spiritual abuse within the RCA. If necessary, this working group will work with experts in spiritual abuse.

The working group will:

- **Clarify the definition of spiritual abuse from a faith perspective.**
- **Develop resources for individuals and congregations facing spiritual abuse.**
- **Create educational material for classes, middle assemblies, and congregations.**

The group will include two representatives each from the Commission on Christian Action, the Commission on Theology, and the GSC. Meetings will be virtual, with the first convening before October 31, 2025. (ADOPTED)

RETIRED MINISTERS OF WORD AND SACRAMENT

During 2024, 29 ministers of Word and sacrament retired from active service. Those who retired are being recognized by the General Synod through its endorsement of appreciation for their years of faithful and dedicated ministry in the church.

EC 25-17

To adopt the following resolution:

These individuals have loved Christ and fed his sheep. They have devoted themselves to spreading the Word and equipping the saints for the work of ministry.

Their contribution to a needy world is rich beyond measure; their record is on high.

The Reformed Church in America, with admiration, deep affection, and overflowing thanks to God, celebrates their lifelong service.

**Jeffrey Allen
Livermore, Colorado**

**Kathy Jo Blaske
Holland, Michigan**

**David Blauw
Holland, Michigan**

**William Crawford
Comstock Park, Michigan**

**Stephanie Doeschot
Columbia, Illinois**

**Barbara Edema
Dewitt, Michigan**

**Carolyn Hoffman
Holland, Michigan**

**Paul Janssen
Selkirk, New York**

**David Jones
East Greenbush, New York**

**Susan Kerr
Schuylerville, New York**

**Kathleen King
Commerce City, Colorado**

**William Koster
Ludington, Michigan**

**Thomas Kragt
Jenison, Michigan**

**Eric Lai
Edison, New Jersey**

**Jonathan Lam
Kalamazoo, Michigan**

**Lynne McGarrigan
Southampton, Pennsylvania**

**John Messer
Sierra Vista, Arizona**

**Joan Mitchell
Bushkill, Pennsylvania**

**Terrence O'Brien
Fuquay-Varina, North Carolina**

**Neal Ooms
Hollandale, Minnesota**

**Karyn Ratcliffe
Wayne, New Jersey**

**Benjamin Rivera
New Brunswick, New Jersey**

**James Robinson
Fort Collins, Colorado**

**Wilfredo Rodriguez
Metuchen, New Jersey**

**Steve Sayer
Charlestown, Rhode Island**

**Ceny Tavares
Toronto, Ontario**

**Leigh Van Kempen
Holland, Michigan**

**Arthur VanderMeulen
Granville Ferry, Nova Scotia**

**Lyle Zumdahl
Forreston, Illinois
(ADOPTED)**

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL SYNOD 101

NECROLOGY

This necrology report covers calendar year 2024.

Name	Date of Birth	Date of Death	Age
Ron Klein	January 13, 1957	January 17, 2024	67
Norman Kansfield	March 24, 1940	January 27, 2024	83
P. Okke Postma	January 14, 1949	January 30, 2024	75
Larry Suntken	June 8, 1937	February 20, 2024	86
Eugene Roberts	April 7, 1945	March 8, 2024	78
Susan Vander Wall	February 3, 1960	March 13, 2024	64
Randal Van Doornik	May 4, 1966	April 17, 2024	57
Peter Mondeel	May 18, 1933	May 5, 2024	90
John Moser	April 27, 1938	May 5, 2024	86
Gayle Wilson	January 11, 1936	May 7, 2024	88
Matthew Floding	February 1, 1955	May 15, 2024	69
Melchior Van Hattem	January 19, 1937	May 22, 2024	87
Jay Braband	February 24, 1956	June 1, 2024	68
Raymond DeDoes	January 12, 1936	June 22, 2024	88
Joan Mitchell	December 29, 1939	June 30, 2024	84
Stephen Yon	February 22, 1952	July 12, 2024	72
David Chen	May 12, 1924	July 14, 2024	100
Harlan Ratmeyer	September 5, 1938	July 19, 2024	85
Joyce Jennings	August 7, 1931	July 25, 2024	92
Stanley Vugteveen	October 19, 1940	September 5, 2024	83
Robert White	April 24, 1944	October 18, 2024	80
Harold Rust	May 5, 1938	October 18, 2024	86
Fred Mueller	May 20, 1950	November 1, 2024	74
C. Bruce Wierks	October 14, 1945	November 1, 2024	79
Jae Hong Han	April 16, 1943	November 3, 2024	82
Jack Carpenter	May 30, 1930	November 3, 2024	94
LeRoy Koopman	April 5, 1935	November 3, 2024	89
Paul Fries	October 24, 1935	November 10, 2024	89
Choan-Seng Song	October 19, 1929	November 26, 2024	95
Robert de Forest	July 5, 1936	November 28, 2024	88
Earl Laman	September 17, 1931	December 13, 2024	93
Jon Van Oostveen	1932	December 19, 2024	93
Wayne Tripp	December 18, 1930	December 22, 2024	94

Overtures

Compose and Publish New Testimony

1. The Classis of Mid-Hudson overtures the 2025 General Synod of the Reformed Church in America to:
 - Bear witness to the public and advise our congregations by means of a testimony stating our Reformed convictions on the responsibilities of our governments in this time of conflict, distress, and uncertainty.
 - Compose and publish a Testimony of 2025 using language from:
 - o The Belhar Confession: 3a and 4
 - o Our Song of Hope: 10, 11, and 21
 - o Our World Belongs to God (the contemporary testimony of the Christian Reformed Church in North America): 3, 11, 43, 52-54
 - Invite the Christian Reformed Church to join with us in this testimony.
 - Augment this testimony, in place of a Rejection of Errors, with a liturgical Litany of Repentance, to be composed as soon as possible upon the adjournment of General Synod by a team of one General Synod professor, two members of the Commission on Christian Worship, and the general secretary or his designee.
 - Instruct the general secretary to
 - o Share this testimony with its litany in a pastoral letter to our congregations, pastors, and chaplains,
 - o Share this testimony with our ecumenical partners in full communion and with the ecumenical councils to which the RCA belongs, and
 - o Publish this testimony in appropriate media.

Reasons:

1. North American culture needs our witness. Our congregations and pastors need our testimony for their guidance. Our congregations are tempted by Christian nationalism. Our members are tested by religious-political ideology and purportedly Biblical support for policies that justify harsh treatment of aliens and refugees and that excuse the use of violence.
2. We could labor to write new language, but it seems best to claim and apply the language that we already have. This would display that we are not just reacting, but reclaiming our deep historic convictions.

In response to Overture 1 the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended the following:

**ONB 25-1
To deny Overture 1. (ADOPTED)**

Committee reason:

There is good heart to this overture, but it is underdeveloped. It wasn't clear to the committee what was being requested.

Amend BCO Requirement Regarding Four-Year Schedule of Exposition of Heidelberg Catechism and Belhar Confession

2. The reverend Classis of New Brunswick respectfully overtures the 2025 General Synod to amend the *Book of Church Order* Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 11f as follows (deletions are struck out, additions are underlined; the pending amendment from 2024, which is unaffected, is in parentheses).
 - f. The points of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism (and Belhar Confession) shall be ~~explained by the minister~~at regular regularly referenced in services of worship ~~on the Lord's Day, so that the exposition of them is completed within a period of four years.~~

Reasons:

1. Points of doctrine from these standards can and should be included not only in preaching, but also in song, prayer, affirmations of faith, and numerous other ways, and not only by the minister.
2. Not all weekly worship necessarily occurs on the traditional Lord's Day of Sunday.
3. The term "exposition" can be confusing, and the reference to four years alludes to a lectionary based on the Heidelberg Catechism that is not used in many congregations. Few, if any, RCA ministers preach on the questions and answers of the Heidelberg in this day and age. Most are more likely to use the Standards to inform their preaching of Scripture.

In response to Overture 2 the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended the following:

ONB 25-2

To direct the Commission on Church Order to look at the language of Overture 2 and propose changes to the *Book of Church Order* that accomplish the intent of the overture to General Synod 2026. (ADOPTED)

Committee reason:

The committee likes the proposed wording, but recognizes the prudence of having the Commission on Church Order look at changes to the *Book of Church Order* before adopting them.

Provide Advice on Care and Supervision for Long-Term Ministerial Vacancies

3. The reverend Classis of New Brunswick respectfully overtures the 2025 General Synod to instruct its Commissions on Church Order and Theology to prepare advice to the church on issues relating to the care of churches and supervision of consistories where there are long-term ministerial vacancies, for report to the General Synod of 2027.

Reasons:

1. There are more and more congregations and consistories experiencing periods of multiple years or even decades without installed pastors, including situations where there is a contract pastor who is not installed, or even a series of them, for various reasons. The challenges of supervision in these situations are different from those of congregations moving from one installed minister of Word and sacrament to another.
2. Assuming the most recent amendment to *BCO* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 3 passes, it will be possible for consistories under supervision to then be without representation by the offices of minister, elder, and deacon for periods of several years to decades. This is already true of consistories supervised by commissioned pastors. According to the *Liturgy for Ordination and Installation of Elders and Deacons* (www.rca.org/liturgy/ordination-and-installation-of-elders-and-deacons), this runs contrary to our understanding of how these three offices function: "As the three offices of deacon, elder, and minister of Word and sacrament are united in Christ, so also in the church one office is not separate from the others. ... Together they enable the whole mission of the church." What does it mean for our theological understanding and our ecclesiology when one office is consistently absent?
3. There are already classes dealing with this issue who may well have good practices to share.

In response to Overture 3 the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended the following:

ONB 25-3

To direct the General Synod Council to form a task force to prepare advice for the church on issues relating to the care of churches and supervision of consistories where there are long-term ministerial vacancies, for report to the General Synod of 2027. The task force should include members of the Commissions on Church Order and Theology and others with contextual experience with long-term ministerial vacancies. (ADOPTED)

Committee reasons:

1. This is an expressed need, and there are classes dealing with this issue who may well have successful contextual experience to share.
2. The committee agrees with the classis's reasons.

Ensuring Diversity and Justice, Especially in Non-Geographically Bound Middle Assemblies

4. The Regional Synod of New York overtures the General Synod to direct the General Synod Council and the Commission on Race and Ethnicity to research and recommend to General Synod 2026 how the RCA will continue in its restructuring to meet and support one another in our racial and ethnic diversity, especially as middle assemblies may form by “affinity” and General Synod will meet only once every three years.

In particular, (1) how will middle assemblies embrace difference, not only among their member churches but also among churches in other sectors of the RCA? And (2) how will middle assemblies and the denomination ensure equitable financial support of churches, especially struggling churches in racially and ethnically diverse areas?

Reasons:

1. As structures change, we must be vigilant to avoid erecting invisible boundaries, either consciously or unconsciously, that deter us from a Revelation 7:9 vision.
2. In its ongoing commitment to work toward a multiracial and multicultural future free of racism, the RCA’s antiracism policy—adopted by the 2022 General Synod after presentation by the Commission on Race and Ethnicity—includes the following relevant statements (both from *Minutes of General Synod 2022*, RE 22-1, p. 235):
 - a. “Confess that our sin has led us to erect religious, cultural, economic, and political barriers along racial and ethnic lines and that these barriers have separated us from one another and deprived many of us of the right to develop our personal and corporate identities.”
 - b. “Commit to dismantling racism in its attitudes and structures in all assemblies (local churches, classes, regional synods, and General Synod).”

In response to Overture 4 the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended the following:

**ONB 25-4
To deny Overture 4. (ADOPTED)**

Committee reason:

This topic will be addressed by this General Synod through RE 25-3.

Report of the General Synod Council on the Center for Church Multiplication and Ministry

The Center for Church Multiplication and Ministry is at the epicenter of the cultural and RCA shift in the role of a denomination. Where once denominations were producers of programs and materials, we are becoming an equipping and resource site. We assist churches in identifying tools and models that are helpful for discerning ministry direction in the local context. We seek to network churches in similar circumstances that often span traditional judicatory boundaries.

The center and its staff primarily connect with regional synod and classis leaders, who have a better pulse on the needs of the churches and ministers in their purview. We are here to offer the most beneficial training, equipping, and resourcing for the churches in these contexts.

Discipleship and Church Revitalization/Innovation

Discipleship

One of the goals of the center's work in discipleship is to establish supportive training pathways for congregations and classes as they grow all generations of disciples in their faith. Over the last year we have sought to do this in three ways:

1. Support congregations as they disciple all generations entrusted to their care through a mentoring-based program called Generation Spark. This year, 40 congregations participated in the training efforts of Generation Spark through webinars, in-person training events, and a year-long cohort. This program cohort offers both discipleship training for leaders and congregational renewal efforts as emerging leaders are elevated into places of leadership alongside older generations of leaders.
2. Elevate emerging leaders into key roles within local, regional, and denominational positions. The European church planting trip is designed to identify emerging leaders capable of serving in ministry roles, and the Cultivate Renewal retreat facilitates opportunities for spiritual development. This past year 20 emerging leaders attended these two events. In addition, at this year's joint racial and ethnic council meeting, the Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries, the Global Council for Hispanic Ministries, and the Native American Indigenous Ministries Council all had young leaders serving on their executive committees who participated in the meeting. Lastly, in supporting these efforts we facilitated a listening session with 17 Northwestern College students to better understand the desires of young people as it pertains to spiritual formation and the church.
3. Facilitate regional support for congregations and classes by developing localized coaches. Over the last year we identified and trained four new coaches. These coaches are located in Colorado, Iowa, Arizona, and Michigan.

Church Revitalization/Innovation

One of the goals of the center's work in church revitalization is to support congregations as they faithfully live into God's call for their ministry in the world today. There were three key priorities for church revitalization work over the past year:

1. Support congregations as they distill their unique mission and vision through the Renovations program's seven characteristics of a thriving congregation. The Renovations program offers an assessment, online training, coaching, and small grants that support ministries to more effectively live into God's unfolding call for the present needs of their communities. Over the last year, 23 congregations participated in this program.
2. Create supportive pathways for RCA regions as they facilitate the restructuring efforts related to the recommendations adopted by the 2024 General Synod. In September 2024, we prioritized redirecting funding to regional synod leaders, in partnership with their executive teams, as they seek to listen to the needs of congregations and classes, create plans for restructuring, and begin the implementation process. The Regional Synod of New York was the first region to apply and receive funding.
3. Centralize assessment efforts to help congregations facilitate conversation around Renovations' seven characteristics of a thriving congregation. This assessment is geared toward supporting internal conversations about the next steps a congregation might take in continuing to serve its community well. We recommend that at least 5 to 7 members from a congregation take the assessment, but a larger number of members may participate if they wish. After completing the survey, congregations will receive a PowerPoint to guide discussion and will be invited to meet with one of our trained coaches.

Church Multiplication

The Church Multiplication team pursues three priorities with RCA assemblies. These priorities are also our mission and vision for 2025.

The three crucial priorities of the center's church multiplication work are:

1. Disciples who can make other disciples. The first priority in church multiplication is to develop disciples who have a deep understanding of the gospel and are equipped to share it with others. These disciples should be trained to effectively make disciples themselves, following the model of Jesus' ministry.
2. Church Growth. The second priority is to focus on the growth and expansion of existing churches. This includes intentional efforts to reach out to the community, invite new people to church, and provide excellent worship experiences and relevant teaching, as well as developing strategies to assimilate new believers into the church community and help them mature in their faith.
3. Church Health. The third priority is to ensure the spiritual health and maturity of the church. This involves cultivating a strong foundation of biblical teachings, maintaining unity and healthy relationships within

the church body, and fostering an atmosphere of love, grace, and accountability.

RCA Church Multiplication is also very involved in helping RCA assemblies to plant and adopt churches.

In recent years we have seen an explosion of growth through both church planting and adoption. Both church planters and existing congregations are reaching out to the Church Multiplication team seeking partnership with and membership in the RCA.

Many of these new churches are located outside the U.S. and Canada. Central and South America are predominant; there are also requests from Africa and Europe. RCA staff are not soliciting these planters or churches—they are coming to us. Or perhaps we should say that God is bringing more international churches to the RCA as we become an expression of Revelation 7:9 and the global church of Jesus Christ.

Revelation 7:9

Equity-Based Hospitality

Equity-based hospitality (EBH) is the biblical practice of welcoming both friends and strangers in generous, kind, respectful, flexible, *barrier-free* ways. It takes people's needs into account so they can find space to truly belong, live into their God-given gifts and callings, and contribute to the body of Christ. This practice embraces the mutual hospitality of guest and host and can be readily adapted to build beloved community anywhere and anytime.

The nine values of equity-based hospitality:

1. Sense of belonging and ability to contribute
2. Access for all
3. Intentional diversity
4. Authenticity, vulnerability, and humility
5. Trust
6. Care for content and context
7. Attention to power dynamics
8. Prioritizing the needs of others
9. Respecting participation levels

There are a number of EBH resources for faith communities and leaders. A self-guided study is available through Faithward (www.faithward.org/equity-based-hospitality-study). Several interactive equipping events facilitated by the EBH director and team are also available: an introductory workshop (1 to 2 hours) and a deeper dive retreat (1 to 2 days).

An EBH framework has been created for Sankofa journeys, and was introduced to the racial and ethnic councils at the joint meeting of their executive teams in Orlando, Florida, in January 2025. In addition, EBH workshops and retreats have been held at churches in New York and West Michigan.

The Dismantling Racism Prayer ministry is in its fifth year. It meets virtually on the second Tuesday of the month from September through May. This year's gatherings have been deeply prayerful, drawing dozens of diverse leaders committed to dismantling the sin of racism and all forms of oppression. Sessions are led by co-chairs Rev. Nancy Boote and Rev. Dr. Micheal Edwards and the planning team: Rev. Dwayne Jackson, Elder Cynthia Peters, Rev. Dr. Joanne Van Sant, Rev. Dr. Gordon Wiersma, and Rev. Liz Testa, staff liaison, with occasional guest speakers.

Women's Transformation and Leadership

Women's Transformation and Leadership (WTL) helps the RCA pursue the vision for the full inclusion of women's gifts, influence, and leadership in all areas of the church and beyond. This "both/and" ministry encompasses the She Is Called/Ella Es Llamada ministry, designed to encourage, equip, and empower women to live into their God-given gifts and callings, and Building God's Church Together, which equips faith communities to create healthy environments where men and women of diverse backgrounds can freely and fully serve together and flourish in ministry.

Highlights of the past year include:

- A NYC-area Honoring Our Stories retreat, co-hosted by the Classis of Brooklyn and Flatlands Reformed Church in Brooklyn, New York, with 110 women in attendance from over a dozen RCA and ecumenical churches from as far away as New Hampshire and Maryland.
- 22 diverse RCA leaders attended Christians for Biblical Equality's conference "Tell Her Story" in Denver, Colorado. Pastors Karla and Israel Camacho were worship leaders, Mescalero Reformed Church members served communion and offered prayer and singing in the Apache language, and WTL director Rev. Liz Testa was honored to preach and offer a workshop.
- A group of 15 women went on a global experience mission trip to Cusco, Peru, to visit missionaries Sandy and Albino Rodriguez and the students and families of Casa del Maestro. The women led interactive spoken word and creative drama workshops, Bible study, worship, a panel on overcoming obstacles, and a Q&A with Quechua parents (with simultaneous interpretation in three languages!). The team was able to help the Rodriguezes attend Mission 2025 and hosted a well-attended breakfast that shared about the trip and the amazing work being done in Cusco.
- The She Is Called Women of the Bible Study Series, volume 4, received its final edits and was launched in time for Women in Ministry Sunday on May 19, 2025. It is available in English and Spanish, with a virtual master class planned for the summer of 2025. We thank our editors, Rev. April Fiet and Dr. Travis West; artist Crystal Wright; the diverse, faithful authors; and the RCA communication team for pouring into this labor of love. Volumes 1 to 3 have been used by hundreds of church groups and reached more than 2.4 million people digitally around the world.
- The celebration of five decades of women in ordained ministry continues with dedicated events and WTL representation at ordination

- and installation services.
- 2025 marks the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Women's Board of Foreign Missions. The celebration started at Mission 2025, where the She Is Called booth had historical books and a limited-edition missionaries "&Me" t-shirt along, and a touching moment honoring the anniversary took place at the opening plenary. In March, the annual virtual Women's Stories Day co-hosted with the Reformed Church Center at NBTS centered on women in mission, and a robust web resource has been curated in partnership with Global Mission, the Commission on History, the Commission for Women, and the RCA Archives. We commend the webpage to churches so they can hold their own celebrations honoring women missionaries and the women's church groups that supported them.
- This year, the Building God's Church Together Bible study's second edition was published and the male allyship project premiered as a three-part series: a leaders' round table, a virtual summit, and a small group learning community. These online events included 55 men from 48 churches and focused on equipping them to be better allies to their sisters in ministry for the purpose of creating healthy partnerships so everyone's gifts can flourish.

Sankofa Journeys

Sankofa is a powerful concept that emphasizes the importance of understanding our past to navigate our future. A Sankofa journey increases one's awareness, understanding, and sensitivity for past struggles, victories, and continuing racist oppression existing in the U.S. Sankofas are journeys of spiritual transformation, of personal and corporate change. They are a critical component of Christian discipleship, equipping participants to pursue biblical justice and become ambassadors of reconciliation in and outside the church.

The RCA's Sankofas are designed to:

- Explore historical narratives
- Foster racial reconciliation
- Build authentic multicultural, multiethnic community
- Inspire heart transformation leading to meaningful action

In compliance with RE 22-2 (*MGS 2022*, p. 237), the center's Rev. 7:9 department is working on Sankofa planning, design, and implementation under the supervision and guidance of the equity-based hospitality director, Rev. Liz Testa, led by council coordinators and their teams, and in consultation with CORE. Equity-based hospitality's nine values and best practices will be embedded into each journey to ensure that they are authentically diverse and welcoming to all.

Projected Sankofa timeline:

2025

- She is Called/NAIM Sankofa journey to Mescalero, New Mexico, August 7-11, 2025
- AABC Freedom Ride Sankofa journey to southern civil rights sites, August 21-25, 2025
- GCHM Sankofa journey to the U.S./Mexico border with Frontera de Gracia, November 2025 (dates TBA)

2026

- CPAAM Sankofa journey to Asian communities around New York City
- Disability Concerns Sankofa journey to ADA historical sites and RCA congregations devoted to serving people with disabilities
- Dismantling Racism Prayer Ministry Sankofa journey centered on racial healing and reconciliation

Disability Concerns

Disability Concerns exists to help further the RCA along the journey to ensuring that everybody belongs and everybody serves. To that end, the ministry is working to have regional advocates that help ensure this goal. Resources and training are made available through quarterly training opportunities and monthly newsletters. The quarterly trainings are also designed to be times of connection. The goals of Disability Concerns going forward are to have training around specific topics as well as regional connection events.

Racial and Ethnic Councils

Note: While the racial and ethnic councils themselves are advisory bodies of the General Synod Council, their staff coordinators' work is part of the Center for Church Multiplication and Ministry.

Pacific and Asian American Ministries (CPAAM)

CPAAM is a uniquely diverse group that comes from many different countries in Asia: China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, India, Thailand, Indonesia, and more. CPAAM members speak many different languages and dialects. CPAAM's primary focus is to lift up the needs and gifts of the CPAAM community, to represent Pacific and Asian Americans before the assemblies of the RCA, to empower CPAAM churches and pastors to be full participants in the RCA's goals and vision, and to advocate for full inclusion of Pacific and Asian Americans in all areas of denominational life. It is becoming clear that CPAAM must play a prophetic and connecting role in interpreting and applying the RCA's goals and vision to the specific context of Asian American congregations and leaders. The year 2024-2025 has been a good and blessed one as CPAAM has been able to connect with all the staff of the center through the annual CPAAM consultation meeting, executive committee meetings, and the participation of CPAAM members and congregations in many resourceful programs and events that were held by various departments of the center.

Global Council for Hispanic Ministries (GCHM)

GCHM reports a transformative year marked by growth, innovation, and collaboration within the RCA. Partnering with the Center for Church Multiplication and Ministry under Rev. Hanoi Avila, GCHM is working toward a Revelation 7:9 vision of a multicultural, multiracial, and multigenerational denomination. Key initiatives include the annual Hispanic Summit, the promotion of equity-based hospitality, and the development of a Sankofa journey highlighting Latino contributions to the RCA. Additionally, GCHM supports theological education through partnerships with seminaries and universities, addressing barriers for Latino students. The council remains committed to racial justice, youth engagement, and prayer, advocating for inclusive policies and greater participation of ethnic councils in RCA leadership. GCHM also submitted recommendations to the General Synod Council regarding improved translation services and expanded racial and ethnic representation on RCA commissions, boards, and agencies to foster a more inclusive and equitable denomination.

African American Black Council (AABC)

Over the past year, the African American Black Council (AABC) has entered a new season of growth and renewal, marked by the formation of a dynamic executive team and the launch of Catalyst, leadership development, church growth, economic development, and racial and social justice initiatives aimed at equipping emerging Black leaders and constituents within the Reformed Church in America.

The newly established executive team has brought fresh energy and vision to AABC's work, ensuring greater strategic alignment and sustainability. With a strong emphasis on connection, service, and leadership development, this team has worked to expand AABC's impact, fostering deeper engagement with Black churches across the denomination.

The past year we saw some of our constituents become ordained as ministers of Word and sacrament, serve on several commissions, and participate in our East Coast-focused leadership cohort called the Aaron and Hur Cohort.

A significant highlight of the year was the return of the AABC Fall Gathering, held at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, our first in-person convening since 2020. This event provided a space for pastors, elders, and ministry leaders to reconnect, strengthen their ministries, and discern new ways forward together. Out of this gathering came a renewed commitment to leadership formation, culminating in the launch of Catalyst, a program designed to cultivate the next generation of Black church leaders. By providing mentorship, theological reflection, and practical ministry training, Catalyst is preparing leaders who will carry the work of the Black church forward in both traditional and innovative ways.

At the core of our efforts remains the unwavering commitment to advocacy and justice. Through our executive team's leadership, the launch of Catalyst, and deepened partnerships with Black churches, AABC continues to be a voice for equity and transformation within the denomination. As we look ahead, we are committed to equipping leaders, strengthening churches, and ensuring that Black voices and ministries thrive within the RCA and beyond.

Native American Indigenous Ministries Council (NAIM)

The Native American Indigenous Ministries Council (NAIM) was fully reconstituted as one of the RCA's four racial and ethnic councils in 2024 with the completion and approval of the NAIM bylaws. NAIM consists of six churches from several regions within North America continent: Apache Reformed Church, Jicarilla Apache Reformed, Comanche Reformed, Mescalero Reformed, Winnebago Reformed, and Calling Lake Church Plant (via Athabasca Reformed Church).

In April 2024, NAIM nominated, elected, and installed its first executive committee officers. Elected officers were president Nathan Gullion (Calling Lake Church), vice president Nancy Gillis (Winnebago Reformed Church), and secretary Vincea Nez (Mescalero Reformed Church).

NAIM's bylaws identify several key purposes: to encourage, strengthen, and support each other; to serve God; to proclaim the good news of Jesus in our communities; to celebrate the cultural uniqueness and diversity of our tribes; and to share our collective voices with the RCA.

NAIM will have its yearly meeting on April 28 to 30, 2025, in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The six churches will spend time together in worship, meetings, and at the First Americans Museum (FAMok.org), where we hope the galleries and exhibits will help to deepen our conversations about who we are as Native and Indigenous people and who we are in Christ.

Report of the General Synod Council on Global Mission

Working together to share God's love with the world

RCA Global Mission exists to strengthen and grow the global church by supporting ministries of compassion, developing leaders, and sharing the good news. Our goal is to provide engagement opportunities for RCA churches to partner with global churches in ways that are collaborative and mutually meaningful that help us all to live and love like Jesus.

Stories of God's Faithfulness

You Gave Academic Recovery to Kids in the Bahamas

After Hurricane Dorian devastated the schools in Abaco, Bahamas, and the COVID-19 pandemic delayed recovery, the damage went beyond buildings. Many students were out of school for three years, causing a significant decline in academic performance. The Academic Recovery for Kids (ARK) program was created in partnership with Many Hands to address this crisis, offering essential reading and math skills to children who are behind. Thanks to the generosity of churches and individuals in the RCA, students are showing remarkable progress. Children like Makayla, Janique, and Parasha achieved perfect reading scores since starting the program. Your support is rebuilding the futures of one child and family at a time.

You're Strengthening the Church in Cuba

The church in Cuba has been struggling for a long time. For the last four years, you've made it possible for RCA missionary Martha Amaro and her Children and Worship team to share the gospel in Cuba and build up the next generation of leaders. In partnership with the Reformed Church in Cuba, this team has made an annual trip to train leaders in Children and Worship programming and lead a summer Bible school program. You've helped meet the basic needs of the community, provide moral support to church leadership, and offer spiritual care resources to a church that has faced persecution and a lack of leaders and resources. Thank you for strengthening and growing the church in Cuba.

You Supported Survivors of Human Trafficking in Canada

At Restorations Second Stage Homes, survivors of human trafficking and exploitation are supported and encouraged as they work through the processes of healing and recovery. In 2024, RCA mission partner Jennifer Lucking and her Restorations team, through your support, were able to house four survivors at Nancy's House. That's four survivors of human trafficking who now have a safe place to live and access to resources and support as they work hard toward self-sufficiency. In 2024, you also made it possible for five survivors to have employment opportunities where they further developed their skills and were fairly compensated for their lived experience and expertise through Restorations Peer Advocacy programming. Thank you!

You're Aiding the Growth of the Church in Turkey

Note: Due to the sensitive area in which they work, identifying information about these mission personnel is omitted.

Over the past two decades, RCA Global Mission, through the faithful support of churches and individuals like you, has partnered with a local church in Turkey to help them grow and reach communities in their area. These biblical cities, home to some of the first Christians, are now seeing the first churches in centuries sprout up. This work is bearing tremendous fruit as the church has now planted several other worshiping communities and is currently looking to find new ways to reach communities that are even further away from their city. God has blessed this church with amazing leaders and has put it on their hearts to be sent out to plant their own churches. In what often feels like a dark reality for Christians in Turkey, you are aiding in the growth of the church. Thank you!

You're Breaking Cycles of Dependency in Kenya

As recently as 2016, the Pokot in Kenya were dependent on the RCA to provide food relief at a cost of \$18,000 per year. Now, through a church and community mobilization training that RCA churches and individuals helped make possible, the community is becoming more food secure. The training is also helping local Christians see how the gospel is relevant to every aspect of their lives via the teachings of asset-based community principles from the Bible.

Because of this training, Christine Cheposetem, a member of an Africa Inland Church in the Pokot community, has been empowered to mobilize her resources and has transformed a portion of her small farm to sorghum—a more drought resistant crop. Thanks to the proceeds, she's been able to pay for her daughter's school fees, paving the way for a brighter future.

You Provided Trauma Healing for South Sudanese Refugees

In 2024, you helped raise nearly \$116,000 to support South Sudanese refugees in camps in Arua, Uganda, through access to faith-based trauma healing training. Since 2013, armed conflicts and violence in South Sudan have left many internally displaced and forced to flee to neighboring countries. Your support has made it possible for RCA Global Mission partner RECONCILE to help displaced people take steps toward healing, improve relationships with their host communities, and develop leaders to run training among their peers.

Erminia Ayia, a beneficiary, found strength through a RECONCILE training after experiencing trauma. She now runs a small tea business, supporting herself and her grandchildren. Despite the challenges faced by 1.4 million refugees in Uganda, the support from the RCA has provided hope and opportunities for healing and self-sufficiency for years to come. Thank you!

You're Welcoming Migrants in South Korea

While migration is often seen as a pathway to a better life, for migrant workers in South Korea it also comes with new challenges, like navigating a new culture that many have never faced before. Your support of the Osan Migration Ministry Center, run by Pastor E. Galang and Chang Won Jang, makes it possible to

serve the migrant community through the sharing of the gospel in word and deed. The RCA's support makes it possible for the center to offer vital services including shelter, labor counseling, language and culture training, and medical assistance. All of this work is aimed at helping those who may not have yet encountered Jesus Christ experience his love and grace in tangible ways.

You're Fostering Growth of the Chinese Church in Thailand

Note: Due to the sensitive area in which they work, identifying information about these mission personnel is omitted.

In the 1840s, the RCA planted the first Protestant church in Amoy (Xiamen), China. Today, a new initiative echoes this work through the planting of a Mandarin ministry congregation in Thailand. Your support has made it possible for RCA missionaries to lead tailored worship services, preach, and conduct Bible studies for Chinese attendees. They also disciple local and international Chinese Christians and provide cross-cultural training for students. The Mandarin ministry in Thailand continues RCA Global Mission's commitment to Chinese-language gospel ministry, fostering community growth and leadership among Chinese Christians in the region.

Partnership-in-Mission (PIM) Shares

The mission personnel and staff of RCA Global Mission would like to express appreciation to the churches and individuals of the Reformed Church in America who so generously support our mission programs. The RCA mission program is supported almost entirely by contributions and Partnership-in-Mission (PIM) shares. Without you, there would be no RCA Global Mission.

The Reformed Church in America has more than 80 active partnerships in more than 40 countries around the world. There are 43 missionaries and 46 partner personnel (partner personnel are employed by the partner but supported through RCA Partnership-in-Mission shares). These mission personnel were supported by 472 churches (347 of them through Partnership-in-Mission shares) and 705 individual donors (111 of them through Partnership-in-Mission shares). There are over 120 active projects, including disaster response and projects of compassion. These projects were supported by gifts from 216 churches and 552 individual donors.

Global Mission proposes that the value of a full Partnership-in-Mission share increase from \$6,900 (which has been the rate since 2022) to \$7,000 for 2026. We are asking that every RCA congregation that does not currently support an RCA missionary with a PIM share consider taking on a full or partial share of support. Learn more at www.rca.org/pim.

GM 25-1

To increase the value of a full Partnership-in-Mission (PIM) share to \$7,000 for 2026; and further, to encourage every RCA congregation that does not currently support an RCA missionary through a PIM share to consider taking on a full or partial share of support. (ADOPTED)

Transitions in Mission Personnel*Jeremy and Susan Beebout*

Jeremy and Susan Beebout faithfully served with the Evangelical Church of the Republic of Niger (EERN) for 17 years, contributing to medical, agricultural, and community development. Their tenure ended June 30, 2024, following prayerful discernment. While in Niger, Susan established sustainable healthcare models like Clinic Olivia and Clinic Dogondoutchi and trained medical students, while Jeremy led infrastructure projects and agricultural initiatives. Despite challenges like Niger's 2023 coup, they ensured smooth transitions for EERN programs, empowering Nigeriens to continue their impactful work. Their work continues through local leadership in Niger.

Gretchen Schoon Tanis

Gretchen Schoon Tanis is the former and founding pastor of RELISH, the Reformed English Language International Service of Hannover, Germany. She served in this capacity as an RCA missionary for four years, ending in July 2024, creating a space for deep community and belonging for people who had three things in common: their love of Jesus, their commonality in speaking English, and their expatriate status. RELISH is now pastored by RCA missionaries Rev. Jeff and Rev. Chelsea Lampen.

GM 25-2

Let it be resolved that the 218th session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting at the Westin La Paloma in Tucson, Arizona, gives glory to God for the life and witness of Jeremy and Susan Beebout and Gretchen Schoon Tanis and offers a prayer of thanksgiving for their service to RCA Global Mission. (ADOPTED)

New Mission Assignments*Israel and Loida Castro*

Israel and Loida serve with International Christian Centers for the Deaf (ICCD) in Brazil to provide the Deaf community with basic needs, language support, spiritual care, and evangelism training. They also serve the refugee Hispanic community that arrives in the city with basic needs and spiritual care.

Addelyn Wachter

As the Global Mission multimedia storyteller, Addy will use her passion for videography and photography to equip RCA missionaries and partners with storytelling skills. Addy will integrate photography, journalism, and videography to tell the mission stories happening worldwide and share them with the supporters and future supporters who make this work possible.

Yohannes Bekele

Yohannes serves as the director of the Christian–Muslim Relations Centre at Mekane Yesus Seminary in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. His role is pivotal in equipping pastors, evangelists, and other church leaders with the skills they need to provide a sensitive, Christ-centered witness among their non-Christian neighbors.

Sonomi Mugabo

Sonomi works with the Reformed Church in Rwanda, providing facilitation for primary and secondary school sponsorships, theological training for Rwandan pastors, and peace and reconciliation mission trips.

Deaths

This report acknowledges known deaths that occurred from spring 2024 until spring 2025. We recognize that some names may have been unintentionally forgotten, and for that we greatly apologize. If you know of names we have missed, please contact us at mission@rca.org.

Lavina “Daisy” Hoogeveen passed away on May 24, 2024, at the age of 93. Lavina dedicated her life to spreading God’s love through missionary work. After graduating from Hope College in 1952, she was commissioned by the RCA and served for six years in Bahrain, Iraq, and Kuwait, where she was an elementary school principal and director of Christian education. She also taught in Saudi Arabia, traveled to RCA mission stations in the Pacific, and spent 26 years as a counselor with the Department of Defense Dependents Schools in Libya, Japan, South Korea, and Germany. Her retirement years were spent doing extended mission work in the United Arab Emirates, Russia, Florida, South Africa, Zambia, Brazil, and Trinidad and Tobago. Throughout her life, Daisy corresponded with and supported countless RCA missionaries. Her compassion, faithfulness, and love for the Lord touched many lives, leaving an indelible mark on those she mentored.

Margaret Doorenbos passed away on June 2, 2024, at the age of 90. Margaret was a remarkable woman whose life was a testament to selfless service through her work with RCA Global Mission and the Reformed Church in America. After meeting her husband, Harvey, at Hope College, they answered the call to serve as missionaries in the Arab world and later in Ethiopia, dedicating decades to following God’s mission. Even after retirement, they served as short-term mission volunteers for several years. Through her work, Margaret touched countless lives, leaving an indelible mark on the communities she and Harvey served. Her legacy serves as an inspiration, reminding us of the profound impact one life can have when following God’s call.

Lucille Mae Van Heest Schroeder passed away on September 2, 2024, at the age of 90. Lucille dedicated her life to serving others, especially during her time as a missionary with the Reformed Church in America. In Taiwan, she led women’s Bible studies, taught at Morrison Academy and Tunghai University, was a den mother for Cub Scouts, and welcomed countless individuals into her home. Her unwavering faith and compassion touched many lives. Lucille’s legacy of love and service will continue to inspire all who knew her.

Sharon Blanksma passed away on February 10, 2025, at the age of 87, leaving behind a legacy of dedicated mission work. A nurse practitioner by training, Sharon served in various roles, including as director of Hope College's student health clinic. Her most impactful work was running a mission clinic in Alale, Kenya, for 11 years with her husband, Emery. Sharon's commitment to service extended beyond her professional life, as she was an active church member, elder, and youth group leader. Her passion for mission work was evident in both her career and personal life, touching countless lives through her compassionate care and leadership.

Report of Words of Hope

At Words of Hope, we believe that all people in all places should have access to God's Word. Through this ministry, people are connected daily to the truths of Scripture so they can grow in faith and share it worldwide.

Words of Hope works to proclaim the gospel in all ways possible, ensuring that people in remote locations, persecuted regions, and diverse language groups can hear the good news of Christ in their own heart languages. Where poverty, geography, or persecution hinder the spread of the gospel, we equip indigenous Christian leaders to minister effectively in their own language and context.

Words of Hope's regions of ministry include Albania, Bhutan, India, Indonesia, Iran, Nepal, Niger, North America, South Sudan, Türkiye, and Uganda. Each ministry field requires a unique media outreach approach, including radio programs, social media, text messages, print materials, and satellite television, to ensure the gospel reaches as many people as possible.

This past year was filled with growth, transformation, and new opportunities for sharing the gospel. Notable highlights include:

- A first-of-its-kind Global Leadership Retreat that brought together Words of Hope leaders from around the world.
- The retirement of longtime director of development Todd Schuiling and a celebration of his 25 years of faithful service.
- Welcoming Andy Bast to lead our development efforts, continuing the work of fostering relationships that sustain the ministry.
- A significant increase in devotional readership, expanding our reach in North America.

Global Leadership Retreat

Last year, Words of Hope hosted its first-ever Global Leadership Retreat in Türkiye, bringing together 20 international field leaders and 20 North American team members and prayer partners, collectively representing more than 80 language ministries. This gathering marked a transformational shift in ministry—from a traditional hub-and-spoke model to an interconnected web of relationships where global leaders encourage, equip, and learn from one another.

President Jon Opgenorth shares, "At our gathering, we sought the Lord together in prayer and learned from each other how God is speaking into this full-circle approach to ministry." This powerful time of worship, fellowship, and strategic planning set the stage for deeper collaboration and the expansion of new ministry fields. The retreat concluded with a communion service, led by our Ugandan director and our women's ministry leader from inside Iran—a moment that left no dry eye in the room.

We ask for continued prayers for these leaders as they seek to faithfully implement the next steps God has called them to. We trust that the fruit of this gathering will reach more people with the hope of the gospel.

Staff Changes

After 25 years of dedicated service, Words of Hope's director of development, Todd Schuiling, retired on March 31, 2025. During his tenure, Todd faithfully stewarded over \$75 million in donor gifts, ensuring that the gospel would continue to reach unreached people. His passion for building relationships with donors and global ministry leaders strengthened Words of Hope's foundation and helped the mission to thrive.

President emeritus Rev. David Bast reflects, "Todd's dedication, professionalism, winsome personality, and commitment to the mission of Words of Hope have been of incalculable benefit to the church of Jesus Christ around the world." We are deeply grateful for Todd's years of service. His work has helped bring the hope of Christ to hard places, and his legacy of faithfulness will continue to bear fruit. We invite you to join us in thanking God for Todd's ministry and praying for him as he enters this new season of life.

Words of Hope is pleased to announce that Andy Bast has joined the development team. Andy brings extensive experience from his previous role as director of development and church partnerships at Western Theological Seminary. His deep connection to Words of Hope runs through three generations, as the son of president emeritus Rev. David Bast and grandson of former broadcast minister Dr. Henry Bast.

President Jon Oppenorth shares, "Andy's focus on relationships and attentiveness to the Holy Spirit's guidance will help us expand our mission in meaningful and impactful ways." Andy is eager to meet supporters, staff, and mission partners, and he looks forward to helping Words of Hope strengthen its outreach and impact worldwide.

Words of Hope Daily Devotionals

Words of Hope's daily devotional readership is expanding significantly. Thanks to strategic marketing, a strong social media presence, and a revamped email system, more people are engaging with the devotional each day. Approximately 60,000 individuals now have access to free daily devotionals through these efforts. We see this devotional as a worthy investment—both in ministering to North American readers and in introducing more people to our global mission. We give thanks for how God is using these devotionals to deepen faith and reach new hearts. If your church is not yet receiving copies of the Words of Hope daily devotional, contact us at devotional@woh.org to request free copies today!

Words of Hope is deeply grateful for the faithful support of RCA churches. Your generosity sustains this outreach ministry and allows people to hear and respond to the gospel. Each gift helps introduce more people to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Thank you for sharing hope worldwide as we work together to proclaim the good news in every way possible.

Report of The Reformed Church in America Church Growth Fund, Inc.

The Reformed Church in America Church Growth Fund, Inc. (CGF) is a nonprofit corporation that functions under the supervision of the RCA General Synod. The CGF supports the work of the denomination by making affordable-rate loans to current and former RCA churches and related agencies for the purchase, construction, and improvement of buildings and other properties used in ministries. The CGF offers unsecured loans up to \$200,000 and secured borrowing up to \$7,500,000.

As a primary source of funding for loans, the CGF sells interest-bearing investments called savings certificates. The CGF offers two types of savings certificates:

1. Term savings certificates, which are available in maturities from one to ten years.
2. Demand savings certificates, which allow the investment and redemption of amounts in the certificate at any time (subject to the limits described in the CGF Offering Circular).

As a way to support the denomination, the CGF contributes a portion of its earnings annually to the General Synod Council (GSC), which awards the funds as ministry grants for the following purposes:

1. **Church Multiplication**
Provides grant funding for RCA church plants. In the fiscal year ending September 30, 2024 (FY24), the CGF contributed \$400,000.
2. **Revitalization**
Provides grant funding (a) to equip RCA churches and leaders to innovate and revitalize, and (b) for Flourishing Churches grants, which are awarded to RCA churches that have thriving ministries but lack the financial resources for facility improvements. In FY24, the CGF contributed a total of \$470,000.
3. **Next Generation Missional Engagement Fund (Next Gen)**
Provides scholarships to middle school–age children through post-college young adults to cover part of the cost of mission trips and internships, disaster response work, vision and study tours, and missional training experiences. In FY24, the CGF contributed \$30,000.

More specific information on CGF loans and how to invest in savings certificates is available on the CGF website at www.rca.org/cgf.

Assets

In FY24, total assets increased by \$63,175 to \$79.5 million. CGF assets at the end of FY24 consisted primarily of loans of nearly \$45 million and cash and investments of \$34.6 million. The CGF funded new loans of \$1.4 million in FY24 while receiving \$5.4 million in loan principal payments from existing borrowers.

The overall financial health of CGF church borrowers remains strong. This has resulted in few delinquent loans in the CGF portfolio and has contributed to

the CGF continuing its long history of never having experienced a loan principal loss. We continue to have a few church borrowers that are challenged to repay their loans, and the CGF works with these affected congregations to ensure viable continuance of their ministries.

Savings Certificates

At the end of FY24, CGF investors held savings certificates of nearly \$24.3 million, representing a decrease of \$4.1 million from the previous fiscal year end. In FY24, the CGF received \$1.9 million in new savings certificate investments and reinvested interest of \$700,000, which was offset by redemptions of \$6.7 million. Funds received from investment in savings certificates are used by the CGF to make loans to current and former RCA churches throughout the United States and Canada.

CGF savings certificates are state-regulated securities. Currently the CGF is authorized to sell savings certificates in 28 states, which are listed on its website at www.rca.org/cgf. Rates of interest paid on savings certificates, along with other information on the CGF and how to invest in savings certificates, can be found on the website.

Earnings

In FY24, the CGF's change in net assets from operations (net operating income plus realized gains) was \$1.6 million compared to \$2.1 million the previous year (FY23). The change in net assets for FY24 was down 23 percent from the previous fiscal year (due to a non-recurring gift of \$450,000 that was received in FY23 coupled with recording credit losses of \$246,000 in FY24). The recording of credit loss was not due to an actual loss, but instead was due to a new accounting standard that required the CGF to transition from an incurred loss model of credit risk assessment to the new Current Expected Credit Loss Model ("CECL") to determine the adequacy of the amount held in reserve for loan losses. Implementation of this model is primarily for accounting purposes. Excluding these two amounts, our change in net assets from operations would be up 14 percent compared to the previous year.

The change in net assets from operations was the result of several factors. Even though there was a decrease in loans outstanding by \$4 million, loan interest income increased from the previous year by 2 percent due to an increase in the average portfolio yield from the previous year. The revenue from interest and dividends received on the CGF's investment portfolio also increased significantly (37 percent) from the prior year. Investment realized gains also tripled compared to FY23. The average savings certificate portfolio balance was down from the previous year, but interest expense increased by 26 percent due to a higher average cost of funds in FY24. Finally, operating expenses increased by 7 percent, primarily due to higher office and professional service expenses. We continue to be grateful for the Ralph Guarino trust, which helps to offset costs of obtaining New York court approval for mortgaging property for churches.

Total change in net assets for the fiscal year was \$3.3 million, compared to \$2.3 million the previous year. Due to the implementation of CECL, an increase in net assets of \$660,000 was also recognized as a cumulative effect of the change in accounting principle.

The total earnings figure for FY24 is after contributing \$900,000 to the GSC for ministry grants.

Ministry Grants

In 1999 the CGF began contributing a portion of its earnings to the GSC to be used for grants to new church plants. From 1999 through FY24, the CGF has contributed nearly \$8.4 million to support RCA church multiplication. During that time, 473 New Congregation Plans have been approved for new church plants, and the majority of these new church plants have received grant funds to help start their ministries. In FY24, the CGF contributed \$400,000 to support church multiplication efforts.

In FY14, the CGF began contributing annually for support of Next Gen by providing financial assistance to RCA youth for mission trip experiences. Since the inception of the Next Generation Missional Engagement Fund the CGF has been its primary financial supporter, making contributions totaling \$534,000. Since the program has been in place, 3,031 young people have benefitted from scholarships awarded through this fund. In FY24, the CGF contributed \$30,000 to benefit youth missional engagement.

In FY18, the CGF launched the Flourishing Churches grant program under the area of church revitalization, which provides grants of up to \$50,000 to economically challenged churches for facility improvements necessary to continue and grow already-successful ministries. To date, 56 RCA congregations have been Flourishing Churches grant recipients, and the CGF has contributed a total of \$1.9 million to this program. In FY 24, church revitalization grants expanded to include grants to equip RCA churches and leaders to innovate and revitalize their congregations.

As stated earlier, the CGF contributed \$900,000 in FY24 to fund RCA ministry grants.

Financial Strength

A measure of financial strength of an entity is its level of net assets, also known as capital or equity. As of September 30, 2024, the CGF had net assets or capital of \$54.8 million. This represents the accumulation of earnings and contributions received over its years of operations.

The funds received from savings certificates are used by the CGF primarily to make loans to current and former RCA churches. The ability of the CGF to repay savings certificate investors is related to its level of capital, net earnings, and repayment of the loans funded from certificate investment dollars. CGF loans typically are secured by first mortgages on church facilities. The CGF follows strict guidelines in approving loans to make sure congregations can sustain such debt payments. While past performance is no guarantee of future events, the CGF has never experienced a loss of principal on any loan. No CGF savings certificate investor has ever experienced a loss of investment or missed receiving an interest payment.

Financial Highlights

	<u>FY 2024</u>	<u>FY 2023</u>	<u>FY 2022</u>
Total Assets	\$79,455,796	\$79,392,621	\$80,587,349
Net Assets (Capital)	\$54,810,703	\$50,877,539	\$48,582,717
Savings Certificates			
Outstanding	\$24,290,692	\$28,369,966	\$31,672,760
Number of Borrowers	79	90	98
Dollar Amount of Loans			
Outstanding	\$44,997,829	\$49,027,439	\$51,185,285
Number of Loans Funded			
in Year	9	11	7
Dollar Amount of Loans			
Funded in Year	\$1,408,272	\$3,025,856	\$1,091,112
Net Earnings from			
Operations before			
Ministry Grants	\$1,581,419	\$2,053,393	\$1,702,643
Contributions to GSC			
for Ministry Grants	\$900,000	\$633,500	\$800,000

Future CGF Activity

The CGF will continue to follow its mission of providing affordable-rate loans to current and former RCA churches and affiliated agencies for the purchase, construction, and improvement of buildings used in ministry. The CGF will continue to seek opportunities to promote its savings certificate and loan programs, both within the denomination and with former RCA churches, raising a greater awareness of the benefits of borrowing from the CGF and investing in its savings certificates. This will, in turn, allow the CGF to contribute funds to the GSC for RCA ministry grants to support church planting and revitalization endeavors, property improvements for flourishing churches that are economically challenged, and mission trip scholarships for young people.

This work would not be possible without the faithful support of the CGF's investors and borrowers. We are grateful for your support as we continue in ministry together.

Amendments to Church Growth Fund Organizational Documents

Amendments Related to Restructuring

***Note:** the next three paragraphs reflect the status of the pending constitutional amendments it refers to as of late April 2025, when the report was written.

A restructuring of the RCA's polity has been under consideration for a number of years. Work by the Vision 2020 team, the restructuring team, and others has equipped the General Synod to take a number of actions, including adoption by the 2024 General Synod of constitutional amendments described in CO 24-4 and RF 24-1 (*MGS 2024*, pp. 247-282 and 111-112). If approved and declared effective, these constitutional amendments will, among other things, result in the elimination of classes and regional synods and the creation of middle assemblies

as a single level of governance between the General Synod and local churches or organizing churches.

At the time of publication of this report, the constitutional amendments described in both CO 24-4 and RF 24-1 have received approval from the required two-thirds of classes (as required in Section 2b of the Rules and Amendments of The Government of the Reformed Church in America and Disciplinary Procedures [*Book of Church Order*, 2024 edition, p. 77]). It is not known with certainty whether the 2025 General Synod will vote to declare effective any amendments that are approved by the classes, and it also is not known with certainty whether any such declarations of effectiveness by the 2025 General Synod will take effect immediately or as of a specified future date.

If the constitutional amendments described in CO 24-4 and RF 24-1 are approved and declared effective by the 2025 General Synod, it is important that the organizational documents (certificate of incorporation and bylaws) of the CGF be amended promptly to make them consistent with the BCO as most recently amended. Regarding amendments to the CGF's certificate of incorporation, BCO Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 7, Section 3 (2024 edition, p. 73) says that “[t]he constitution or enabling document of every agency, board, and institution officially related to the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, with its amendments, shall be approved by the General Synod.” Regarding amendments to the bylaws of the CGF, Article X of the CGF bylaws states the following: “These bylaws may be amended by a majority vote of the voting directors after such proposed amendments have been approved by a majority vote of the General Synod. Proposed amendments shall be submitted to the board members in writing prior to any regular meetings, with final approval given at a subsequent meeting.”

Following a careful review of the CGF's organizational documents, the CGF has determined that amendments to its certificate of incorporation and bylaws are necessary only if the constitutional amendments described in RF 24-1 are approved and declared effective. Accordingly, the necessary bylaws amendment has been submitted to the CGF's board members in writing prior to its most recent regular meeting, and the CGF now makes the following recommendation regarding amendments to both the CGF's certificate of incorporation and bylaws:

CGF 25-1

To approve the following amendments to the Certificate of Incorporation and the Bylaws of the RCA Church Growth Fund, with the condition that these amendments will not become effective until such time as the amendments to the *Book of Church Order* described in RF 24-1 become effective (additions are underlined, deletions are stricken):

Certificate of Incorporation, Section A of Part Second

...by making loans to local churches, organizing churches, classes~~middle assemblies~~, and other

assemblies, institutions, and agencies...

Bylaws, Article II, Section A

**...disburse said monies as loans to local churches, organizing churches, classes~~middle assemblies, and other assemblies, institutions, and agencies...~~
(ADOPTED)**

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance was to vote in favor of CGF 25-1.

Other Amendments (Unrelated to Restructuring)

While determining what amendments to the CGF's organizational documents are necessary to make them consistent with the BCO as most recently amended, additional amendments to the organizational documents, unrelated to the restructuring, were identified as being appropriate for other reasons, such as consistency with current practices and terminology used elsewhere in the RCA. The amendment process can be costly, both in terms of time spent by staff and money, so the CGF believes it would be good stewardship to also implement the additional amendments at this time. These additional amendments are unrelated to the restructuring, however, and so the CGF's recommendation regarding these amendments does not need to be conditional on the effectiveness of the General Synod's approval of the amendments in RF 24-1.

The bylaws amendments proposed in the following recommendation have been submitted to the CGF's board members in writing prior to its most recent regular meeting, and the CGF now makes the following recommendation:

CGF 25-2

To approve the following amendments to the Certificate of Incorporation and Bylaws of the RCA Church Growth Fund (additions are underlined, deletions are stricken):

Certificate of Incorporation, Section A of Part Second

...for the purpose of funding church multiplication (~~previously known and referred to as evangelism and church development~~) and, revitalization endeavors of the RCA, and for Next-Generation (~~middle school age through post college young adults~~)-scholarships to fund volunteer opportunities, advocacy experiences, and mission internships for RCA youth (middle school age through post college young adults).

Certificate of Incorporation, New Part Eleventh

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ELEVENTH: This Restated Certificate of Incorporation may be amended by a majority vote of the voting directors after such proposed amendments have been approved by a majority vote of the General Synod. Proposed amendments shall be submitted to the voting directors in writing prior to any regular meetings, with final approval given at a subsequent meeting.

Bylaws, Article II, Section A

**...for the purpose of funding church multiplication (previously known and referred to as evangelism and church development) and; revitalization endeavors of the RCA, and for Next Generation (middle school age through post college young adults) scholarships to fund volunteer opportunities, advocacy experiences, and mission internships for RCA youth (middle school age through post college young adults).
(ADOPTED)**

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance was to vote in favor of CGF 25-2.

Report of the Board of Benefits Services

The Board of Benefits Services of the Reformed Church in America was established by the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) and incorporated and approved by an Act of the Assembly of the State of New York on April 16, 1923, under the original name “The Ministers’ Fund of the Reformed Church in America, Inc.” Later, the name was changed to “The Board of Pensions of the Reformed Church in America.” It had operated continuously as a New York not-for-profit corporation until 2019, when the board of directors voted to redomicile to the state of Michigan. This action was approved by the General Synod during its 2019 session.

In the fall of 2019, The Board of Benefits Services of the Reformed Church in America, Inc., (BOBS) was incorporated as a Michigan domestic nonprofit corporation. Thereafter, all operations, assets, liabilities, and contract rights of the New York corporation were transferred to the Michigan corporation. Dissolution of the New York corporation was approved by the state of New York, effective August 31, 2022.

As an agency of the General Synod, BOBS is subject to the provisions of the *Book of Church Order*. The General Synod has delegated to BOBS the responsibility to manage and administer the retirement and insurance programs required by *BCO* Formulary No. 5, to manage and administer the retiree chaplains and assistance programs, and to ensure the availability of appropriate life insurance benefits, long-term disability benefits, and any other programs or services related to the financial well-being of eligible RCA-ordained ministers and their dependents, and of other eligible employees of agencies, assemblies, and institutions of the RCA. The board has provided direction that these additional programs include the availability of educational resources and financial counseling that allow individuals to make wise decisions about their retirement and insurance benefits. In addition, the board wants to ensure that debt relief and other grants are available to RCA-ordained ministers and commissioned pastors who have expressed a long-term commitment to the RCA.

The board met on October 10, 2024, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and on May 21 and 22, 2025, over Zoom. The composition of the board is as follows: the general secretary of the General Synod, one member of the General Synod Council (GSC) with interest and experience in the work of the Board of Benefits Services, one person designated by the GSC from among its moderator or the president or vice president of the General Synod, and at least five and no more than thirteen directors-at-large with professional experience in law, retirement services, financial planning, and insurance and ministers. The board is supported by the Investment Advisory Committee and the Audit Committee, both joint standing committees representing the General Synod Council, BOBS, and the Church Growth Fund, as well as external retirement consultants from Creative Planning Retirement Services.

BOBS supports those in ministry in the RCA. In order to provide this support, BOBS must adhere to insurance regulations that require levels of participation so that the programs can be sustained over time and in a cost-efficient manner. BOBS also operates within the laws governing insurance and retirement

programs and must adhere to the tax codes of the U.S. Internal Revenue Service. BOBS is equally committed to fulfilling the mandates from General Synod and to maintaining high standards as we serve those who serve.

Required Benefits for Ministers

As stated in the *BCO*, a consistory shall fulfill the provisions of the call form (Formulary No. 5) for retirement and insurance for all ministers serving the church under call or contract by paying the stipulated contributions to the RCA 403(b) Retirement Program. In addition, consistories must provide benefits including group life insurance, long-term disability insurance, and medical insurance for a minister and his or her immediate family (*BCO* Appendix, Formulary No. 5, pp. 138-139 [2024 edition]). The requirement also states that if the minister and his or her family elect medical coverage through a spouse's employer-sponsored group plan, the church will compensate for "any medical premium costs incurred by [the pastor's] immediate family, up to the premium cost of the Reformed Benefits Association plan meeting the minimum standards stipulated for the year compensated" (Formulary No. 5). These required benefits apply equally to full-time and part-time ministers under call or contract.

There are, however, a few exceptions to this general rule. The *BCO* states that "a consistory shall fulfill the provisions of the call form (Appendix, Formulary No. 5) for retirement and insurance for all ministers serving the church under call or contract unless (a) regarding retirement, the minister is covered by the retirement plan sponsored by the Regional Synod of Canada or the retirement plan of the communion where the minister's membership is held, (b) the classis determines that the minister is serving the church part-time, as defined by the Board of Benefits Services, and that circumstances warrant that the consistory be exempt from this requirement, or (c) the minister is serving less than part-time as defined by the Board of Benefits Services" (*BCO* Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 7 [2024 edition, p. 15]).

Furthermore, "the classis shall be responsible for the pastoral care of each minister and their immediate family" (*BCO* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 15, Section 3 [2024 edition, p. 55]). In that role, it is the classis that must assure that the provisions of the call form are fulfilled for all its ministers serving in congregations or employed by an assembly, institution, or agency of the Reformed Church in America full-time or part-time under call or contract as noted above.

The executive director of Benefits Services met with the Commission on Church Order (CCO) regarding the challenges that many churches with ministers serving part-time or with ministers serving in geographic locations other than the United States and Canada have in fulfilling the terms of Formulary No. 5. As a result of this discussion, the commission drafted a number of changes to the formulary that will be offered to the General Synod 2025 as a constitutional amendment. BOBS thanks the commission for their collaboration and supports the changes CCO is recommending to Formulary No. 5 (see CO 25-1 on pp. 168-170).

Retirement Services, Fidelity Investments, and Fund Management

The board administers two defined contribution retirement plans—a non-qualified plan and a 403(b) plan. Since 2005, employer and employee

contributions have been placed in the RCA 403(b) Retirement Program (“RCA 403(b) plan”). The non-qualified RCA Retirement Plan has been closed to contributions since December 31, 2004. Plan information for both plans are available on the retirement page of BOBS’ website (www.rca.org/benefits/retirement).

To participate in the RCA 403(b) plan, employers must have a completed Adoption Agreement on file with the Board of Benefits Services. The Adoption Agreement is a compliance document that recognizes the RCA 403(b) plan as the retirement plan of the employer and allows the employer some flexibility to make certain elections with respect to the provisions of the RCA 403(b) plan. If an employer submits funds on behalf of its ministers, the board also recognizes this action as evidence that the employer has adopted the agreement. Employers should update this agreement whenever the information they submitted becomes outdated. BOBS will continue to request adoption agreements from employers as required by the plan. The adoption agreement can be downloaded from the employer section of BOBS’ webpages (www.rca.org/benefits/employers).

The contribution amount payable to the RCA 403(b) plan account of full-time RCA-ordained ministers must be at least 11 percent of eligible pay or the amount of the effective buying power per household (EBPH), whichever is greater. The EBPH amount for 2025 is \$8,599. The EBPH does not apply for ministers serving part-time; however, churches are still required to contribute 11 percent of eligible pay for ministers serving part-time. It is important that ministers review their quarterly statements from Fidelity Investments to ensure that the church is contributing the appropriate amount to their account. A contribution calculator is available on BOBS’ website to assist in calculating the required contribution amount (www.rca.org/benefits/retirement/contribution-calculator).

Once enrolled in the RCA 403(b) plan, new participants are invited to complete their enrollment online through the Fidelity NetBenefits website. Participants are automatically enrolled in the appropriate target date Freedom Fund and have the option to allocate their contributions to other available funds in the lineup or select funds available through Fidelity BrokerageLink. Sixty-nine percent of RCA 403(b) Plan participant funds remain invested in the target date Fidelity Freedom Funds and an additional five percent of participants are enrolled in the Fidelity Personalized Planning and Advice (FPPA) program. (FPPA is an optional, fee-based service that provides ongoing investment management and financial planning support that aligns with a participant’s personal goals and is adjusted based on the market or life changes.)

The board has partnered with Fidelity Investments since 2000. Fidelity provides the recordkeeping services and investment management services for both the RCA Retirement Plan and the RCA 403(b) Retirement Program. In its fiduciary role, BOBS monitors the performance of the investment options available in the two retirement programs in collaboration with the GSC Investment Advisory Committee (IAC). BOBS and the IAC are assisted in this task by BOBS’ retirement consultants from Creative Planning Retirement Services, who take an active role in monitoring the investment options and administrative expenses associated with our retirement plans.

Cineca Anthony, plan administrator, and Feifei Liu, benefit actuarial analyst and project coordinator, are in regular contact with any number of participants, beneficiaries, church administrators, clerks, and Fidelity representatives to service the needs of our participants from pre-enrollment through retirement.

Fund and Administrative Fee Changes

Effective January 1, 2022, the administrative fee charged to participants on employer contributions was reduced from 19 basis points to 10 basis points. Earnings from the ERISA Insurance Endowment Fund and other corporate investment sources, a decrease in operational expenses, and an increased value in retirement plans allowed BOBS to administer its programs by collecting fewer administrative fees. Due to a surplus, participants were not charged administrative fees for October, November, or December 2024. We are grateful that the administrative fee remains at 10 basis points for 2025.

A revenue sharing credit agreement with Fidelity provides approximately \$650,000 annually to support with the direct administrative costs of the plan, such as legal, audit, consulting, and internal management costs including salaries and office administration. Due to increased earnings from the ERISA Insurance Endowment Fund (established in 2016) and the Operations Endowment Fund (established in 2021), this revenue sharing will be credited to participant funds effective July 1, 2025.

At the advice of the Investment Advisory Committee, the MFS Massachusetts Investors Trust Class R6 fund (MITJX) will be removed from the fund lineup as of June 7, 2025. Assets and future contributions will be mapped to the Fidelity 500 Index Fund (FXAIX). The MFS fund has not been performing well and has been on the watch list for several months.

Housing Allowance Designation

At its October 2024 meeting, the board approved the following housing allowance designation for eligible participants taking distributions from the RCA retirement plans.

For calendar year 2025, to designate up to 100% of distributions from the RCA Retirement Plan and the RCA 403(b) Retirement Program as housing allowance for participants in the plan(s) who are eligible for the housing allowance under relevant provisions of the United States Internal Revenue Code.

Housing allowance letters are emailed and mailed to retirees who have money in either plan at the end of each calendar year and are available on BOBS' retirement webpage.

Social Screening Constraints and Environmental, Social, and Governance Investing

BOBS' corporate investments follow the current corporate investment policy statements that require investment managers to seek to avoid investments in the securities of companies whose principal business involves gambling, for-profit prisons, the production and distribution of tobacco or alcohol,

adult entertainment and pornography, or firearms. The socially responsible investment guidelines for BOBS' corporate investments are not intended to be a "zero tolerance" policy and the determination, implementation, and ongoing monitoring of these guidelines is a shared responsibility of the investment manager and the IAC.

However, as stated in the retirement fund investment policy statement, the social screening investment guidelines apply only to the BOBS' endowment and operating reserve investments and do not apply to the RCA Retirement Plan and RCA 403(b) Retirement Program assets. Except for the funds that are part of Fidelity BrokerageLink, the investment options in the retirement plans, including the Freedom Funds, are monitored by the IAC and BOBS' retirement consultant to ensure the objectives of the retirement fund policy statement are being achieved.

BOBS currently offers three environmental, social, and governance (ESG) funds to its participants in the retirement program. The self-directed brokerage account, added in 2024, offers a greater variety of ESG funds for participants interested in investing in funds that align with their personal values.

General Synod 2021 took two actions regarding ESG investing: CA 21-6 (*MGS 2021*, p. 206) and ONB 21-9 (*MGS 2021*, p. 119). As a result, the IAC created an ESG subcommittee to discuss these two recommendations. Two BOBS board members with professional experience in retirement plans and investing are members of the IAC and of this subcommittee.

The ESG subcommittee recognizes that the industry standards for ESG ratings and definitions are a work in progress and that the criteria and scoring methods are constantly evolving. There continues to be significant political and regulatory pushback on ESG standards. The subcommittee believes that the RCA is not behind the industry on incorporating ESG criteria into our corporate investment policies. In this frequently changing environment, the IAC is being cautious and prudent and continues to believe that it is not a good time to integrate ESG criteria into our corporate investment policies. The committee remains committed to balancing investment growth, fiduciary responsibility, and our ESG impact.

Selecting Investment Options

BOBS' retirement plans offer a broad array of investment options that enables participants to select options that best suit their individual values, goals, and risk tolerance. To assist with participants' selections, the investment options have been organized into four separate categories:

1. Target date funds: an asset mix of stocks, bonds, and other investments that automatically become more conservative as the fund approaches its target retirement date and beyond.
2. Core investment options: allow participants to construct a basic investment portfolio utilizing low-cost funds.
3. ESG investment options: environmental, social, and governance-themed investment options help participants find investments that align with their principles.
4. Self-directed brokerage account: provides access to a wide range

of mutual funds and Exchange Trade Funds (ETFs), including ESG options, beyond those that have been designated for the retirement plans.

For additional help with determining an investment strategy, participants should work with their personal financial advisor, visit Fidelity NetBenefits at netbenefits.com, or meet one-on-one with a Fidelity retirement consultant by calling 800-642-7131.

Additional educational resources about the various investment options can be found on BOBS' webpages at www.rca.org/benefits/investment-options-in-the-retirement-plans.

RCA 403(b) Retirement Contribution Verification Project

The contribution verification project was initiated in 2012 to verify the participation and payment of the required employer contributions related to the retirement accounts of eligible ministers under call or contract. Many employers were out of compliance with the plan document and the BCO by not contributing the required 11 percent of compensation to the retirement accounts of eligible RCA ministers. Over \$2 million has been collected and added to the retirement accounts of RCA ministers since this project has begun. As of December 31, 2024, there remains a shortfall of an estimated \$696,000 that churches should have contributed to these accounts.

The necessary information to verify the contribution amounts is requested annually from employers through the Retirement Security Form (RSF), a confidential portion of the Consistorial Report Form (CRF). Each year we request ministers' salary information, review the data, and communicate the results to the churches, collecting shortfalls in contributions as they are discovered. The process was enhanced in 2024 to better capture salary information from ministers who are also working for regional synods and classes.

Unfortunately, there are still a significant number of churches who fail to complete the RSF or do not respond to the requests for payment. Without the needed information, it is impossible for BOBS to verify that the proper contributions have been made. The plan documents and the BCO are clear that the responsibility for making contributions lies with the church employer. Staff feel confident that we have made reasonable efforts to collect these contributions on behalf of our participants, but we cannot do this without the cooperation of the churches.

Churches, delegates, and participants can help BOBS by:

1. Completing and submitting the Retirement Security Form in its entirety with accurate information.
2. Responding to inquiries from BOBS and, if needed, contributing the amount requested to cover the shortfall in contributions.
3. Reviewing quarterly statements to ensure that the church has made the required 11 percent contribution.

Reallocation Program

In the summer of 2015, a process was implemented that allowed participants to reallocate their retirement savings from the RCA Retirement Plan to the RCA 403(b) Retirement Program. This reallocation requires participants to provide relevant information to confirm their eligibility and determine the dollar amount that can be reallocated. Staff work closely with Fidelity Investments in the process and the review is completed in strict compliance with the IRS 415(c) rules.

The reallocation program was completed in the summer of 2024 in connection with the 2023 tax year. One hundred and forty-six participants were able to reallocate \$6.17 million from the RCA Retirement Plan to the RCA 403(b) Retirement Program.

The reallocation program will be conducted again in 2025 in connection with the 2024 tax year. Information about the program will be sent to potentially eligible participants beginning in April 2025, and relevant data will be due to BOBS in July 2025. BOBS will determine final eligibility and the amount that can be reallocated based on the information provided by the participant and in accordance with IRS regulations and annual contribution limits. BOBS would like to encourage all eligible participants to participate in the reallocation program.

More information about the reallocation program is available on BOBS' webpages (www.rca.org/benefits/retirement/reallocation) or by contacting BOBS at retirement@rca.org.

Insurance Programs

BCO Formulary No. 5 requires that churches "promise to pay the stipulated contributions to the Reformed Church in America retirement plan and provide benefits including group life insurance, long-term disability insurance, and medical insurance" for RCA-ordained ministers of Word and sacrament and their families. BOBS and the Reformed Benefits Association (RBA) provide a number of insurance products so that consistories can confidently carry out this promise.

Group Life and Long-Term Disability Insurance

A major objective for BOBS in providing these benefits is for churches to have access to an affordable group plan that allows them to easily fulfill the requirements of Formulary No. 5 for their ministers and their families. Fortunately, the insurance programs are financially sound and the only increase in rates since 2019 was a 2 percent increase in 2023. Rates remain the same in 2025 as they were in 2024.

BOBS contracts with Lincoln Financial for both group life and long-term disability (LTD) plans that include voluntary options if participants would like to purchase increased coverage for themselves, their spouses, and their children. All eligible actively working RCA-ordained ministers who are regularly working a minimum of 17.5 hours per week are automatically enrolled in LTD insurance administered through BOBS. Those who are not enrolled in group life insurance

through the Reformed Benefits Association (RBA) are also enrolled in group life insurance administered through BOBS.

Commissioned pastors, while not mandated to have coverage, are eligible and encouraged to enroll in BOBS' group life and LTD plans. BOBS expanded its coverage to include ministers ordained outside of the RCA who are serving in an RCA church. Due to agreements already established by the denominations involved, this coverage does not include ministers ordained in the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) or Formula of Agreement partner churches.

Many churches are struggling financially and the cost of benefits is a substantial burden for hiring. We are working with the insurance company to provide two new life insurance offerings valued at \$45,000 or \$100,000. This will provide greater flexibility to smaller or financially struggling churches, church plants, and those churches that employ part-time ministers. Currently, ministers are covered at \$175,000.

To assist BOBS in administering these benefits with high integrity, churches should:

1. Keep BOBS staff aware of current salary information. This information is requested at the time of enrollment, during each open enrollment period following, and through a special campaign each summer. This information is essential so that ministers are enrolled in the proper amount of long-term disability coverage.
2. Make quarterly payments for insurance through electronic funds transfer (EFT) or by credit card instead of sending manual checks. This can be conveniently done by completing the ACH form that is part of the church's quarterly invoice or by contacting Terri Boven at tboven@rca.org.

All participants are encouraged to keep their beneficiary information up to date by using the beneficiary designation form.

Cineca Anthony, plan administrator, works with churches to ensure proper insurance coverage is available and provided to eligible RCA ministers. She also guides pastors and/or their beneficiaries as they navigate the insurance system when claims need to be filed.

Reformed Benefits Association

The Reformed Benefits Association (RBA) was created in 2013 by the Board of Benefits Services of the Reformed Church in America, Inc. (BOBS) and the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) for the provision of health and welfare benefit plans for ministers, lay employees, and retirees of each denomination and other eligible employers.

BOBS continues to collaborate with the CRCNA for the provision of medical benefits through the RBA. RCA and CRCNA entities are eligible to participate in RBA benefit offerings by agreeing to the Terms of Participation. The terms require that entities enroll all eligible full-time staff in health insurance (unless the employee has coverage through a spouse, parent, or retiree health insurance

plan). The RBA currently offers four medical insurance plans for its members, who must work a minimum of 20 hours per week to participate. Two group life insurance options are available as well as dental, vision, supplemental life, accident, and critical illness insurance.

The RCA is represented on the RBA board by Cora Taitt, Ervin Anderson, Doug Struyk, and executive director of Benefits Services Kelly Oliveira.

Minimum Standards for Insurance

As stated in Formulary No. 5 of the BCO, “Such insurance coverages shall meet or exceed the minimum standards stipulated by the Board of Benefits Services” (2024 edition, p. 139). For 2025, the minimum standard of coverage established by BOBS is met by offering coverage that approximates the \$4,000 consumer plan, as offered by the RBA.

- An individual deductible of \$4,000 and a family deductible of \$8,000
- A maximum in-network, out-of-pocket cost of \$8,000 for an individual and \$16,000 for a family
- Coverage that is 70 percent after the deductible has been met and until the out-of-pocket maximum has been reached
- 100 percent coverage of eligible medical expenses once the out-of-pocket maximum has been met

BOBS is committed to identifying a minimum standard plan for 2026 that is more readily available on the marketplace.

Definition of Part-Time

Similar to the requirement that BOBS set the minimum standard for medical insurance, BOBS is also required to establish the definition of “part-time.” Because each provider has varying eligibility requirements, the definition of part-time varies based on the product.

- For life and LTD insurance purchased through BOBS, part-time is defined as working a minimum of 17.5 hours but not more than 29 hours per week. Those working 30 hours per week or more are considered full-time. Those working 17 hours per week or less are considered less than part-time.
- For the RCA 403(b) Retirement Program, part-time is defined as anyone working 1 to 29 hours per week; however, consistories are required to make contributions for all ministers serving the church under call or contract. Those working 30 hours or more are considered full-time.
- For medical insurance, part-time means anyone working a minimum of 20 but not more than 29 hours per week. Those working 30 hours per week or more are considered full-time. Those working 19 hours per week or less are considered less than part-time.

These definitions are published in the “Annual Insurance and Retirement Benefits Information” document that is updated and distributed to ministers, churches, classis clerks, and regional synod executives each fall. The electronic version of this document is available on the RCA website at www.rca.org/airb.

Retiree Chaplains and Assistance Programs

Through the retiree chaplains program, BOBS employs a network of up to 32 retired pastors and ordained elders who visit, befriend, assist, and maintain contact with over 1,100 retired RCA ministers and their spouses or surviving spouses, with lay missionaries who served for ten or more years, and with former employees of the Southern Normal School. This ministry has been in existence since the early 1970s and is intended to keep retirees connected to the RCA and to communicate the needs of our retirees back to BOBS. The retiree chaplains develop and maintain an intentional, personal, and pastoral relationship, especially when the retiree lives in a community where there is not an RCA congregation. We are actively recruiting for two retiree chaplains to cover (1) North Florida and Alabama and (2) New York City and Long Island.

The retiree chaplains met in Holland, Michigan, on April 28 and 29, 2025, for their annual gathering. They enjoyed connecting and praying with each other and expressed their appreciation for the time to discuss their joys and challenges, both professionally and personally.

The *In Touch* booklet is a compilation of reflections from RCA retirees that is published and mailed to retirees three times a year. Terry DeYoung recently began serving as editor. The reflections are posted on BOBS' webpages: www.rca.org/benefits/retirees.

The assistance program is a ministry available to eligible ministers, their surviving spouses, and dependents who are experiencing long-term or immediate financial need. Lay missionaries with ten or more years of service and former employees of the Southern Normal School are also eligible for grants from the assistance program.

- Financial assistance grants are primarily awarded for needs related to housing and utilities, ongoing medical insurance premiums, funeral grants for surviving spouses, and EBPH retirement contributions for disabled ministers. At times, a one-time grant is provided for an immediate, unexpected, or urgent need.
- Financial assistance is also available for costs related to the higher education of children of deceased ministers and to assist in the payment of medical insurance premiums of full-time RCA ministers involved in a new church plant.

To be eligible for monthly grants, recipients must have nearly exhausted their retirement account(s) and have established financial need through a formal assistance application. Each fall, Mornier Rich, coordinator of retiree chaplains and assistance programs, and Kelly Oliveira, executive director of Benefits Services, review applications and award grants for the upcoming year. In addition, applications are distributed and reviewed throughout the year as new financial needs are presented. Twenty-six monthly grants totaling \$12,746 per month were approved and are providing assistance in 2025 for essential needs or medical insurance premiums.

As of January 2024, the retiree chaplains and assistance programs are funded only through endowment earnings and contributions. We are grateful for the many churches, organizations, and individuals who donate to the Assistance

Fund each year. (If you would like to be one of them, visit www.rca.org/give/bobs-assistance-fund.)

Well-being, Debt Relief, and Education

To address the emotional well-being of pastors, employee assistance program (EAP) services are provided through Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services or the Reformed Benefits Association. Active and retired RCA-ordained ministers and members of their households have access to a nationwide network of clinicians where they can seek confidential short-term counseling virtually or in person at a local clinic. To learn about these programs and find contact information, visit www.rca.org/eap. This webpage also provides a list of retreat centers, therapy resources, and spiritual directors that have been utilized by pastors who have received a Clergy Revitalization Grant.

The Ministerial Excellence Fund (www.rca.org/ministerial-excellence-fund) was created to reduce or eliminate ministers' personal debt and to give them a jump-start toward long-term financial health. Grant money is available from a combination of funds from the Lilly Endowment, BOBS, and individual donations.

Four different types of grants were offered in February 2024 and \$123,000 in grants were awarded. The four types of grants include:

- Debt relief: helps ministers become free from significant and burdensome personal debt. Recipients are granted up to \$10,000 to pay down or eliminate their personal debt.
- Matching grant: debt relief grant for previous grantees. This grant was new for 2024 and required a matching contribution in order to receive the grant.
- Retirement kickstart: incentivizes ministers who are behind in saving for retirement to make or increase their employee contribution into their RCA 403(b) Retirement Program account. To qualify, clergy must contribute an additional two to four percent of their salary into their account. Those awarded the grant received a contribution between \$2,000 and \$4,000 directly into their RCA 403(b) Retirement Program account.
- Clergy revitalization: offers ministers a three-week leave to participate in a revitalization experience that includes professional counseling or spiritual direction.

The Lilly Endowment Inc. believes that financial burdens carried by pastoral leaders are significant barriers to effective, faithful, and fruitful ministry. We have heard many stories from grant recipients how the Ministerial Excellence grants and the Clergy Revitalization grants have had a positive impact on pastors, their families, and their congregations.

BOBS encourages every church to take a special offering to give to their pastor in October, November, or December. As an extension of the Ministerial Excellence Fund, BOBS provides a matching grant of up to \$2,000 to pay down student loans or medical debt. Ministers are encouraged to invest in themselves by using their own money to receive the matching grant if their church is not able to participate. Over \$66,000 in student loan and medical debt was paid

down for ministers in the 2024 Bless Your Pastor campaign (www.rca.org/bless-your-pastor). Since 2019, over 120 ministers have received a grant from the Bless Your Pastor campaign.

Calendar year 2025 will mark the conclusion of our participation in the Lilly Endowment's National Initiative to Address Economic Challenges Facing Pastoral Leaders. When the first grants were issued, Lilly wanted each denomination to build a long-term financial plan to sustain the initiatives offered with the money they gave us. BOBS has been successful in putting a funding structure and staff in place to sustain and administer many of these grants beyond 2025. BOBS' staff will continue to cultivate our relationship with the Lilly Endowment, looking for future grant opportunities that align with the ends and objectives of the Board of Benefits Services.

A number of workshops and educational opportunities are offered throughout the year, coordinated by Billy Norden, BOBS' retirement and financial education coordinator.

- Based on feedback from a participant survey, in collaboration with Everence, BOBS offered two new workshops about understanding clergy taxes and estate planning.
- BOBS' staff leads a "Ready to Retire" workshop three times annually. The interactive online workshop helps attendees understand timelines, tasks, and resources available as they prepare to retire.
- In partnership with Fidelity, BOBS offers complimentary one-on-one consultations with a Fidelity retirement advisor. BOBS expanded this offering through virtual appointments available over a two- to three-day period. Because of the high participant engagement, BOBS will offer these one-on-one consultations every other month in 2025, as well as in-person consultations at General Synod.
- Newly ordained ministers of Word and sacrament are invited into a conversation in which they learn about the benefits promised to them in the *Book of Church Order (BCO)*, are oriented to the services provided by BOBS, and become grounded in their benefits knowledge early in their ministry. We are confident that when ministers enter the ministry talking about and understanding their finances, benefits, and retirement savings, they will be more equipped to lead their congregations in financial discussions.
- Through our partnership with Everence Financial, clergy can participate in a seven-part financial planning process with a team of Everence certified financial planners. Topics include cash flow, protections, taxes, investing, estate planning, retirement, and charitable giving. BOBS is able to subsidize the cost, bringing the final cost from \$1,500 to only \$375 for ministers interested in this yearlong experience.
- With the knowledge that congregational financial health is directly connected to a minister's participation in benefits, BOBS partners with Everence Financial and the Lake Institute on Faith and Giving to host Cultivating Generous Congregations learning communities for RCA churches, a program that began in 2016. The curriculum is provided by the Lake Institute and it is presented by BOBS and Everence staff.

The Annual Insurance and Retirement Benefits Information booklet is updated and distributed in September. This annual publication is a guide for ministers,

consistories, classes, and regional synods that clearly communicates the benefit requirements for ministers, information about the benefits administered through BOBS and the RBA, and tips and tools for participating in these benefits. A copy of the booklet can be found online at www.rca.org/airb.

Board and Staff Transitions

After nearly twenty years of service, Thos Shipley retired as BOBS' retirement plan administrator on November 21, 2024. Julia Humphrey joined the BOBS team in December 2024 as a part-time executive assistant.

The Board of Benefits Services expresses its gratitude and appreciation to Michael Otte for his faithful service as a retiree chaplain. BOBS welcomes Robert Anderson, Stephanie Doeschot, and Thomas Larkin as new retiree chaplains.

BOBS also thanks Lynn Barnes for her excellent service as a board member and representative on the Investment Advisory Committee.

Annual Audit and Finances

For additional information about the annual audit and BOBS' finances, please see the report of the Office of Finance.

Report of the Commission on Christian Action

The *Book of Church Order* states that “the commission shall inform and advise the church concerning current social issues and the scriptural and Christian principles by which critical evaluation may be exercised on those issues and proper action taken” (Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 2b [2024 edition, pp. 113-114]).

The Commission on Christian Action takes seriously its role of calling the church to faithful and persistent witness and action in the world and so exhorts the church to “not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith” (Galatians 6:9-10).

Spiritual Abuse

In 2022, the CCA started researching the topic of spiritual abuse, and has brought recommendations to the past two General Synods. General Synod 2023 adopted CA 23-7:

To invite and welcome members of the congregations, classes, and regional synods of the Reformed Church in America to educate themselves on the resources highlighted in the CCA's 2023 report as well as other resources on spiritual abuse in order to equip congregations and members to address spiritual abuse, both locally and systemically (*MGS 2023*, p. 164).

The resources referenced in that action, as well as some additional resources, are shared at the conclusion of this report.

General Synod 2024 adopted another recommendation related to spiritual abuse, CA 24-2:

To direct the General Synod Council to undertake study on spiritual abuse, utilizing resources from CBE International, Tears of Eden, and others listed in the Commission on Christian Action's report to the 2024 General Synod, as well as opening communication with My Sanctuary Healing and other RCA-connected spiritual abuse professionals to explore resources that may be shared and/or developed for use in RCA congregations, assemblies, and affiliated institutions; and further,

To provide an initial report to the 2025 General Synod and a second report to the 2026 General Synod (*MGS 2024*, p. 208).

The CCA has continued its work on spiritual abuse, as continued concern has been brought to the CCA in the past year. There have been growing concerns and testimonies regarding instances of spiritual and religious abuse within the denomination. These experiences often lead to deep-seated trauma, disillusionment, and a profound sense of betrayal among those who seek to engage with their faith constructively. Such abuses can manifest in various forms, including manipulation, coercion, exploitation, and the misuse of power,

undermining the sacred principles that bind us as a community of believers.

In the spirit of our commitment to the tenets of love, justice, and community, we recognize that the faith we cherish must reflect the values we uphold. The Reformed Church in America has long been a beacon of hope and guidance for its members, providing a foundation for spiritual growth, mutual support, and accountability. However, it is vital to acknowledge that, like any community, we are not immune to practices and behaviors that can cause harm to individuals and communities.

With this initiative, we are not only responding to the pressing need for transformation within our denomination, but also reaffirming our dedication to building a community where all individuals can grow in their faith free from fear or harm. As we move forward, may we do so with humility, compassion, and an unwavering commitment to justice, allowing our collective voices to illuminate the path toward healing and reconciliation.

Together, we can cultivate a church that reflects the love of Christ—a sanctuary for all, where faith is nurtured and every individual is treated with dignity, respect, and care.

The CCA worked with the GSC as it followed up on the directive from last year's General Synod to undertake study on spiritual abuse and report back to this year's General Synod (*MGS 2024*, CA 24-2, p. 208). A report on that work and a recommendation can be found on pp. 95-97 of these minutes; CCA supports the recommendation and encourages its adoption by this General Synod.

The CCA expresses gratitude to all who had the courage to step forward and share their stories. The CCA also offers a special thanks to representatives of the General Synod Council for their collaboration and for honoring their commitment to this work.

Immigration and Refugee Resources and Support

In the last few months, with U.S. President Trump's recent executive orders, many people within the RCA reached out to the CCA regarding resources around supporting immigrants and refugees. In response to this call for support, the denomination put out a statement: www.rca.org/a-call-to-support-immigrants-and-refugees-in-christs-name.

The CCA encourages all to read this statement, as it contains many resources and options to connect with staff support. There are also reminders of the importance of the call of the Christian faith: to welcome the stranger and to ensure belonging for all. Those who have read this statement seem to find guidance and comfort in it, and the CCA expresses gratitude to the denomination for living into the commitment of engaging positively with immigrant and refugee related crises by providing statements and resources in response to the crisis.

However, the need for this kind of statement does bring to the CCA's attention that there is a need for more resources that are readily available to all. At General Synod 2017, the CCA encouraged congregants, churches, and classes to engage with refugees in a number of ways, including:

- Financially supporting advocacy and relief for refugees through organizations such as Church World Service or Bethany Christian Services.
- Befriending or helping resettle refugees in or near their communities, inasmuch as this is possible (*MGS 2017*, R 17-39, pp. 230-231).

At the same General Synod, the CCA also offered a recommendation through which the General Synod directed the General Synod Council to take action:

To direct the General Synod Council to continue to create and make available resources for churches to engage with the refugee issue and the people who are most affected by it; and further,

To partner with the Christian Reformed Church in North America as well as our Formula of Agreement partners to resettle refugees, be active in advocacy for immigrants, and to support refugee relief around the world; and further,

To publish on the RCA website on a quarterly basis the amount of money raised for refugee work and the plan for investing those resources in efforts to address the global refugee emergency; and further;

To report progress to the 2018 General Synod (*MGS 2017*, R 17-40, p. 232).

In reference to this previous commitment, many were asking what the RCA is doing as a denomination to continue to protect the lives and liberties of our immigrant neighbors. People also wondered how the RCA can show love and welcome to people on the move or living in the diaspora worldwide.

The number of inquiries around this issue to all commissions led to the Commission on Christian Action, the Commission on Theology, and the Commission on History coming together to write a joint paper in which we will address many previously named concerns as well as expand on how the RCA can respond to this crisis. The theology and history of the RCA call us to action in the here and now; the moderator of each of the above-mentioned commissions found it appropriate to join in conveying this together. [This joint paper can be found on pp. 217-222 of these minutes.] Along with that joint paper, the CCA recommends the following:

CA 25-1

To urge agencies, assemblies, and individual congregations of the Reformed Church in America to educate themselves on and utilize the resources listed in the CCA's 2025 report to the General Synod, and to utilize resources in their own local communities regarding supporting immigrants and/or refugees in order to equip congregations and members to protect and advocate with and for immigrants and refugees, both locally and systemically. (ADOPTED)

Resources:

1. Informed Immigration website (includes DACA information): www.informedimmigrant.com
2. National Immigration Law Center
www.nilc.org/resources/factsheet-trumps-rescission-of-protected-areas-policies-undermines-safety-for-all
3. World Relief Responding to ICE in Places of Worship
<https://worldrelief.org/preparing-for-and-responding-to-ice-in-places-of-worship>
4. Training through the UNDIVIDED movement: <https://undivided.us/the-movement> (Immigration resources available include a downloadable resource guidebook and recorded training video entitled “Sensitive Locations & Becoming a Faith Witness”)
5. World Relief Immigrant Resource Hub webpage: <https://worldrelief.org/immigrant-resource-hub/>
6. “Preparation & Rapid Response Resources for Immigrants & Community Allies” from the nonprofit Welcoming America: https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/KENTCOMI/2024/12/31/file_attachments/3116394/Preparation%20&%20Rapid%20Response%20Resources%20for%20Immigrants%20&%20Community%20Allies.pdf?fbclid=IwY2xjawH98AtleHRuA2FibQlxMQABHdx7p28Jc-nGpnaozAbJdZhE6DErKxLQGbCB-DFBvYilgPUDI9bL7PXA_aem_HsSG3GXS014Nba143_OTAQ
7. We Have Rights website: www.wehaverights.us
8. Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC) website: www.ilrc.org/community-resources
9. US Committee for Refugees & Immigrants (USCRI) Know Your Rights and Safety Planning resources: <https://refugees.org/KnowYourRights>
10. Immigration Advocates Network National Immigration Legal Services Directory: www.immigrationadvocates.org/legaldirectory (great resources to find local legal help)
11. Examples of resources from other denominations doing this work:
 - a. United Church of Christ (UCC) Immigration Enforcement Action: What Churches Need to Know webpage: www.ucc.org/immigration-enforcement-action-what-churches-need-to-know
 - b. Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM) Immigration Resources webpage: <https://episcopalmigrationministries.org/essential-resources-immigrant-families>
 - c. Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA) Family Care Plan for immigrants: www.pcusa.org/about-pcusa/agencies-entities/interim-unified-agency/ministry-areas/immigration-issues/family-care-plan
 - d. Catholic Legal Immigration Network (CLINIC) Know Your Rights resources (multiple languages): <https://clinic.shorthandstories.com/know-your-rights/index.html>

These resources are not exhaustive, but many of these are a helpful way to start looking into local and national resources. The CCA would also like to express special gratitude to RCA missionary JJ TenClay for being a guide to many resources. We deeply appreciate the support she offered the commission as the CCA was doing research on this section of the report.

Mental Illness and Mental Health Care

The CCA has cited the mental health crisis in previous reports. Sixty-four percent of residents of the United States and 53 percent of Canadians identify as having a mental health illness. As the CCA has reported before, there has been a 25 percent overall increase in cases of anxiety and depression since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Often, churches express not feeling equipped to help due to the following factors:

1. Lack of insurance
2. High costs
3. Insurance that does not cover mental or emotional issues
4. Lack of quality care in their state/province or area
5. Stigma for mental health or emotional issues that keep people from seeking help

The CCA has previously encouraged churches to discern their own gifts and skills to see how the RCA can help in their local community. In the United States, the responsibility for the mental health care system has shifted over time; while it was once lodged with the federal government, the responsibility was shifted to the state level and sometimes even down to local communities. There were good reasons for this movement, including the belief that community support and care, rather than national action, would provide a better system to meet the needs of our neighbors. However, the actual result was underfunded services and care as states and local communities struggled to keep up with the necessary care outlined in the best practices offered by the American Psychiatric Association.

In studying the failure of our system to meet the needs of those who struggle with mental illness, there are a number of findings that can help us take action as a church:

1. Continuity of caregivers is very important. Constantly shifting venues and caregivers are extremely difficult for those whose brains are not functioning normally; this usually leads to treatment failure.
2. Jails and prisons have become the new psychiatric inpatient system.
3. Sheriffs, police, and courts have become the new psychiatric outpatient system.

This reality is shameful. Those who suffer with mental illness are made in the image of God and should receive the respect, decency, and care that each child of God deserves. Our sheriffs, police, and court systems are not trained or supported to handle mental health crises, nor are they equipped to provide the care people with mental illness require. We fail them as well.

CCA recommends the following:

CA 25-2

To encourage congregations in the RCA to adopt statements against stigma concerning mental illness in their congregation and community; and further;

To encourage RCA congregations to connect with other local churches and nonprofits that are engaged in the work of fighting stigma against mental illness, both to learn from them and to help build their own power to address these issues in order to make changes that make a difference in their community that makes a difference for everyone.

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business was to amend CA 25-2 as follows (additions are underlined, deletions are stricken):

To encourage congregations in the RCA to adopt statements against stigmas ~~concerning~~ targeting mental health ~~illness~~ in their congregation and community; and further;

To encourage RCA congregations to connect with other local churches and nonprofits that are engaged in the work of fighting stigmas ~~concerning~~ targeting mental health ~~illness~~, both to learn from them and to help build their own power to address these issues in order to make changes that make a difference in their community that makes a difference for everyone.

Reason:

The committee feels that using the word “illness” perpetrates the stigma.

A motion was made and supported from the floor to amend the proposed amendment to CA 25-2 as follows (additions are double underlined, deletions are double stricken):

To encourage congregations in the RCA to adopt statements against stigmas ~~concerning~~ targeting surrounding mental health ~~illness~~ and illness in their congregation and community; and further;

To encourage RCA congregations to connect with other local churches and nonprofits that are engaged in the work of fighting stigmas ~~concerning~~ targeting surrounding mental health ~~illness~~ and illness, both to learn from them and to help build their own power to address these issues in order to make changes that make a difference in their community that makes a difference for everyone.

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

VOTED: To cease debate.

VOTED: To amend the proposed amendment to CA 25-2.

The amended amendment to CA 25-2 was before the house. It reads as follows (additions are underlined, deletions are stricken):

To encourage congregations in the RCA to adopt statements against stigmas concerning surrounding mental health, illness, and illness in their congregation and community; and further;

To encourage RCA congregations to connect with other local churches and nonprofits that are engaged in the work of fighting stigmas concerning surrounding mental health, illness, and illness, both to learn from them and to help build their own power to address these issues in order to make changes that make a difference in their community that makes a difference for everyone.

VOTED: To adopt the amended amendment to CA 25-2.

The final version of CA 25-2 as amended was before the house. It reads as follows:

CA 25-2

To encourage congregations in the RCA to adopt statements against stigmas surrounding mental health and illness in their congregation and community; and further;

To encourage RCA congregations to connect with other local churches and nonprofits that are engaged in the work of fighting stigmas surrounding mental health and illness, both to learn from them and to help build their own power to address these issues in order to make changes that make a difference in their community that makes a difference for everyone. (ADOPTED)

Alongside this recommendation, the CCA provides an example, which is edited from a template created by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI).

_____ Reformed Church (Community Church, etc.) Pledges To:

1. Learn about mental health issues and share the facts with friends, family, and co-workers.
2. See the person, not the illness.
3. Take action on mental health issues.
4. Show empathy and compassion to persons in our church and community with mental illness.
5. Talk openly about mental illness in our church and community. Communicating is the catalyst to change.
6. Encourage people to express themselves and find help they need.
7. Watch out for stereotypes. Everyone is unique.
8. Challenge our own assumptions.
9. Speak out when we see stigma happening. Be agents of change.
10. Treat everyone with the dignity and the respect they deserve as a child of God.

Areas of Continuing Concern

The Commission on Christian Action regularly studies and reports on a broad variety of topics, many of which we make recommendations on. Below are the areas the CCA is continuing to study, seeking to understand how the CCA can encourage the church to take action.

Disability Access

The CCA has continued to hear concerns around disability access in the Reformed Church in America, especially after staff changes that took place in the fall of 2024. The CCA expresses gratitude to Rev. Jeremy Simpson and his service with Disability Concerns, and to Rev. Laura Osborne as she continues in this work. Since churches in the U.S. and Canada are not always obligated to ensure that their facilities are accessible to all (state/provincial and local regulations may require some accommodations), it is of utmost importance that the RCA pays close attention to what we can do to ensure that everybody belongs and everybody serves.

The Disability Concerns section of the RCA website currently lists “8 themes in faith and disability: becoming a church of belonging for people with disabilities.” These themes provide an excellent resource for congregations and church leaders to begin learning what life is like for those who navigate the world and our churches while living with disabilities.

Continued Work with the ESG Subcommittee

The ESG subcommittee held its annual meeting to continue efforts toward investing in a socially responsible way. The CCA expresses appreciation to all participating in these efforts and plans to continue participating in this work.

With gratitude for the work of the CCA and my fellow commissioners, I submit this report.

Rev. Anne Troost (Elzinga), moderator

Report of the Commission on Christian Discipleship and Education

The *Book of Church Order* defines the responsibilities of the Commission on Christian Discipleship and Education as follows:

1. The commission shall develop and advocate for strategies for people of all ages to be fully included in the mission and life of the RCA.
2. The commission shall monitor, evaluate, and report on the RCA's progress in ministries of education and discipleship with children, youth, adults, and families.
3. The commission shall collaborate with RCA staff, assemblies, agencies, and institutions to promote and strengthen the next generation in discipleship with RCA congregations
4. The commission shall advocate for the ongoing preparation of those who carry out the church's teaching ministry (*BCO* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 12b [2024 edition, p. 121]).

The Commission on Christian Discipleship and Education has focused on one large project and several small projects this year. Over the past two years, the commission has focused a good portion of time on discerning our purpose and direction as we support discipleship and education in the RCA and in the life of local churches.

As part of one of the commission's auxiliary projects, the CCDE responded to a request from Faithward for egalitarian resources for kids, especially resources that highlight women in ministry. Our commission was able to compile a list of resources that showcase women and other minorities in ministry, as well as more general resources to help parents disciple their children. This compilation included both books and activities for kids and resources directed to parents; it was then translated into an article that appeared on Faithward. A big thank you to commission member Ellen Balk for her work on writing the article!

The commission's main project this year was continuing our work connecting local churches to the commission and to the RCA. This project came out of a discussion our commission had last year when the future of commissions and their funding was in question. In that conversation, we discerned that the work of the commission is vital to the life of the RCA. Two things became clear. First, the work of our commission to support education and discipleship is important because discipleship is a key focus of the mission of the RCA. Second, we were unclear, as a commission, what that work should look like. We spent a portion of our time this year clarifying that vision, especially as we considered the importance of supporting denominational staff as they took on more and different responsibilities.

The commission determined that the need was not so much to create new resources for churches—there are *many* great resources already available through the RCA! However, we heard several challenges from local church leaders. One: they are unsure who to contact with questions about discipleship and resources. Two: they are very busy and many feel overwhelmed with day-to-day ministry. Researching new ways to solve discipleship challenges was difficult because of limited resources of time and energy. Many of these leaders

are also volunteers, serving in multiple ways in addition to other jobs and family responsibilities. The CCDE decided to focus on alleviating these challenges by making contact with local classis leaders and congregations. The goal of the commission is to build relationships with local leaders and be a bridge between their needs and denominational resources.

The commission will be successful in this goal if some of the stress and strain of local leadership is reduced while also increasing the quality and diversity of discipleship in the local church. A helpful by-product of this will hopefully be an increased connection of local churches to one another and to the denomination as a whole, as well as an increased awareness of denominational value.

The commission worked this past year to develop a database of contacts, as well as an email form that can be sent to those contacts. Our commission worked to divide the denomination geographically and each member took responsibility for different regions.

Another aspect of this task has been to compile reference sheets of frequently used and needed resources. These include ideas for small church youth groups, children's sermons, adult discipleship, sermon series, interfaith ministry, and church events. These quick-reference sheets will be a resource that can be shared in our communication with local churches.

The commission recognized the benefit of having a diverse group serving in different ministries and capacities to our work of discipleship and education. Each of our commission members brings unique and diverse experiences, context, and local needs to the work of the commission. Our members include individuals working in pastoral ministry, chaplaincy, higher education, mental health, nonprofits, and the marketplace. We imagine that these diversities will spill over into our work connecting with local congregations as we also learn from their unique experiences and challenges. We look forward to hearing from local leaders about the things that have worked well for them as we learn from one another. Our ultimate hope is that someday we will be pointing leaders to one another as they share resources, experiences, ideas, and encouragement. We have also been working to engage more with our specialized ministers and chaplains so that those in non-pastoral ministry have resources available to them; this work has included making them aware of resources that are available to help in their specific ministry settings.

One of the highlights of the past year was awarding our first scholarship! One of the challenges since the scholarship was established (*MGS 2019*, DE 19-2, p. 216) has been making those who could benefit from the scholarship aware that it is available. We made great progress on that this year; a huge thank you to denominational staff who partnered with us to update and improve the application process and for making the application available on the Christian Educators, RCA (CERCA) website. We have also shared the application and scholarship information with both Western Theological Seminary and New Brunswick Theological Seminary, asking them to make their students aware of the opportunity. Finally, we have made the scholarship information available to chaplains and specialized ministers for educational opportunities.

The commission had representatives attend meetings with CERCA as well, making contact and discussing ways we can partner together in our work.

The commission also discussed some goals and plans for the coming year, including building relationships with our General Synod professors. We hope that these relationships will be mutually beneficial as our commission seeks to offer greater support to them in their work as well as utilize their knowledge as a resource.

It has been my honor to serve alongside Rebecca, Paige, Kevin, Patricia, Jason, and Ellen in this past year. It has been our joy and privilege to serve the denomination, and we look forward with joy and hope to the work we will do in the coming years.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. LaCosta Van Dyk, moderator

Report of the Commission on Christian Unity

According to the *Book of Church Order*, the General Synod is responsible for the ecumenical relations of the Reformed Church in America. In order to fulfill that responsibility, the General Synod constituted the Commission on Christian Unity. Since its formal inception in 1975, the commission has served the General Synod by coordinating a range of ecumenical involvements. These include the oversight of ecumenical commitments to global and national ecumenical bodies, interchurch conversations and dialogues, and appointing ecumenical delegates to various bodies.

The commission also seeks to educate the RCA on ecumenical matters and advocates for actions and positions consistent with the RCA's confessions and ecumenical practices as outlined in "An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America," adopted by General Synod in 1996 (*MGS 1996*, R-1, p. 197). General Synod may also refer ecumenical matters to the commission for study and implementation.

The RCA has long been involved in ecumenical conversations and organizations. It is a charter member and active supporter of historic bodies like the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches, as well as a driving force and participant in newer ecumenical initiatives like the Global Christian Forum and Christian Churches Together. In this work, the RCA is represented by various members—sometimes staff, sometimes ministers or elders, some elected, some appointed, paid or volunteer. All are committed to promote and work for the unity Christians already have in Christ as they share their gifts, time, and energy with other believers locally and globally. Typically, these appointees share reports of ecumenical events and meetings with the Office of the General Secretary and with the Commission on Christian Unity.

The commission presents the following report to General Synod as a summary of the RCA's participation in various ecumenical and interfaith efforts during the past year. We are grateful to our general secretary, Rev. Eddy Alemán, and to Rev. Dr. Laura Osborne, RCA staff liaison, for their commitment to and participation in many of these organizations.

World Council of Churches (WCC)

The World Council of Churches is "a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior according to the scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is a community of churches on the way to visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and in common life in Christ." The WCC gathers its fellowship from 352 churches in 120 countries, representing more than 580 million Christians worldwide.

The WCC's highest legislative body, its assembly, meets approximately every seven years. Between assemblies, the WCC is governed by the Central Committee. This body meets every two years. Rev. Eddy Alemán will attend the June 18-24, 2025, Central Committee meeting in Johannesburg, South Africa, on behalf of Rev. Stacey Duensing Pearce (current RCA Central Committee member), who will have just returned from maternity leave at that time.

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

The WCC invites Christians to join in prayer January 18-25 each year for the annual “Week of Prayer for Christian Unity” and offers resources for worship, prayer, and Bible study. This year’s materials were prepared by the brothers and sisters of the monastic community of Bose in northern Italy. The theme was “Do you believe this?” (John 11:26). This year the Commission on Christian Unity created daily social media videos offering the WCC prayers. The commission urges churches, pastors, and elders to mark their calendars for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and make use of the rich resources created by the WCC each year.

Public Statements

The WCC speaks with a pastoral and prophetic voice addressing needs throughout the world in various public statements. This year, the commission commends especially to the General Synod the WCC’s various statements on the war in Israel and Palestine. The commission urges pastors and churches to read and engage with these statements through discussion, prayer, and ministry contexts. All published WCC public statements can be read in full on the WCC website: www.oikoumene.org.

Global Christian Forum (GCF)

The Global Christian Forum (GCF) creates space for a new methodology of worldwide ecumenical dialogue based on relational fellowship. The Global Christian Forum seeks to widen the ecumenical table by drawing together world leaders from Evangelical, historic Protestant, Orthodox, Pentecostal, Catholic, and African-Instituted churches.

Begun quietly in the 1990s, with RCA involvement from the very beginning, the GCF is responding to the rapid shift in global Christianity marked by new vitality and growth in the churches in the Global South, often in Pentecostal and Evangelical expressions that have no links to broader ecumenical bodies. From the start, the WCC, the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the World Evangelical Alliance, the Pentecostal World Fellowship, and others have been supportive of the GCF’s work.

The guiding purpose statement of the Global Christian Forum is “to create an open space wherein representatives from a broad range of Christian churches and inter-church organisations, which confess the triune God and Jesus Christ as perfect in His divinity and humanity, can gather to foster mutual respect, to explore and address together common challenges.”

The Global Christian Forum held its fourth Global Gathering on April 14-19, 2024, in Ghana with the theme “That the World May Know” from John 17:23. A Youth Pre-Assembly was held under the same theme. Rev. Stacey Duensing Pearce and Rev. Wes Granberg-Michaelson helped plan this first-ever GCF Youth Gathering. RCA representatives at the gathering included Rev. Wes Granberg-Michaelson, Rev. Stacey Duensing Pearce, Dr. Monica Schaap Pierce, and Rev. Dr. Laura Osborne.

Rev. Wes Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary emeritus of the RCA, serves

on the International Committee of the Global Christian Forum and as president of the GCF Foundation in the USA. Rev. Stacey Duensing Pearce serves as a youth delegate to the International Committee.

For more information on the Global Christian Forum, visit www.globalchristianforum.org.

World Communion of Reformed Churches

The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) carries a legacy rooted in the 16th-century Reformation, shaped by reformers such as John Calvin, John Knox, Ulrich Zwingli, Jan Hus, and Peter Valdes. Over centuries, this global communion—comprising Congregational, Presbyterian, Reformed, United/Uniting, and Waldensian churches—has evolved through significant milestones, uniting diverse traditions in a common witness to justice and faith.

Founded in 1875 as the Alliance of Reformed Churches, WCRC has consistently positioned itself as a voice against oppression—challenging colonialism, apartheid, economic and climate injustice, and gender inequality. From its early advocacy against European colonial policies in the 1880s to its 1982 declaration of apartheid as a sin, the Communion has upheld a bold and prophetic witness. The 2010 unification of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Reformed Ecumenical Council marked another step in strengthening its global presence. Today, WCRC operates from Hannover, Germany, with most of its member churches located in the Global South, where many navigate the realities of being religious minorities.

Central to the WCRC's identity is its mission to renew and restore both the economy and the earth, striving for all humanity and creation to experience life in its fullness, as inspired by Deuteronomy 30:19 and John 10:10. This mission is underpinned by a vision of a world where there is full and just participation for all people, achieved through robust engagement with the Word of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As a global *koinonia*, the WCRC and its member churches are committed to discerning, confessing, witnessing, and being reformed together, continually transforming to fulfill God's call to communion and justice.

As the WCRC prepares for its upcoming General Council in Thailand in October 2025, the theme "Persevere in Your Witness" resonates deeply with its historic mission and vision. The gathering will reaffirm the WCRC's role in empowering smaller churches, fostering ecumenical unity, and advocating for justice in an increasingly polarized world. In a time of shifting global challenges, the WCRC's commitment remains unwavering: to stand in faith, uphold human dignity, and persevere in witness—just as it has for nearly 150 years.

Respectfully submitted,
Anam Gill, WCRC Communications Coordinator

Continuing its long history of support for the WCRC, RCA Global Mission sent the Revs. Chelsea and Jeff Lampen in December 2024 to serve as Global Mission personnel alongside their colleagues at the WCRC. The Lampens follow in the steps of Phil and Rev. Gretchen Schoon-Tanis, who supported the work of the WCRC for the previous decade. The RCA will be well-represented at the

upcoming General Assembly—general secretary Rev. Eddy Alemán, Rev. Dr. Laura Osborne, Rev. Kim Pavlovich, and Jessica Loper (a student at Western Theological Seminary) will be attending as delegates, in addition to Rev. Dr. Lisa Vander Wal (currently serving as WCRC vice president) and Rev. Chelsea Lampen, who will serve as chaplain coordinator for the event.

Rev. Dr. Laura Osborne was invited to join the fourth round of the Pentecostal-Reformed dialogue through the WCRC. That dialogue started its initial conversation after the Global Christian Forum gathering in Accra, Ghana. The in-person meetings will begin after the WCRC gathering in Chiangmai, Thailand, in the fall of 2025. More information about the WCRC can be found at its website, www.wcrc.eu.

National Council of Churches (NCC)

Since its founding in 1950, the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC) has been a visible presence for ecumenical cooperation among Christians in the United States. The 37 member communions—from a wide spectrum of Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox, Evangelical, historic African American, and Living Peace churches—include more than 40 million people in more than 100,000 local congregations nationwide. The RCA was a charter member of the NCC, and our general secretary, Rev. Eddy Alemán, serves on its governing board. The RCA is also represented on the NCC’s Convening Tables on Interreligious Relations, Christian Education, Faith Formation and Leadership, and Faith and Order.

The October 2024 Christian Unity Gathering in Nashville highlighted the vital intersection of creation care and economic justice. During 2024, the NCC sponsored a Pilgrimage for Peace and a Freedom Summer 60th Anniversary Commemoration Voter Engagement Campaign. The NCC also produced a Voting Matters Toolkit. The NCC is celebrating its 75th anniversary in 2025 with several events leading up to the special Christian Unity Gathering in Boston in October with the theme “Christ is Risen: A Transforming Witness from Generation to Generation.”

Rev. Dr. Laura Osborne is still active in the Interreligious Table and the Theology Task Force. The Interreligious Table takes up issues relevant to the work and the times. Most of its work is done in dialogues. Rev. Osborne is a part of the Jewish-Christian dialogue. As described in the co-conveners’ summary statement, “The National Jewish-Christian Dialogue began decades ago. Convened by the National Council of Churches and various partners along the way, earlier iterations of the dialogue included participants from various Christian churches and Jewish organizations, and they focused on various issues important to the time and place in which they took place. The latter included a second conversation dedicated specifically to issues related to Israel and Palestine.” The Theology Task Force just finished up a paper working against Christian Nationalism. This paper was published just before the NCC’s last gathering in the fall of 2024. The policy statement of the task force is as follows: “The Theology Task Force is a study group, composed of members of the convening table...Its most recent work explored connections between Christian nationalism and racism. Analyses, essays, and reports led to the drafting by task force members of an NCC policy statement based on this work that would address the problem of Christian nationalism in the US, with

reference to religious nationalism globally.” The resulting policy statement, “The Dangers of Christian Nationalism in the United States” was adopted by the NCC Governing Board on April 20, 2021.

The NCC’s Faith and Order Table published “Confronting Racism and White Supremacy in the US: Twenty-first Century Theological Perspectives” in the fall of 2024. Commission member Kitt Jackson contributed an article about the steps the RCA has taken over the years to address and dismantle racism. The year 2025 marks the 1,700th anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea, and both the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches are cognizant of this anniversary. The contribution of the NCC Faith and Order Table will be a collection of essays currently in the editorial process. This collection includes essays from across the Christian traditions in the United States as well as across the continent. The RCA will be represented by a contribution from Rev. Matthew van Maastricht.

For more information about the work of the NCC, visit www.nationalcouncilofchurches.us.

Christian Churches Together (CCT)

Formed in 2006, Christian Churches Together in the USA (CCT) has as its mission “to broaden and expand fellowship, unity, and witness among the diverse expressions of Christian traditions in the USA.” Rev. Dr. Laura Osborne attended the fall gathering of CCT in Memphis, Tennessee, a city with great historical significance. Attendees visited or held services in churches from the five families of CCT’s member churches (Historic Black churches, Mainline Protestant churches, Orthodox churches, Catholic churches, and Evangelical churches). We encountered the history of Memphis, including the location of Dr. Martin Luther King’s last speech at the Church of God in Christ’s World Headquarters Church. We visited the National Civil Rights Museum and the Lorraine Motel. This is an incredibly rich time of ecumenism in the U.S., and CCT is the most diverse ecumenical body in the U.S. The RCA has a rich history in the forum and RCA members are valued participants.

From the forum summary:

On October 8-11, 2024, Christians from over 40 U.S. church communions and national organizations convened in Memphis to discern the Holy Spirit’s word for the churches today as they reflected on how the “third person” of the Trinity works through baptism, Eucharist, and discipleship. In light of the 30th anniversary of the Spirit-filled “Memphis Miracle” and the first anniversary of the “Asbury Outpouring,” both of which included a concern for repentance and racial reconciliation, the Forum also explored the call to justice in the life of the Spirit and considered how the Holy Spirit continues to work through creation, revelation, and Pentecost-like movements as we visited the Civil Rights Museum and prayed at the Mississippi River. We were delighted to welcome three new participant bodies into our membership at the Forum, including the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship.

Dr. Monica Schaap Pierce, a member of the RCA, is the executive director of CCT. More information can be found on its website: www.christianchurchestogether.org.

Formula of Agreement Relationships

In 1997, the RCA—in conjunction with its Reformed ecumenical partners the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the United Church of Christ—approved a historic agreement with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, known as the Formula of Agreement (FOA). This landmark agreement brought the four churches—already partners in several ministries, both in North America and around the world—into full communion with each other.

Since that agreement, the working relationships between the churches have remained close and vibrant, if not always very public. Leaders from within the RCA have historically served in positions with the church council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and on the ecumenical committee of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). While the commission regularly looks for means of cooperation between the partner denominations, it also acknowledges that, in fact, much ecumenical work between these denominations happens at the local level, where Reformed and Lutheran congregations join in ministries of worship, education, and service. Behind the scenes, denominational staff from the respective churches, including general secretary Rev. Eddy Alemán, meet both to support each other in their respective work and to plan for possible joint historic streams of Protestant Christianity at a time when their common witness makes the gospel of Jesus Christ more available to more people in more places.

To help churches grow in mutual understanding and, in particular, to implement the Formula's provisions for the exchange of ministers at the local level, denominational staff of each of the Formula churches have produced a revised guide on "The Orderly Exchange of Ministers of Word and Sacrament" document: images.rca.org/docs/ministry/FormulaOfAgreement.pdf. We commend this resource to those classes, ministers, and consistories considering an exchange of ministers with other Formula churches.

We are pleased to see that pastors from the ELCA, PC(USA), and UCC are serving many RCA congregations. We encourage congregations embarking on the search process to broaden their scope by considering candidates from the other Formula churches.

Rev. Dr. Laura Osborne helped orchestrate a training alongside the FOA partners to help RCA classes and stated clerks better understand our partnership. This training specifically focused on the orderly exchange of ministers. Many others were helpful in the training as well.

When invited, RCA representatives attend the general assemblies of our FOA partners. Rev. Dr. Laura Osborne also attends the PC(USA)'s ecumenical and interreligious committee meetings twice per year.

Creation Justice Ministries

The focus of Creation Justice Ministries (CJM) is "Care for God's Planet and People." Its work during 2024 has included impactful theological engagement,

advocacy, and community action, equipping churches and faith communities to embody their call to protect, restore, and rightly share God's creation.

CJM's 2024 annual resource, "Plastic Jesus: Real Faith in a Synthetic World," focused on the pervasive plastic crisis and its theological, social, and environmental dimensions. The resource includes worship materials, sermon starters, and action steps for congregations and individuals to address the plastic epidemic. CJM released another resource on environmental justice and Indigenous solidarity: "Truth, Healing, and Repair Resource." The 2025 resource, "Power of God: From Extractive Theology to Transformative Faith," will explore how faith communities can move from extractive understandings of power to models of transformation, renewal, and justice.

Advocacy efforts focused on protecting marine sanctuaries and old growth forests. Moving into 2025, CJM has a new logo reflecting its theological and ecological vision of a restored and thriving creation; it hired a policy and advocacy manager; and it plans to continue to build networks of resilience and action.

Robin Suydam is the RCA's ecumenical representative to the Creation Justice Ministries (CJM) board.

For more details or to explore resources, visit www.creationjustice.org.

Anabaptist Rapprochement

Although the following recommendation was made several years ago, action was not taken on it until recently.

H 19-2

To instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to explore possibilities for repentance and reconciliation, being particularly attentive to the ways in which our ecumenical partners have pursued rapprochement with Anabaptists, and report back to General Synod 2021 (*MGS 2019*, p. 276).

In accordance with H 19-2, adopted by General Synod 2019, the Commission on Christian Unity is coordinating with Christian Churches Together to facilitate a discussion with the Mennonites, the Church of the Brethren, and the Bruderhof.

The CCU has begun work on this by reaching out to our Formula of Agreement partners to see what reconciliation processes they have done. We plan to continue the process toward rapprochement, repentance, and reconciliation.

Reformed–Catholic Dialogue

The goal of the Reformed–Catholic Dialogue is to bring together Catholic and Reformed scholars to model and deepen a "dialogue of love" in which each tradition brings its own distinctive gifts to help each other pursue the truth and grow in the love of God and neighbor. This dialogue has been paused for the time being.

The Interreligious Subcommittee

The missional mandate for the work of the interreligious subcommittee of the Commission on Christian Unity is found in the 2018 report of the Interreligious Task Force. “The primary purpose of the church of Jesus Christ is to bear witness to God’s saving grace and love in a world imbued with cultural and religious diversity. In this sense, we are a missionary people, called by God to use our gifts in God’s renewing and reconciling work in all its dimensions. This entails working with our neighbors to bring healing and hope to the many victims of poverty, injustice, and oppression while embracing Jesus’ call to ‘make disciples of all nations’ (Matthew 28:19).”

The interreligious subcommittee of the commission met three times in 2024 to support the interreligious work of the RCA. Beside the work through our ecumenical partners already listed, the subcommittee also meets regularly with the Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign. It has been an RCA partner since its founding. This group helps fight Islamophobia and, more recently, antisemitism. The group has training locally and virtually. The RCA has had a working group with the CRC for the last three years. This group brings training to the Reformed community.

Rev. Dr. Osborne took a group to Ethiopia in partnership with Global Mission to study the ecumenical and interreligious (Muslim-Christian relations) work of Mekane Yesus Seminary in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The group went on to the Al Amana Centre in Oman to study the same work and see the contrast and similarities between the two.

Global Partnerships

The coordinator for interreligious relations shares in the work of RCA Global Mission. There is a great connection with the Al Amana Centre in Oman, and a few intercultural trips were planned for 2024. The timing of these trips has been affected by the war in Gaza. We partner with the Al Amana Centre through scriptural reasoning and share a few interns who work on similar projects. There has been much collaboration with the refugee ministries coordinator, with an online workshop to help folks reach the diaspora in their neighborhood.

A new partnership has been formed with Religions for Peace–USA. This organization helps with awareness of other faiths and sometimes champions related justice issues. There are monthly gatherings to get people involved in the work. Religions for Peace had a strong presence at the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago, Illinois, in August 2023. Its coordinator for religious relations sat on a panel with other religious leaders on the topic of religious appropriation.

The interreligious subcommittee has three members and each of them has been working on projects that connect with the group and with the greater commission. Rev. Paige Pugh is working on collecting resources to help our churches connect with their neighbors of another faith.

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP)

The RCA is a longstanding member of CMEP. Through events, resources, and

trips to the region, Churches for Middle East Peace provides opportunities to learn about the Middle East and a holistic approach to advocating for peace. CMEP elevates diverse voices advocating for equality, security, and human rights for all people in the Middle East. This past year the focus on the war in Gaza has continued. CMEP is asking for an end to all hostilities, the release of all hostages, and the free flow of humanitarian aid. They advocate for just U.S. policies toward the Middle East by contacting members of Congress, participating in Capitol Hill and government meetings, and attending advocacy summits. Rev. Dr. Laura Osborne sits on CMEP's governing board.

Dr. Peter Ford, who served at the Near East School of Theology (NEST) in Beirut, Lebanon, shared an update on the status of NEST's work in the region. The Commission on Christian Unity is still involved with the school and in the region through its work with Churches for Middle East Peace. NEST (where Peter and Patty served as RCA missionaries from 2012 to 2022) has worked hard to maintain quality theological education, serving Lebanese, Syrian, Jordanian, and Palestinian students as they train for pastoral and other Christian ministries in the Middle East. This work continues, despite the challenges of Christian emigration from the region, and the political and economic problems that Lebanon has faced in recent years. During the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in the fall of 2024, NEST was able to continue classes online, even though all students and most of the faculty and staff had returned to their homes. Following the cease-fire agreement, they have returned, and NEST is now conducting classes in person on-site. NEST has also experienced a major staffing transition with the retirement of Dr. George Sabra as president in the summer of 2024. However, the new president, Dr. Martin Accad, has been well-received by everyone associated with NEST, and he is carefully guiding the school through these uncertain times. The Fords (now retired) continue to be in touch with various faculty and graduates.

For more information visit <http://cmep.org>.

Christian Unity and Peace in Palestine

The ongoing violence in Palestine continues to draw global focus in the aftermath of the October 7, 2023, attacks (which claimed 1,139 lives) and the subsequent military campaign in Gaza. Of course, the violence in occupied Palestine has a context that stretches much further back than late 2023. The Center for Preventive Action estimates 1.9 million Gazans have been displaced and approximately 46,000 have been killed (17,000 of which were believed to be Hamas militants).

The Reformed Church in America has had ministers involved in work toward peace in Palestine, advocating for justice for all people. In 2021, RCA missionaries Joshua Vis and Chris DeBlaay created a documentary called *The Law and the Prophets*, which continues to be screened for audiences across the globe. Their work can be followed at www.rca.org/global-mission/missionaries/josh-sally-vis.

The commission thanks Rev. John Paarlberg for his continued work to keep the denomination connected to ecumenical projects promoting peace in Palestine. Some of those partners include Sumud (ELCA), Palestine Justice Network (PC[USA]), Palestine Israel Network (UCC), United Methodist Kairos Response

(UMC), and the World Communion of Reformed Churches. The WCRC has a resource called Focus: Palestine, which congregations can use to educate themselves and be empowered to advocate for change.

The commission reminds General Synod 2025 that the Reformed Church in America has advocated for a just peace in Palestine in the past. In 1987, the General Synod made the statement that it “affirmed the right of the state of Israel to exist and advocated for the full rights of self-determination, including statehood for the Palestinian people” (*MGS 1987*, p. 102; see also *MGS 1980*, R-5, p. 64 and *MGS 1989*, pp. 68-72). In 2004, the General Synod declared Christian Zionism, the dispensational belief that Israel must be reconstituted to the borders described in the Old Testament as a precursor to Christ’s Second Coming, to be a distortion of the Biblical message and an impediment to peace (*MGS 2004*, p. 311). Likewise, the General Synod of 2002 urged a mutual end to violence in Palestine by Israel and Palestinians (*MGS 2002*, R-125, pp. 412-413).

The commission urges congregations of the Reformed Church in America to access these crucial resources and to work with our Christian partners to pursue a just peace in Israel and Palestine.

Relations with the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA)

On October 2, 2024, members from the Commission on Christian Unity and members from the CRCNA’s Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations Committee met to discuss the directive from the CRCNA’s Synod 2024 to examine our ecumenical relationship. A wonderful conversation took place around the RCA’s changes in the last few years, our historical stance on marriage, and, given the differences in our denominational structure, how our classes deal with this issue. Subsequently, a letter was sent from the CCU to the CRCNA Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations Committee affirming our longstanding relationship and expressing our desire to remain in communion with the CRCNA.

Relations with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the USA

The CCU received the following directive from General Synod 2023:

[T]o invite the leadership of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the USA (UOC-USA) to meet with them, to hear about the Ukrainian Orthodox experiences of the war in Ukraine, to consider further ways of supporting and partnering with the UOC-USA in war relief, and to offer the RCA’s expressions of solidarity and support, with our prayers of intercession and prayers for peace in an in-person setting (*MGS 2023*, CU 23-1, p. 181).

Commission on Christian Unity members met with representatives of the UOC-USA at their headquarters in Somerset, New Jersey, in October 2023 to carry out this recommendation. The commission met with His Eminence Archbishop Daniel Zelensky, Ruling Hierarch of the Western Eparchy of the UOC-USA and President of the Consistory, and the Very Rev. Fr. Vasyl Pasakas. That meeting ended with prayer with and for these leaders, the UOC-USA, and the people of Ukraine who are still immersed in a war they did not choose. (At the time of this writing, it has been three years since the war began.) Prayer was the

number one request that Archbishop Daniel made of the commission and of the RCA. “Do not let the lamp of support for Ukraine stop burning,” he asked; “continue to tell the story of Ukraine and remind one another of this war—and so the need for prayer—as long as it may continue.”

Subsequently, Archbishop Daniel was invited to address the 2024 General Synod. Although he was not able to attend in person, he sent video greetings in which he thanked the RCA for our support and prayers and suggested ways to strengthen the relationship. Among those suggestions were the following: joint educational programs with New Brunswick Theological Seminary and St. Sophia Ukrainian Orthodox Seminary, coordinated advocacy efforts, sharing of resources and expertise, and interfaith dialogues.

At the time of the third anniversary of the Russian invasion, RCA News published a “Call to Prayer” for the people of Ukraine and an end to the war. Local RCA churches and members can continue to express solidarity by praying for an end to the war and the establishment of a just peace as well as connecting with UOC-USA churches or Ukrainians who may be present in your area. In partnership with these Ukrainians that you or your congregation come to know personally, further actions like letters to congressional representatives can be discerned.

For more information, visit www.uocofusa.org, the website of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA.

Acknowledgements

The commission welcomed Rev. Andy Bossardet and Allan Altamirano as new members this year. We wish to thank Rev. Stacey Duensing Pearce for her work over the past six years as she completes her final term on CCU. We are grateful for the dedication of elder Kitt Jackson, moderator; Rev. Nathan Busker, vice moderator; and Rev. Jeffery Lampen, secretary. The presence of Rev. Anthony Elenbaas, a pastor in the Christian Reformed Church in North America, on the commission has been a blessing, especially as we discern new ways for the RCA to relate to the CRCNA. The other members are Rev. Robert Hoffman and Rev. Kim Pavlovich.

Report of the Commission on Christian Worship

The commission met via Zoom on October 21, 2024, and again in person on February 7-9, 2025, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, at the RCA's Michigan Regional Center. We also attended worship at Church of the Servant in Grand Rapids together.

Making Our Resources Available and Resourceful

We continue to have conversations about our commission's role as the conscience of worship in the RCA. Previously our role was to write liturgies that were requested by the General Synod. Over the years RCA churches have moved away from utilizing those resources and the commission has found that our role has been changing. Those changes have certainly meant that the way we do our work is different than it was twenty 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 *diakona*, 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 that 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. For example, we were tasked by General Synod in 2021 with writing a Litany of Lament. That work concluded in the spring of 2024, but the commission wonders how it best can get into the hands of pastors and worship leaders to be used by congregations in the RCA. In our conversations with the fantastic GSC staff, we have not yet found an answer that we feel is satisfactory. Along those same lines, we have also wondered how we can best equip the churches in our denomination with needs they have concerning

worship in their local context. We would like to hear from you how we can better equip you as pastors, worship leaders, and consistory members.

Liturgy That Meets Our Contexts

While discussing the survey in Grand Rapids, we also talked about the thoughtful, poetic language in our liturgy. Given the diversity of our cultural contexts, the language in our liturgy may not always be appropriate in all settings, or connect with people who are unfamiliar with the gospel. Starting with the funeral liturgy, we are creating rubrics to help guide ministers and commissioned pastors on how to make the language more colloquial for their contexts, while still keeping the rich theology of each liturgy. This project is just getting started, so we will have more to report next year.

Bible Translation Resources

Our work around translations of the Bible continues to evolve. We are continuing to work on a resource that would enable leaders and readers to see at a glance how different translations relate to the reader and to one another. This year we reached out to the scholars at our RCA seminaries. We've taken their wisdom and used it to help inform the graph we began last year. We are now sending our work to the Commission for Women, the Commission on Race and Ethnicity, and the Commission on Christian Discipleship and Education for their feedback. We are also asking CCDE to give us guidance on children's Bibles. We are hoping to conclude this project in the next year and have it available for church leaders and lay people to use.

Worship at Church of the Servant

The worship service at Church of the Servant (CoS) was filled with music from the Psalms. We happened to attend the week they announced the New Psalm Contest winners; we were graced with new musical settings of Psalm 108 and Psalm 121. Winning psalm songs from previous years were also used during the service. Here is a brief note about the New Psalm Contest from the CoS website:

In its fifteen years, the Church of the Servant New Psalm Contest, in memory of Ben Fackler, has garnered many quality Psalm songs from a diverse group of songwriters. We are grateful to all the Psalm writers, whether this is the first year they have submitted, or their fifteenth year of submitting! We hope that this contest will be an encouragement to songwriters to continue writing new settings of the Psalms. And we hope that this contest will be a blessing to the Church, continuing to provide it with new Psalm songs for congregations to sing.

The Rev. Len Vander Zee preached from their Lord's Prayer series, focusing on the phrase, "Give us this day our daily bread." He urged, "May the food and the clothes and all the other things we need come into our hands more and more in ways that are just and true and respectful of our fellow human beings and of all our fellow creatures." We were thankful for the reminder that God is not a God of scarcity, but of abundance, and similarly we are called to be a people who are generous in every way.

There were a few other notable things about worship at CoS. One is their use of liturgical dancers, who called us into worship and also brought the font forward with simple, grace-filled movements. Their sanctuary is set up in such a way that a central pillar looks like a tree, and from this tree hung strands of stars (for the season of Epiphany). The music team had musicians of all ages and stages participating in worship. Communion was done in circles, where congregants came forward and surrounded the Table in a circle and then proceeded to serve each other communion.

We note these things to continue to encourage churches to allow their imaginations to percolate to create opportunity for intergenerational worship and to remember that even a building's structure and how we use it can enhance our worship.

Thank You

The commission wishes to express gratitude to Cory Grimm and Ron Rienstra, who are concluding their terms this year.

Respectfully submitted,
Rosalyn De Koster, moderator

Report of the Commission on Church Order

The Commission on Church Order (CCO) serves a supportive role for the church, “making recommendations concerning the content, structure, and style of the *Book of Church Order*” and providing “advisory responses to requests for interpretation of the *Book of Church Order*” (*BCO* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 4b [2024 edition, pp. 114-115]). To faithfully fulfill these responsibilities, the commission met in person at the Michigan Regional Center in Grand Rapids on September 23-25, 2024, and January 8-9, 2025, and via Zoom on April 11, 2024; April 25, 2024; May 8, 2024; July 22, 2024; November 18, 2024; December 18, 2024; February 17, 2025; and March 5, 2025.

On several other occasions, the commission consulted with General Synod officers, General Synod Council (GSC) staff, as well as officers and members of other assemblies, agencies, commissions, and institutions—both formally and informally—responding to requests for assistance interpreting or applying the provisions of our order.

Advisory Responses to Requests for Interpretation

The commission received several inquiries related to the interpretation or application of the *BCO*. What follows is a summary of some of the more significant advisory responses provided by the commission.

Covenant Shares for Congregations Petitioning to Withdraw

The commission received an inquiry about the propriety of levying assessments/covenant shares for congregations that have filed a petition to withdraw from their classis but have not yet withdrawn, despite the running of the four-calendar-quarter time period contemplated in the rules and regulations established by the General Synod’s adoption of RF 21-3. The commission discussed the background of the rules and regulations, noting that the origin of the four-calendar-quarter standard was the Vision 2020 Team report, and that the apparent reason for it was to discourage classes from delaying unnecessarily their processing of petitions to withdraw.

The commission concluded that GSC staff do not have the authority to unilaterally resume the levying of assessments/covenant shares, but may work with relevant classes to determine whether a church’s intent to withdraw remains legitimate. If it does, then the classis and church should work toward mutual resolution. Finally, the commission noted that if this issue increases in significance, a recommendation could be made to the General Synod that the rules and regulations be amended to address it.

Regional Synod Representation on General Synod Council

The commission received an inquiry about a regional synod experiencing difficulties identifying a classical elder delegate to recommend to the Commission on Nominations for service on the General Synod Council. The regional synod’s executive board asked whether it would be possible for their regional synod voting delegate to the 2024 General Synod, who is an elder, to be nominated for the GSC position. The commission affirmed the executive board’s request in this circumstance.

Implementation of Restructuring Recommendations

The commission was invited by the officers of General Synod into a conversation about the orderly implementation of the amendments approved by the 2024 General Synod, should they be approved by the classes and the 2025 General Synod. The conversation touched on such topics as the timeline for the amendments to take effect and the process whereby the 2025 General Synod would deliberate and decide upon the timeline. Further information can be found in the report of the General Synod Council acting as the Executive Committee of the General Synod.

Editorial Changes to the BCO

Occasionally, the commission receives correspondence from eagle-eyed church members about errant commas, spaces, and other minor adjustments that need to be made for accuracy in the *BCO*. Sometimes, the adjustments needed are more substantive. This is the case this year, as it was brought to the commission's attention that a reference is made to a section of the *BCO* that no longer exists. The definition of a consistory in Chapter 1, Part I, Article 1, Section 1 makes reference to Chapter 1, Part II, Article 17, Section 8, which used to be a section about commissioned pastors and was re-numbered in 2017. That section is now Chapter 1, Part II, Article 17, Section 4a. Because this change is editorial in nature, no official action is required by the General Synod.

The commission plans a full review of the *BCO* soon to discover other references that need revising.

Benefits-Related Changes to Formulary 5

The commission received a request from Kelly Oliveira, executive director of the Board of Benefits Services, for a meeting regarding benefits for ministers serving part-time and ministers serving in geographic locations other than the United States and Canada. As the circumstances of many RCA churches shift to having part-time ministers, and the RCA grows into a global denomination, revisions are needed to the form congregations use when calling a minister. The Board of Benefits Services regularly reviews and updates its policies, so it logically follows that the formulary would reference those policies, rather than work through the process for changing the constitution each time.

With this in mind, the commission offers the following constitutional amendment:

CO 25-1

To adopt the following amendments to the *Book of Church Order* for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined, deletions are stricken):

Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 7

Sec. 7. A consistory shall fulfill the provisions of the call form (Appendix, Formulary No. 5) for retirement and insurance for all ministers serving the church under call or contract unless ~~(a)~~

regarding retirement, the minister is covered by the retirement plan sponsored by the Regional Synod of Canada or the retirement plan of the communion where the minister's membership is held; (b~~a~~) the classis determines that the minister is serving the church part-time, as defined by the Board of Benefits Services, and that circumstances warrant that the consistory be exempt from this requirement, or (c~~b~~) the minister is serving less than part-time as defined by the Board of Benefits Services.

Chapter 1, Part II, Article 15, Section 3

Sec. 3. The classis shall be responsible for the pastoral care of each enrolled minister and the minister's immediate family. Pastoral care shall be exercised by such means as the classis deems appropriate, which shall be reported to the classis annually in order to assess its adequacy and effectiveness. The classis shall assure that the provisions of the call form (Appendix, Formulary No. 5) for retirement and insurance are fulfilled for all of its ministers serving in congregations or employed by an assembly, institution, or agency of the Reformed Church in America under call or contract, unless (a) regarding retirement, ~~the minister is covered by the retirement plan sponsored by the Regional Synod of Canada or the retirement plan of the communion where the minister's membership is held;~~ (b~~a~~) the classis determines that the minister is serving the church or other assembly, institution, or agency part-time, as defined by the Board of Benefits Services, and that circumstances warrant that the consistory or employing assembly, institution, or agency be exempt from this requirement, or (c~~b~~) the minister is serving less than part-time as defined by the Board of Benefits Services.

Formulary No. 5

5. Call to a Minister of Word and Sacrament

...

We promise you in the name of this church all proper attention, love, and obedience in the Lord. We promise and oblige ourselves to encourage you in the discharge of the duties of your important office, and to free you from worldly avocation while you are dispensing spiritual blessings to us, to pay you the sum of \$[AMOUNT] in [FREQUENCY OF PAYMENT; e.g.,

weekly, monthly, twice per monthly] payments yearly and every year, and to consider annually whether such payments are adequate, as long as you continue to be the minister of the church, together with [HERE INSERT PARTICULARS THAT REFER TO A PARSONAGE OR RESIDENCE, OR OTHER EMOLUMENTS]. As long as you continue to be the minister of this church, we also promise to pay benefits as stipulated by the Board of Benefits Services, which may include contributions to the Reformed Church retirement plan, and provide benefits including group life insurance, long-term disability insurance, and medical insurance for you and your immediate family—which means those dependents eligible for family medical insurance according to the insurance plan documents of the Reformed Benefits Association. Such insurance coverages shall meet or exceed the minimum standards stipulated by the Board of Benefits Services.

If you and your immediate family elect medical coverage through your spouse's employer-sponsored group plan, we promise to compensate you for any medical premium costs incurred by your immediate family, up to the amount stipulated by the Board of Benefits Services premium cost of the Reformed Benefits Association plan meeting the minimum standards stipulated for the year compensated. (ADOPTED)

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance was to vote in favor of CO 25-1.

Referrals from Previous General Synods

Calculation of Size of Middle Assembly Delegations to General Synod

The 2024 General Synod voted to adopt RF 24-2, thereby instructing the commission

to change the method of calculation for middle assembly [classis] delegations to the General Synod in *BCO* Chapter 1, Part IV, so that each middle assembly [classis] receives one minister delegate and one elder delegate for each 2,000 confessing members or fraction thereof, for report to the General Synod in 2025 (*MGs* 2024, p. 119).

In response, the commission offers the following constitutional amendment:

CO 25-2

To adopt the following amendment to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 1,

for recommendation to the classes for approval (deletions are stricken):

Article 1. General Synod Defined

The General Synod is the highest assembly and judicatory of the Reformed Church in America. It consists of ~~two minister delegates and two elder delegates from each of the classes having four thousand or fewer confessing members on the roll of its churches, and one minister delegate and one elder delegate from each of the classes for each two thousand confessing members, or fraction thereof, from each of the classes having more than four thousand confessing members on the roll of its churches as computed in accordance with the Bylaws of the General Synod; [one elder or minister delegate from each of the regional synods;]~~ five General Synod professor delegates, drawn from each of the theological seminaries of the Reformed Church and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency; a number of missionary and chaplain delegates; and corresponding delegates provided for in the Bylaws of the General Synod. Voting rights shall be limited to elder delegates and those minister delegates who are actively serving in ministries under the jurisdiction or with the approval of an assembly. The General Synod is a permanent, continuing body which functions between stated sessions through the General Synod Council, commissions, and agencies.

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance was to amend CO 25-2 as follows (addition is twice underlined):

... ~~[one elder or minister delegate from each of the regional synods;]~~ up to five General Synod professor delegates...

Reason:

We do not currently have five General Synod professors.

VOTED: To amend CO 25-2.

VOTED: To adopt CO 25-2 as amended.

The final version of CO 25-2 as amended and adopted reads as follows:

CO 25-2

To adopt the following amendment to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 1, for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined, deletions are stricken):

Article 1. General Synod Defined

The General Synod is the highest assembly and judicatory of the Reformed Church in America. It consists of ~~two minister delegates and two elder delegates from each of the classes having four thousand or fewer confessing members on the roll of its churches, and one minister delegate and one elder delegate from each of the classes for each two thousand confessing members, or fraction thereof, from each of the classes having more than four thousand confessing members on the roll of its churches as computed in accordance with the Bylaws of the General Synod; [one elder or minister delegate from each of the regional synods;]~~ up to five General Synod professor delegates, drawn from each of the theological seminaries of the Reformed Church and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency; a number of missionary and chaplain delegates; and corresponding delegates provided for in the Bylaws of the General Synod. Voting rights shall be limited to elder delegates and those minister delegates who are actively serving in ministries under the jurisdiction or with the approval of an assembly. The General Synod is a permanent, continuing body which functions between stated sessions through the General Synod Council, commissions, and agencies.
(ADOPTED)

Notes: Amendment 10 from 2024 (see EC 25-11 on pp. 28-29) received a final declarative vote from this synod, effective as of December 30, 2026. When this amendment becomes effective, references to “classis” in the *BCO* will be replaced by “middle assembly.” The bracketed deletion is also part of an already-pending amendment that received a final declarative action from this General Synod, also effective as of December 30, 2026. It will therefore be deleted in the 2026 edition of the *BCO*.

Weighting of Votes by Middle Assemblies on Constitutional Amendments

The 2024 General Synod voted to adopt RF 24-3, thereby instructing the commission

to prepare amendments to the “Rules and Amendments of the Government of the Reformed Church in America and Disciplinary Procedures” (page 77 of the 2023 edition of the *Book of Church Order*) in order to weight middle assembly [classical] votes on amendments to the RCA Constitution based on the number of delegates each middle assembly [classis] was eligible to send to the General Synod at which the amendment was adopted, while preserving the requirement that any amendments to the Constitution require support of two-thirds of the votes cast, for report to the General Synod in 2025 (*MGS 2024*, p. 123).

In response, the commission offers the following constitutional amendment:

CO 25-3

To adopt the following amendment to the *Book of Church Order*, Rules and Amendments of the Government of the Reformed Church in America and Disciplinary Procedures, for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined, deletions are stricken):

Rules and Amendments of The Government of the Reformed Church in America and Disciplinary Procedures

...

Sec. 2.

...

- b. ~~At~~ For a proposed amendment to be approved by the classes, the weighted vote of the classes in favor of the amendment must be at least two-thirds of the total number of regular classical delegates eligible to be seated at the General Synod at which the amendment was adopted. Each classis's vote is equal to the number of delegates from that classis who were classes- ~~shall approve a proposed amendment in order to secure its adoption. Only classes whose delegates were eligible to be seated at the General Synod at which the amendment was adopted are eligible to vote on the recommendation for approval. A classis must cast all its votes either in favor of or opposed to the amendment. (ADOPTED).~~

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance was to vote in favor of CO 25-3.

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

VOTED: To not cease debate.

VOTED: To adopt CO 25-3.

Note: Amendment 10 (see EC 25-11 on pp. 28-29) received a final declarative vote from this synod, effective as of December 30, 2026. When this amendment becomes effective, references to "classis" in the BCO will be replaced by "middle assembly."

Implementation of Triennial Schedule for General Synod

The 2024 General Synod voted to adopt RF 24-4, thereby instructing the commission

to propose amendments to the *Book of Church Order* and other necessary governing documents of the Reformed Church in America that would change the General Synod's meeting schedule so that it meets in person once every three years, with a shorter virtual annual meeting each year in which it does not meet in person, for report to the 2025 General Synod (*MGS 2024*, p. 126).

The commission observed at one meeting that work done in response to this instruction has the potential to become very complicated. Upon further discussion, the commission determined that such is not the case. The commission's discussion of the matter focused primarily on developing a proposed agenda for meetings that are not held in person. Ultimately it concluded that all agenda items presently identified in *BCO* Chapter 3, Part II, Article 1 can be handled properly and reasonably in a meeting that is not conducted in person. Consequently, the commission recommends the following constitutional amendment:

CO 25-4

To adopt the following amendment to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 4, Section 1, for recommendation to the classes for approval (addition is underlined):

Article 4. Sessions and Meetings of General Synod

Sec. 1. The General Synod shall meet annually, either electronically or in person, at such time and place as was either reported by the Executive Committee at a previous stated session or determined by the Committee on Emergencies. All meetings of the General Synod shall begin and end with prayer.

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance was to vote in favor of CO 25-4.

A motion was made and supported from the floor to amend CO 25-4 as follows (further addition is twice underlined):

Sec. 1. The General Synod shall meet annually, either electronically or in person, with an in-person meeting occurring at least every third year, at such time and place as was either reported by the Executive Committee at a previous stated session or determined by the Committee on Emergencies. All meetings of the General Synod shall begin and end with prayer.

VOTED: To further amend CO 25-4.

CO 25-4 as amended was before the house.

A motion was made and supported from the floor to further amend CO 25-4. It reads as follows (addition is double underlined):

Sec. 1. The General Synod shall meet annually, either electronically, hybrid, or in person, with an in-person meeting occurring at least every third year, at such time and place as was either reported by the Executive Committee at a previous stated session or determined by the Committee on Emergencies. All meetings of the General Synod shall begin and end with prayer.

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

VOTED: To cease debate.

VOTED: To not further amend CO 25-4.

CO 25-4 as amended was again before the house.

VOTED: To adopt CO 25-4 as amended.

The final version of CO 25-4 as amended and adopted reads as follows:

CO 25-4

To adopt the following amendments to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 4, Section 1, for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined, deletions are stricken):

***Sec. 1.* The General Synod shall meet annually, either electronically or in person, with an in-person meeting occurring at least every third year, at such time and place as was either reported by the Executive Committee at a previous stated session or determined by the Committee on Emergencies. All meetings of the General Synod shall begin and end with prayer. (ADOPTED)**

Travel Expenses for Delegates Outside the Current Geographical Limits in the BCO

The 2024 General Synod voted to adopt ONB 24-2, thereby instructing the commission

in consultation with the General Synod Council, to propose amendments to the *Book of Church Order* that will permit the General Synod to pay travel expenses for delegates outside the current limitations contained in *BCO* Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 3, Section 7, for report to General Synod 2025.

As the RCA continues to grow beyond the U.S. and Canada, flexibility is required to ensure delegates are able to attend the meetings of the General Synod. The General Synod Council travel policy is more easily amended than the *Book of Church Order*.

In response, the commission offers the following constitutional amendment:

CO 25-5

To adopt the following amendment to *The Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 3, Section 7, for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined, deletions are stricken):

Sec. 7. The General Synod shall pay travel expenses within Canada and the United States (exclusive of Alaska and Hawaii) to and from the synod's place of meeting according to the General Synod Council travel policy. (ADOPTED)

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance was to vote in favor of CO 25-5.

A motion was made and supported from the floor to amend CO 25-5 to read as follows (deletion is stricken, addition is underlined):

“~~The General Synod sending body~~ shall pay...”

VOTED: To not amend CO 25-5.

VOTED: To adopt CO 25-5.

Commissions Working with Racial and Ethnic Councils

The 2024 General Synod voted to refer RE 24-1 to the Commission on Church Order, thereby instructing the commission “in consultation with the Commission on Race and Ethnicity, to incorporate the ideas contained in RE 24-1 into the Bylaws of the General Synod” (*MGS 2024*, RE 24-1a, p. 302).

RE 24-1 reads as follows:

To direct each General Synod commission to annually seek advice and input from each racial and ethnic council in order to incorporate their experiences and concerns into the commission's mission and goals. Each commission is to provide the General Synod Council (GSC) with its annual schedule of engagement with the councils. And further, To direct GSC to monitor how each commission implements its engagement with the councils, and to include its findings in its evaluations of the commissions, as per *BCO* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6g (2023 edition, p. 111) (*MGS 2024*, pp. 301-302).

In response, the commission offers the following constitutional amendment:

CO 25-6

To adopt the following amendment to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 1, for recommendation to the 2026 General Synod for approval (additions are underlined):

Article 5. Commissions

Sec. 1. General Provisions

...

d. Racial/Ethnic Council Reports

As soon as reasonably practicable following the end of the immediately-preceding General Synod, each commission shall provide a report to each racial/ethnic council established by the General Synod Council identifying the anticipated business of the commission for the upcoming year. The purpose of the report shall be to allow the racial/ethnic councils to provide advice and input to the commission’s work for the upcoming year. (ADOPTED)

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance was to vote in favor of CO 25-6.

Diversity of the General Synod Judicial Business Commission

The 2024 General Synod voted to refer OG 24-1 to the Commission on Church Order, thereby instructing the commission “in consultation with the Commission on Race and Ethnicity and the Commission for Women, to propose how the General Synod Commission on Judicial Business will include sufficient diversity and to present recommendations to General Synod 2025.”

CO 24-4 recommended the creation of a new General Synod Commission on Judicial Business, made up of one representative from each classis. The commission consulted with the Commission on Race and Ethnicity and the Commission for Women about the challenge of including sufficient diversity in a commission whose members are selected by classes, not the General Synod Commission on Nominations. The commissions concluded that a positive step would be for the racial and ethnic councils and the Commission for Women to consult with classes in helping them to select their nominees to the Commission on Judicial Business, and commend this practice to the racial and ethnic councils, Commission for Women, and classes for their consideration.

Consultation with Other Commissions and Task Forces

The commission also consulted with other bodies as required by the 2025 General Synod relating to EC 24-9 (task force regarding assemblies beyond

North America), RF 24-5 (regarding standards of ordination for ministers from beyond North America), and RF 24-6 (regarding the size of General Synod commissions). More information can be found in the report of the EC 24-9 task force, the report of the Pastoral Formation Oversight Board, and the report of the General Synod Council.

Review of Policy Governance

1. Introduction

In 2023, the General Synod directed the commission to evaluate the GSC's use of policy governance and report back to General Synod 2025 on the commission's findings and recommendations. This report fulfills that request.

This report has several parts. Part 2 of this report contains a summary of the commission's findings and recommendations. Part 3 of this report identifies the methodology the commission used to conduct our review. Part 4 of the report contains a detailed discussion of both policy governance generally, including the strengths and weaknesses of the approach, as well as the GSC's use of policy governance over nearly 20 years. Finally, Part 5 of this report provides the recommendations of the commission based on our review.

Anyone interested in reviewing additional information regarding the GSC's use of policy governance should visit the GSC's website (www.rca.org/about/government/general-synod/the-general-synod-council), which contains a link to the GSC's governance policies.

2. Summary

As discussed more fully below, policy governance is a model of organizational governance that divides the strategic governance and operational management of an organization into separate roles. Under policy governance, a governing board sets policies and goals for the organization, while an executive is responsible for both identifying and then implementing the best methods for achieving those goals on a day-to-day basis within the confines identified by the board. Implemented as intended, policy governance can provide many benefits to an organization; implemented incorrectly, policy governance can lead to substantial dysfunction within an organization.

The GSC has been using policy governance since the early 2000s with mixed results. At times in our history, GSC has used policy governance as intended. On those occasions, the GSC, general secretary, and staff have generally all worked well together and the RCA has benefited as a result. These experiences confirm that policy governance can work within the RCA. At other times, however, the GSC has fallen into a more passive approach to governance—and particularly with respect to oversight of the executive—than the policy governance model contemplates or requires, and as a result created an over-reliance on the general secretary for the governance of the RCA. This passive approach by the GSC led to periods of dysfunction within the operations of the RCA.

Importantly, however, the GSC has, through hard work and training, rededicated itself in recent years to the proper use of policy governance, and the results are both encouraging and beneficial. Communication, clarity of roles, oversight, and accountability have improved substantially in recent years among all three critical groups: the GSC, the general secretary, and staff. These groups have

worked diligently to realize these benefits, and changing the governance approach at this time would create a substantial period of disruption when we presently have stability and harmony in our governance.

No style of governance is perfect, as they are all created by imperfect people. Policy governance has its limitations, but it can help complex organizations fulfill their purposes and achieve their goals when used appropriately. There are no inherent inconsistencies between policy governance and our polity as it is presented in the *Book of Church Order*. With the appropriate diligence and work on revising, and continued study of the other suggestions the commission has made, policy governance can be an effective model for the GSC.

3. Methodology

In evaluating the GSC's use of policy governance, the commission sought information from a wide variety of sources to ensure that our review was comprehensive. All of these sources informed our discussion below on policy governance and the GSC's use of policy governance.

a. Review of RCA Records

As the GSC's use of policy governance has spanned more than 20 years, the commission reviewed minutes, correspondence, and other historical records of the RCA discussing the RCA's use of policy governance. This review was helpful, as ONB 23-4 is not the first time General Synod directed the commission to consider whether the GSC's use of policy governance is consistent with the Constitution of the RCA. In 2004, General Synod instructed the commission to conduct a very similar review of policy governance. At the conclusion of that review, the commission, in consultation with the Commission on Theology, reported to General Synod in 2005 that the GSC can use policy governance in a manner consistent with the RCA's Constitution.

b. Discussion with Governance Experts

The commission interviewed non-RCA individuals with substantial experience advising governing boards of both for-profit and nonprofit institutions on the various models of governance that boards can use, with specific discussions on the strengths and weaknesses of policy governance and the use of policy governance by the GSC.

c. Survey

The commission sent out a survey to current and former GSC members, staff members, officers, commission members, and stated clerks seeking information on, input into, and recommendations for the RCA's use of policy governance. We received more than 90 responses. Through eight questions, the survey collected information from respondents on the strengths and weaknesses of the GSC's use of policy governance. Respondents provided substantial feedback to the commission, both positive and negative, on the GSC's use of policy governance.

d. Interviews with RCA Individuals

The commission also conducted more in-depth interviews with specific RCA individuals regarding the GSC's use of policy governance. These interviews included current and former moderators of the GSC, staff

members, critics of the GSC's use of policy governance, and others. These interviews were particularly helpful in understanding how the GSC has used policy governance over the years, and the GSC's current approach to using policy governance.

e. *Review of Cohorts*

Finally, the commission also investigated and reviewed whether or not our cohort denominations use policy governance. This included reviewing governance documents found on publicly accessible websites and correspondence with representatives from those denominations. While it can be useful to compare the governance style of other denominations, broader differences between our polities make direct comparisons difficult, especially with those denominations that have a congregational or episcopal polity, or do not have an equivalent body or structure to our General Synod or General Synod Council.

4. Discussion

In order to understand and evaluate the GSC's use of policy governance, the commission first reviewed what policy governance is and what it is not. We then identified how the RCA has used policy governance over the years.

a. *Policy Governance Background*

At its core, policy governance is about defining clear and separate roles between those responsible for setting direction and strategy for an organization and those responsible for implementing that direction and handling the day-to-day operations of the organization. Policy governance is based on the belief that an organization will function more effectively and be more successful if the roles of governance and management are kept separate.

Most typically, a board using policy governance provides the strategic direction for the organization while a single chief executive is responsible for deciding how best to achieve those goals, including how to structure operational staff to manage the organization on a daily basis within boundaries established by the board. As a general matter, policy governance also seeks to ensure clear communication between the board and the executive. Under policy governance, the board should generally limit communications on organizational matters only to the executive to avoid the possibility of confusion that may arise over different board members communicating potentially different messages to multiple members of the operational staff. Policy governance requires a vigilant and active board that, while not involved in management, is dedicated to confirming the compliance of the executive with the goals of the organization.

Policy governance is certainly not the only model of board governance. Many nonprofit organizations use a working board model, where board members are actively involved in the daily operations of the organization. Typically, under this model, board members are assigned to committees or working groups of the organization, and participate in those functions as the board representative.

Many organizations also adopt a hybrid approach between policy

governance and the working board model, with board members involved in a select few and critical functions of the organization, while leaving the majority of management and operational control over the organization to an executive.

b. *The Strengths and Weaknesses of Policy Governance*

Policy governance, when implemented as intended, can provide many benefits to an organization. Policy governance can provide clarity of roles and responsibilities. The board, executive, and operational staff should all understand their respective roles without the worry of commingling or confusing responsibilities. There is a clear chain of communication. Policy governance should cause an organization to have both clearly defined strategic goals and the accountability of the executive for achieving those goals. At the same time, the executive is empowered to identify and implement the best method of achieving those goals free from any micro-management of the board, while still operating within the limits set by the board.

On the other hand, policy governance comes with certain weaknesses or pitfalls if not implemented as intended. The biggest concern, perhaps, is that a board may become passive and overly reliant on the executive for the success of the organization. A passive board may fail to oversee the executive properly and fail to ensure ongoing compliance by the executive with the organizational goals. This lack of oversight can lead to a lack of accountability of the executive and a decline of staff morale. A passive board may also fail to update goals or ensure that the organizational goals are meeting the current needs or complexities of the organization.

c. *History of the GSC's Use of Policy Governance*

In assessing the GSC's use of policy governance, the commission noted at the outset that the GSC, while certainly fulfilling a critical role, is only one part of the larger denominational polity of the RCA. The General Synod, the other commissions, and special purpose groups formed by General Synod (such as the restructuring team) all likewise carry out the important work of the RCA at the denominational level. Moreover, the *BCO* defines the relationship between the GSC and General Synod, and policy governance does not address or alter that. As a result, the GSC's use of policy governance, while important, is limited in reach. The commission found that context important in evaluating the GSC's use of policy governance.

The GSC's use of policy governance is characterized by receiving the benefits of policy governance when using the approach properly and also realizing the weaknesses of policy governance when not used properly. The GSC has done both over the years.

The GSC first considered using policy governance in the early 2000s as a result of some perceived lack of clarity over the role of the GSC and the role of the general secretary in the governance of the RCA. Our review suggested that there were times when the GSC, or only some members of the GSC, got involved in making decisions on an acute or particular operational or management issue within the RCA

without understanding the broader effects of that decision or whether the decision even fit within the overall goals established by the GSC.

Given this confusion, the clarity of roles offered by policy governance appeared to be an attractive solution. At the outset, the GSC appears to have considered policy governance diligently and invested both time and effort to make an informed decision to adopt policy governance. As noted above, the General Synod requested in 2004 that the commission evaluate whether the use of policy governance by the GSC would be consistent with our Constitution. The commission concluded at that time, and in consultation with the Commission on Theology, that use of policy governance by the GSC could be consistent with our Constitution.

Perhaps understandably, the GSC's diligence in using policy governance has varied over the years. At the outset, the GSC invested in policy governance training for its members and was diligent in using this new approach. As with many new endeavors, diligence is greatest at the outset.

As time went on, however, our review indicates that the GSC at times fell into a more passive role, which is one of the dangers of using policy governance. During this period, the GSC relied upon the general secretary and waited on the general secretary to provide compliance reports. The general secretary often only provided those compliance reports on an annual basis, and when received were often perfunctory and of little actual use in determining compliance. The staff was often not aware of the goals and policies established by the GSC. This passive approach by the GSC led to governing dysfunction within the RCA.

All of that has changed in recent years, however, as the GSC has rededicated itself to the proper use of policy governance. This change came about largely as a result of the efforts of a handful of GSC members who understood how policy governance was supposed to work and who also realized that what GSC was doing was not proper policy governance. The GSC invested in policy governance training for members and staff. As a result, the GSC is now much more educated on the proper use of policy governance, and is much more engaged in the oversight process.

For example, the compliance reports the GSC gets are now much more specific and contain detailed, measurable goals. These reports create greater accountability for the general secretary, and have greatly improved both the GSC's implementation of proper policy governance and also the general secretary's relationship with the GSC and staff.

Furthermore, the staff is now more aware of what the policies established by the GSC are. While the general secretary is ultimately responsible for compliance with the GSC-established policies, one specific staff member owns each policy and is both aware of and responsible for implementation of that policy. This has been very helpful in aligning the staff with GSC goals. Staff now have more access to reports, which has helped to increase transparency with staff and helped to improve staff morale. The current culture of governance promotes

honesty in reporting, where staff and the general secretary can report non-compliance with a goal along with a plan to correct the non-compliance.

The GSC also understands that the GSC has many more options for compliance oversight than waiting for the compliance reports from the general secretary as has happened in the past. For example, the GSC now receives and reviews monthly the compliance reports provided by the general secretary, according to a schedule set in the GSC's policies. In addition, the GSC established an email that staff can use anonymously to report any management concerns to the GSC. The GSC understands that a core function of the GSC is the robust and ongoing oversight of the general secretary, and that oversight includes the ability to consult with staff to ensure compliance.

At the same time, some GSC members noted that policy governance is complex and can be difficult to understand, particularly if a GSC member is new to church governance. These members cautioned that policy governance requires robust training of GSC members in order for the model to work well, and that new GSC members may need years of experience with policy governance to feel comfortable with its use. This complexity can create challenges for the GSC given that the membership in the GSC turns over every three to six years.

This positive progress and results that the GSC has made recently concerning its use of policy governance are encouraging and confirm that policy governance can work for the benefit of the RCA. The commission affirms that policy governance is a valid model for the GSC to use and does not recommend any changes at this time, particularly given the hard work of the current GSC, general secretary, and staff. That the GSC has made such a beneficial change, however, also reinforces the need for continued training and diligence on the part of the GSC to not fall back to past practices of being too passive in its governance responsibilities. The next and final section of our report has certain recommendations to consider to help ensure best practices going forward.

5. Best Practices to Consider

The commission recommends that the GSC continue to use policy governance as a model for its work in fulfilling the responsibilities given by the General Synod and the BCO. The commission also recommends that both the General Synod and the GSC give more thought to the following areas.

a. Governance Procedures

The GSC policy document needs to include a definition of the relationship between the GSC, GSC staff, and General Synod commissions, and provide clear guidance to the GSC on how best to facilitate the ongoing work of the General Synod. While the commissions report directly to the General Synod, they may require support from GSC staff to accomplish their business. There is currently no clear avenue for them to access those resources. The GSC has a role to play in assisting the commissions in acquiring those resources.

b. *Training*

Policy governance is a unique style of doing business, and most members of the GSC may not have experience in using it. Regular, ongoing training for all GSC members in policy governance is critical for ensuring that the GSC uses the model effectively and appropriately. This training should be mandatory for all members.

c. *Governance Mentors*

New members of the GSC need additional support in understanding the way the GSC makes use of policy governance. The commission suggests that each new member of the GSC be assigned a mentor to help them become comfortable with policy governance.

d. *Terms of Service*

As with service on any new board, serving on the GSC has a learning curve, and it may be that a single, four-year term is not a sufficient length of time for the greatest effectiveness of the council. General Synod commission members serve a term of three years, which can be renewed once for a total of six years of service. Adopting this term structure for the GSC would help the institutional memory of the body, while also giving an opportunity for a member to be replaced after three years as needed. There is also no current provision for the removal of a member for lack of participation or dereliction of duty. The GSC bylaws could be amended to allow for the removal of a member if the member does not uphold the responsibilities and standards of serving on the GSC.

e. *Terms of Service for General Synod Officers*

The current term of service on GSC for a General Synod officer is three years (vice president, president, and immediate past president). The commission suggests that terms for all GSC members should be equal. Currently, that would mean adding a fourth year of service on the GSC for General Synod officers. This is to help ensure continuity in the leadership of the GSC.

f. *Term of Service for GSC Moderator*

The moderator of the GSC plays a crucial role in policy governance as the primary connection point to the general secretary between meetings of the GSC. The moderator has responsibility to execute the will of the GSC as it pertains to oversight of the general secretary. In other boards that utilize policy governance, the moderator serves in this capacity for multiple years. To strengthen the effectiveness of the use of policy governance by the GSC, the commission recommends increasing the term of the moderator to at least two years.

g. *Governance Resource Group*

The work of the GSC is intricate and important, and requires the full attention of the members. Because of the nature of the ongoing oversight of the general secretary as it pertains to helping the RCA achieve its ends (goals), there is not enough time for ongoing evaluation of the governance process itself. The commission suggests appointing a group or committee from outside the GSC with skills in governance models to assist the GSC in crafting and revising its governance policies.

- h. Policy Document Language*
The language in the GSC policy document reflects the corporate business culture that was used as a model in crafting the initial draft. The committee recommends transforming and simplifying the language of the document to more closely reflect the language of faith, drawing on biblical images and language directly from the standards of unity. Simplifying the language could mean avoiding the use of double-negative statements (e.g., “shall not violate...” could be changed to be “shall follow”). While these negative statements may be a feature of pure policy governance, the GSC has the authority to create a system that works for it.
- i. Evaluating Ends to Align with the Constitution of the RCA*
The primary task for the GSC in policy governance is to create Ends statements for the organization. In the past, the GSC has drawn on the ministry and vision statements of the RCA (Our Call, Transformed and Transforming, etc.) to craft these Ends statements. While these statements can be helpful for short-term planning, they do not adequately capture the overall ends of the RCA. Instead, the commission suggests that the Ends statements be drawn directly from the Constitution. For example, the preamble to the *BCO* describes the purpose of the church: “The purpose of the Reformed Church in America, together with all other churches of Christ, is to minister to the total life of all people by preaching, teaching, and proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and by all Christian good works.” This is a purpose that has stood the test of time; a global Ends statement based on the preamble would help the GSC guide the GSC staff in a more complete vision for the RCA.

CO 25-7

To refer the Commission on Church Order's report on policy governance to the GSC for discussion and potential implementation of the suggestions in Part 5 of the report, for report back to General Synod in 2026. (ADOPTED)

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance was to vote in favor of CO 25-7.

Elections and Appointments

The commission elected Christopher Jacobsen to serve as both its moderator and secretary for the annual term beginning July 1, 2025. Additionally, the commission appointed Philip De Koster to serve as its corresponding delegate to the 2025 General Synod. The commission also wishes to thank Rev. Howard Moths for his faithful service in the last six years.

Respectfully submitted,
Christopher Jacobsen, moderator

Report of the Commission on History

The Commission on History (established in 1966) exists to “inform the Reformed Church in America of the relevance of the denomination’s history and traditions to its program” (*BCO* Chapter 3, Part 1, Article 5, Section 5, [2024 edition, pp. 115-116]). To that end, it works with the RCA’s archivist to ensure that our denomination’s valuable historic and legal records are safe and accessible, it oversees the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America, and it seeks to inspire us to pay attention to the ways our history shapes our present and our future. To accomplish its work, the Commission on History (CoH) met at New Brunswick Theological Seminary on October 4-5, 2024, and via Zoom on November 20, 2024, and February 26, 2025. This is the Commission on History’s 59th General Synod report.

Marking 400 Years of Denominational Life and Mission

One major item of business on the CoH’s docket in the coming years is to partner with the General Synod Council (GSC) to plan for the 400th anniversary of our denomination, which we will recognize in 2028. God has called women and men, lay and ordained, to serve in the Reformed Church in America from our humble beginnings as European settlers in the Americas in the early 1600s until today—as we embrace our multicultural past and present and look to a Revelation 7:9 future.

Though God’s call has been faithful, this does not mean we have served in the best ways. While we celebrate the long history of our denomination and the impact it has had on the development of the United States and Canada and on the spread of the gospel throughout the world, we simultaneously recognize highly problematic elements of our story, including the colonialist treatment of Native American and Indigenous peoples, triumphalist understandings of global mission, and the participation and even leadership of Dutch religious leaders in the African slave trade. At the same time, our history contains stories of grit and determination—including the pioneering spirit and Christian commitment of the RCA women 150 years ago who formed the Women’s Board of Foreign Missions (WBFM). They rallied women across the country to join them in raising funds for women’s education around the globe and provided crucial support to many of our missionaries. We honor those women, like Sarah Doremus and Hazel Gnade, who used their gifts for organization, leadership, and hospitality in service of Christ’s kingdom. The CoH is pleased to partner with the Commission for Women, the Office of Women’s Transformation and Leadership, and RCA Global Mission to recognize 150 years since the founding of the WBFM, which existed until 1946, when it was absorbed into the Board of Foreign Missions.

A true commemoration of our 400 years as a denomination will require openhanded acknowledgment of our past—its glories and its failures. We will do so with the keen conviction that an honest look at our history will shape who we are becoming and how we choose to participate in God’s redemptive purposes for our future. Be on the lookout in the coming year for more information about the 400th anniversary plans. If you would like to partner with us, please contact CoH moderator Katlyn DeVries.

Noting the Good Work of the Reformed Church Center (RCC)

The commission is exceedingly grateful for the Reformed Church Center at New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS) and its director, Rev. Dr. James Hart Brumm. The RCC supports research and scholarship on RCA history through its three annual fellowships—the Albert A. Smith Fellowship in Reformed Church History, the Alvin J. Poppen and John R. Young Fellowship in Reformed Worship and Liturgy, and the Hazel B. Gnade Fellowship in RCA Women’s Studies. It also provides free online events on a variety of topics of historical and enduring relevance. This year’s events included Dr. John Coakley’s lecture on Dr. John Henry Livingston (the first General Synod professor), a conversation between Rev. Dr. Lisa Vander Wal and Phil Tanis on the World Council of Reformed Churches (WCRC) and Reformed ecumenism, and a panel conversation on new implications of RCA polity, among others. Recordings of these conversations and information about upcoming events are available on the RCC website at <https://nbts.edu/reformed-church-center>. This commission commends those resources to the viewership of all.

Supporting the RCA Archives

Under the direction of Dr. Elizabeth Pallitto, the RCA Archives serves the denomination in the careful acquisition, management, and preservation of its valuable records. Archives are necessary to an institution for legal reasons. Copies of your congregational and classis records should come to the Archives for careful storage to preserve the historical record. If you have questions about what church records the Archives should receive, please direct your questions to Dr. Pallitto. In a denomination nearly four centuries old, we hold the added gift and responsibility to care for artifacts of scholarly significance not just to the researchers within our circles, but to scholars of early American history, Dutch history in the colonies, and researchers of Christian mission throughout the world. Archives take significant resources to manage, and ours continues to be underfunded. Dr. Pallitto is working diligently to apply for grants to support some initiatives of the Archives. For the past ten years, NBTS has provided an annual grant of \$10,000 to be matched by the GSC to expand the work of the Archives in partnership with NBTS’s Reformed Church Center. Though the GSC, due to financial constraints, has been unable to match this grant, your commission has provided the matching funds each year from the Historical Series Revolving Fund. As the NBTS grant enters its final year, the General Synod must consider new ways to support the work of the Archives into the future. If you recognize the value of the RCA Archives in meeting our legal obligations and providing avenues for careful scholarship, please consider donating. Individual, congregational, or classical donations would be warmly welcomed.

Discerning the Reality of RCA Congregations Outside of North America

The CoH is glad to have representation on the General Synod task force “to study the opportunities and implications of having Reformed Church in America assemblies beyond North America” (*MGS 2024*, EC 24-9, p. 42). The historical position of the denomination has been to cooperate with and support Reformed denominations or national partners within the country in question, not to plant RCA churches or denominations abroad. This commission is concerned that

the task force is being asked to prepare protocols for a shift that has already happened at the classis level, without the necessary critical reflection or deliberation on how classes will govern the congregations, how we will relate well to them when conflicts arise, and how we will support congregations across national boundaries. The denomination must carefully consider the role of the RCA in relation to churches outside North America, being mindful of issues not just of the complexity of transnational governance but of the perception or reality of colonization. Furthermore, we should consider the relationships with our Formula of Agreement partners and how they may view the RCA's efforts in this matter. This commission urges the General Synod to engage this conversation seriously at the national level as the task force reports are given, not just leaving the conversation to the task force.

Celebrating the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America

The Historical [Book] Series of the Reformed Church in America continues under the supervision of the CoH and the leadership of our general editor, Rev. Dr. James Hart Brumm. This year, we celebrate our progress in adapting to today's publishing practices, providing on-demand printing and e-book options. Paul Huisinkveld's *Elephant Baseball* (2017), the memoir of a 1960s missionary child's experiences in the Middle East and at the Kodai boarding school in India, is now available on Amazon. Liz Estes's *Global Grace Café* (2023), the story of the Reformed Church of Highland Park's advocacy for immigrant families in its midst, is now available as an e-book. We celebrate the publication of a festschrift in honor of Rev. Dr. Carol Bechtel, a book that is in the final stages of preparation upon the submission of this report. This year we are pleased to have published, under the Congregational [sub]Series, a history of Camp Warwick by Una Ratmeyer entitled *Come Away: The Warwick Conference Center—The First Fifty*. As we look to the 400th anniversary celebration, we anticipate the publication of a number of short volumes in our 400 Series, including books on diversity, ecumenism, and theology in the RCA. We look forward to sharing more about these volumes in the coming months.

We are especially glad to have partnered with RCA Global Mission to produce the first-ever Historical Series children's book, called *Ida and the Three Visitors*. We look forward to continued partnership with RCA Global Mission to produce more children's books, which we hope will teach the next generation about our denomination's rich history of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ around the world.

Respectfully submitted,
 Aric Balk
 Corstian Devos
 Katlyn DeVries, moderator
 Daniel Meeter
 Douglas Shepler
 David Zomer

Report of the Commission on Judicial Business

The General Synod's Commission on Judicial Business ("CJB" or "Commission") has eight members, one representing each of the regional synods. Regional synods are required to nominate laypersons and ministers in alternating six-year cycles in order to ensure that the commission's membership includes at least three laypersons and three ministers. A broad knowledge of and background in the structure, government, and function of the RCA is required of all members and legal training and experience is required of lay members.

The responsibilities of the CJB are to carry out the responsibilities assigned to it in the RCA's Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures (*BCO* Chapter 2).

The Office of the General Synod received one judicial matter in 2024. It was an appeal filed on June 6, 2024. It was referred to the CJB for review, recommendation, and report to the 2025 General Synod. The appeal was filed by the consistory of Vida de Reino Church ("Consistory") from a decision by the Regional Synod of Mid-America ("Vida de Reino Appeal" or "Appeal").

The CJB met electronically on July 31, 2024; August 23, 2024; January 17, 2025; February 28, 2025; and March 20, 2025. The February 28, 2025, meeting was for the purpose of holding a hearing on the Vida de Reino Appeal. The CJB also appointed its corresponding delegate to the 2025 General Synod at the February 28 meeting. Following the February 28, 2025, hearing, a draft of this report and recommendation was circulated amongst the commission members who heard the Appeal. The commission's meeting on March 20, 2025, was held to approve the final version of this report and recommendation and elect the commission's moderator, vice moderator, and secretary for the annual period commencing July 1, 2025.

Vida de Reino Appeal

Case Summary

This matter came before the CJB on appeal from the Consistory of Vida de Reino Church. All parties agree that on September 19, 2023, the Consistory sent a petition to its Classis to withdraw from the denomination, and all parties agree that despite the *BCO* command that a Classis committee meet with the church and its representatives, Classis has not yet appointed such a committee. The Classis avers that despite no meeting, the withdrawal will be approved upon the church meeting the unilateral demands of Classis. Regional Synod denied the church's appeal because the *BCO* does not compel a committee to meet "promptly" while admitting the Classis did not follow proper *BCO* procedure, and the instant appeal to CJB followed.

Procedural Posture

The Consistory filed the Appeal with the Office of the General Secretary of the Reformed Church in America. It was dated June 6, 2024. It is related to certain action by the Regional Synod of Mid-America ("Regional Synod"). In addition to the Consistory and Regional Synod, the Classis de las Naciones ("Classis") is an original party to the case.

The Appeal was forwarded to the Commission. The Commission requested and received the record of the case from the stated clerk of the Regional Synod. Later the Commission requested further written arguments from the Consistory, Regional Synod, and Classis, and received them from the Consistory and Regional Synod. A memorandum was sent by the Commission to all parties on August 1, 2024, providing an opportunity to submit any further documentation relevant to the Appeal which was not previously submitted. Following review of all of the documentation, a request for written arguments was sent to all parties on September 17, 2024, and specifically indicated that the written arguments were to address the limited question of whether relevant procedures were followed properly by the Classis when it considered the appellants' (Consistory's) petition for leave to withdraw from the Classis to affiliate with the Alliance of Reformed Churches. The Consistory and the Regional Synod submitted written arguments.

The record of the case and written arguments were provided to all members of the Commission other than the member representing the Regional Synod and one member who recused himself for reasons unrelated to the subject of the Appeal. The Commission determined that the case and its attendant papers appeared to be in order, and no irregularities were noted. Following discussions of the Appeal, record of the case, and written arguments, the Commission voted to conduct a hearing. A pre-hearing order was sent to the parties on January 29, 2025. The pre-hearing order outlined the parties' right to waive a hearing if desired, established the order of arguments to be heard, and provided specific guidance on the limited issue to be addressed at the hearing. In relevant part, the order stated:

The hearing will be limited to the question of whether relevant procedures were followed properly by the Classis when it considered the Consistory's petition for leave to withdraw from the Classis to affiliate with the Alliance of Reformed Churches. The term "hearing" means oral arguments regarding this specific question presented and may include citations to the record(s) previously submitted.

Each party was represented by counsel at the hearing, such counsel having met the qualifications set forth in the *BCO* Chapter 2, Part I, Article 5, Section 10 (2024 edition, p. 87). A number of observers were also permitted to observe the hearing. Prior to entrance as observers, the names were provided, and the parties were provided an opportunity to object to any observer. No objections were received.

Oral arguments were provided in the following order by the listed counsel.

- a. Oral Argument from the Consistory—Lee DeYoung, counsel
- b. Oral Argument from the Regional Synod—Russell Paarlberg, counsel
- c. Oral Argument from the Classis—Chad Farrand, counsel
- d. Rebuttal Argument from the Consistory

Facts and Discussion

The crux of the argument made by the Consistory is that a clear set of procedures was not followed in the handling of the withdrawal petition submitted on September 19, 2023. BCO Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Sections 4a and 4b (page 43 of the 2024 edition) state:

- a. The petition for withdrawal shall be promptly referred to the executive committee, the Committee on Judicial Business, or a special committee, as shall be determined by the classis or its executive committee.
- b. The classis committee shall meet with the congregation, with the consistory of the church, and with representatives of the denomination with which the church desires to affiliate. The committee shall endeavor to ascertain the basic facts and conditions underlying the petition, endeavor to reconcile any differences of opinion within the congregation and between the church and the denomination, explore the advantages and disadvantages of a withdrawal and the needs of both the church and the denomination, and endeavor to ascertain how Christ’s Kingdom may best be served in the matter.

Furthermore, regulation RF 21-3 (adopted by the 2021 General Synod) also provides guidance related to a church’s petition to withdraw. It states:

1. Introduction

.....

Most of the regulations below are related to a church’s financial relationship with and commitments to the agencies and assemblies of the RCA with the goal of allowing a local church to retain its property and other assets while being solely responsible for any liabilities.

A. Unchanged Provisions.

The following provisions of Article 10 remain applicable and are unchanged by the regulations proscribed:

- 1. A written petition of the consistory must be filed with the stated clerk of classis.
- 2. The consistory must provide written evidence that the church would be received without reservation by another denomination.
- 3. The classis committee must meet with the congregation, with the consistory of the church, and with representatives of the denomination with which the church desires to affiliate.
- 4. The classis committee shall endeavor to ascertain

the will of the congregation at a meeting held under the formalities in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Section 4c of the *BCO* (*MGS 2021*, pp. 98-99).

Upon review of the record of documents, the written arguments, and the oral arguments at the hearing, the Consistory has established that the procedures outlined in the *BCO* and RF 21-3 were not followed by the Classis. Specifically, there is no evidence that the Classis or a committee met with the congregation of the church, met with a representative of the denomination it wished to affiliate with (Alliance of Reformed Churches), or interactively explored the advantages or disadvantages of withdrawal. The evidence presented by the Consistory noted Zoom meetings on March 10 and 11, 2024, between the Classis and the Consistory. The Consistory describes this meeting as the classis task group indicating that its only mandate was to have the Consistory sign a settlement agreement and release and that the task group refused to discuss the provisions of *BCO* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Sections 4a-4b.

Furthermore, the Classis and the Regional Synod were provided every opportunity to submit documentation and arguments to refute the assertions made by the Consistory that these meetings were not held. None were provided. Furthermore, the Regional Synod even stated in its response to the Consistory's October 25, 2023, complaint that it does not appear from the complaint and the record provided by Classis that all of the preliminary steps in Article 10 have occurred. The Regional Synod's written arguments submitted to the Commission dated October 24, 2024, similarly stated, "we observed that it did not appear that the Classis had fully performed the steps outlined in *BCO* I.II.10." In the arguments presented at the hearing, both the Classis and the Regional Synod noted that the Classis was unable to contact the pastor and/or the consistory of the church to arrange for these meetings. A note was even made about letters returned to sender. It is noted by the Commission that all parties were provided more than one opportunity to provide documentation, such as these letters or returned letters. The requests from the Commission always focused on evidence of the process/procedures followed in addressing the Consistory's petition to withdraw. None of this evidence of noncompliance with contact to have these meetings was provided. Furthermore, the Regional Synod, as the lower judicatory, even noted that these procedures were not followed.

Certainly, there was a strained relationship between the Consistory and pastor and the Classis. The Commission cannot find any authority in the *BCO* or RF 21-3 for the procedures not to be followed. The General Synod, in its approval of the *BCO* and a specific recommendation (RF 21-3) on the topic of withdrawal from the denomination, laid out very specific steps to be followed. A review of the record below shows that those steps were not followed.

It appears to be accurate that the Classis and the Regional Synod have offered to have the church withdraw from the denomination if the Consistory would sign a release to leave without any property. The Classis noted in its arguments at the hearing that it approved the transfer without a regular meeting because the church just was not cooperating with the Classis attempts to meet. Again, this evidence was not provided. Furthermore, as the Commission is bound by the *BCO* and there appears to be no exceptions to the specific procedures to withdraw and transfer to a different denomination, there simply is no mechanism

to just fail to follow the outlined procedures, which were drafted with a purpose in mind.

Finally, as of the date of the hearing (February 28, 2025), 523 days had passed since the Consistory filed its petition to withdraw. With strict procedures, couched in mandatory not discretionary language, clearly outlined in the *BCO*, the Commission finds it unacceptable that no meeting was ever held between the Classis and the Consistory to this date. The Consistory has clearly been arguing from the beginning that there is a process, and it was not followed. So, there is no question as to what the Consistory's complaint is. Even after the filing of appeals, outlining the lack of procedure in the complaint, no meeting was called by the Classis.

RF 21-3 states in its introduction that the regulations are related to "a church's financial relationship with and commitments to the agencies and assemblies of the RCA with the goal of allowing a local church to retain its property and other assets while being solely responsible for any liabilities" (*MGS 2021*, p. 99). This is stated as a goal and not a mandate, unlike the mandatory language that the classis committee "must meet" with the Consistory. The limited issue before the Commission is whether the relevant procedures were followed properly by the Classis when it considered the Consistory's petition for leave to withdraw. The issue of the property used by the church (*i.e.*, Consistory) is simply not before us. To the extent that RF 21-3 (and/or the *BCO*) reference withdrawing with property (which again is written as a goal, not a requirement), there appears to be a question of this Consistory's ownership of the property. Whether the Consistory owns this property is a question of property law in Florida and is not before us.

Decision and Recommendation

In summary, the Commission finds that the relevant procedures were not followed by the Classis when it considered the Consistory's petition for leave to withdraw. Accordingly, the Commission makes the following recommendation:

JB 25-1

To reverse the finding of the lower judicatory (Regional Synod) that the Consistory's complaint is without merit; and further,

To remand this matter to the lower judicatory (Regional Synod) with instructions that the Regional Synod exercise her general superintendence over the interests and concerns of the Classes within its bounds and exercise her appellate supervisory power over the acts, proceedings, and decisions of its several Classes as set out in *BCO* Chapter 1, Part III, Article 2, Sections 1 and 2 (p. 65, 2024 ed.) to insure that the procedures outlined in the *BCO* and RF 21-3 are initiated and followed in this matter. (ADOPTED)

Report of the Commission on Nominations

During the 2024–2025 annual cycle, the Commission on Nominations met by Zoom video conference on November 7 and December 5, 2024, and February 6, March 6, April 3, April 24, and May 8, 2025, and in-person on January 15, 2025. In addition, an electronic vote was held by email on May 28, 2025.

The members of the commission include representatives named by the Reformed Church in America's eight regional synods and the four racial and ethnic councils, as well as the immediate past president of General Synod. The commission actively promoted the completion of profile forms by all individuals who are members of and wish to serve the Reformed Church in America (RCA) on a General Synod commission, agency, or board. Those profiles were carefully reviewed, and candidates and their references were vetted and discussed thoroughly. In this way, the commission sought to fulfill its responsibilities as stated in the bylaws of the General Synod—namely, “in consultation with the general secretary, [the commission] shall search the denomination for suitable nominees. In making nominations it shall consider the geographic location, occupation, and record of previous service to the denomination of persons suggested by classes, regional synods, and other sources. It shall consider this and other pertinent data in light of each commission's or agency's responsibilities, membership needs, suggested nominees, and place and schedule of meetings” (*Book of Church Order [BCO]*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 8c, 2 [2023 edition, p. 118]). The commission also worked in cooperation with the boards of trustees of the RCA-related institutions to fill openings and vacancies on their respective boards as directed by the various governing documents of those institutions.

The commission seeks to nominate individuals for service on commissions, agencies, and boards on the basis of their spiritual gifts, interests, passion, abilities, personality, experience, and special leadership abilities. Through its efforts, the commission has proactively fulfilled its responsibility to search the denomination. The commission is pleased to report that it has, to the best of its ability, fulfilled its responsibility for ensuring that the requirements of the *BCO* are upheld.

The number of profiles submitted for consideration in recent years continues to lessen, which may be reflective of the smaller membership of the RCA and thus the smaller volunteer pool. It may also be reflective of the fact that other assembly levels in the RCA are also experiencing a decrease in membership, and thus many potential volunteers may have already been asked to take on responsibilities at other assembly levels and feel overcommitted. The commission wishes to stress that it believes the nominees listed below are well qualified for the positions for which they are nominated and they will serve well in these roles. At the same time, the commission acknowledges that the continuing trend of a shrinking pool of profiles from which to identify nominees makes the task with which the commission is entrusted—filling the numerous open positions every year in a way fulfills all of the listed requirements of each body; balances many forms of diversity including racial and ethnic diversity, gender diversity, geographic diversity, age diversity, and diversity of office; and also takes into account the identified needs of each particular body—increasingly difficult.

The commission has received feedback that the profile form is lengthy and time consuming to complete, and this may be a dissuading factor for many qualified individuals who might otherwise apply to serve. This likely also contributes to the difficulty that the commission has experienced in recent years in finding diverse nominees for each body. Feedback was also received from several of the racial and ethnic councils that some of their constituents are not comfortable being asked to provide extensive personal information in an impersonal, written format. The form as it has existed does not provide the cultural sensitivity needed to encourage an increasingly diverse pool of candidates, so that participation in General Synod work reflects the Revelation 7:9 future that the RCA strives for. To begin to address this concern, the commission appointed a small group of CoN members as well as representatives from the racial and ethnic councils to streamline and update the profile form. Since the commission also conducts verbal interviews, commissioners vetting candidates will still have the opportunity to ask the questions needed to get a fuller understanding of a candidate's interests, passions, and giftings.

The small group presented the text of the updated form to the CoN in April; the commission gave approval to move forward, and the text was given to staff to create a form that can be electronically submitted. An electronic form will be an additional process improvement over the former fillable PDF form that required multiple steps to download, fill out, save, and submit. The commission's hope is that by making the profile form less time consuming to submit, more potential candidates will take the time to fill out the form.

The new form is now active, and is located in the same place as the old form, www.rca.org/nominations. On that webpage, click on the green "Complete a Profile Form" button. Once you fill out the form and click "submit," your form is complete. While the form will only be available in English by the time of General Synod, the commission plans to have it translated this summer.

When the number of qualified candidates with diverse backgrounds and experiences from which to choose increases, the commission's work is enhanced, and the work of the General Synod's commissions, agencies, and boards is carried out more effectively. The commission encourages anyone to check out the new, shorter form by submitting your own name for service. Brief descriptions of each commission, agency, and board can be found at www.rca.org/nominations.

Nominees

The commission recommends to General Synod that it elect the following nominees for the terms identified, whom the commission believes have those qualities that make them well-suited for the positions to which they are being nominated. (Terms that include a beginning and ending year begin on July 1 and end on June 30 of the listed year. Terms that are noted by an ending year only indicate a partial term that will conclude June 30 of the listed year. An asterisk in front of the name indicates that the new term will be the individual's final term. The BCO requires regional synod and/or racial and ethnic council nomination for various RCA bodies. These nominees are indicated by a # sign followed by the regional synod or racial and ethnic council name in parentheses.)

*General Synod Council (GSC)*Term ending in 2027

*Vriesen, Rick #(Regional Synod of Canada)

Term ending in 2028

*TeWinkle, Rev. William

Term of 2025–2029

*Ellis, Rev. Corinne

*Reid, Claudette #(Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics)

*Rivera, Rev. Irving

*Theis, Andrea

*Wendlandt, Lois #(Regional Synod of Mid-America)

*Yamamoto, Rev. Drew

*Commission on Christian Action (CCA)*Term of 2025–2028

Ennis, Rev. Mark

*Haveman, Rev. Rodney

Schwander, Rev. Stephen

*Commission on Christian Discipleship and Education (CCDE)*Term of 2025–2028

*Balk, Rev. Ellen

*Simmons, Rev. Patricia

*Commission on Christian Unity (CCU)*Term of 2025–2028

*Pavlovich, Rev. Kim

Plat, Jeannette

*Commission on Christian Worship (CCW)*Term of 2025–2028

*Rivera, Rev. Irving

Van Lonkhuyzen, Rev. Lisa

*Note: one vacancy remains on the Commission on Christian Worship**Commission on Church Order (CCO)*Term of 2025–2028

Fik, Rev. Kayla

*Commission on History (CoH)*Term of 2025–2028

Appleyard-Pekich, Rev. William

*DeVries, Rev. Katlyn

*Commission on Judicial Business (CJB)*Term of 2025–2028

Barnes, Rev. Miriam #(Regional Synod of the Great Lakes)

van Maastricht, Rev. Matthew #(Regional Synod of Albany)

Note: one vacancy remains on the Commission on Judicial Business in the seat occupied by the representative from the Regional Synod of the Far West.

Commission on Nominations (CoN)

Term of 2025–2028

Camacho, Israel #(Global Council for Hispanic Ministries)
*Hart, Rev. Suzanne #(Regional Synod of the Great Lakes)
Kelley, Rev. Jeff #(Regional Synod of Albany)

Commission on Race and Ethnicity (CORE)

Term ending in 2027

Anderson, Sara

Term of 2025–2028

*James, Earl
Rendla, Rev. Das #(Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries)

Commission on Theology (CoT)

Term of 2025–2028

*Brumm, Rev. James
*Church, William
La Rosa Rojas, Dr. Alberto
*Scholten, Rev. Douglas

Commission for Women (CfW)

Term of 2025–2028

Cejas, Miryam
Funk, AJ
Woodward Bosman, Rev. Tara

Board of Benefits Services (BOBS)

Term of 2025–2028

*Flavio Rodriguez, Lucio
Gearhart, Frederick (Fritz)
Humme, Larryl
*Otten, Rev. Wayne

Church Growth Fund Board (CGF)

Term of 2025–2028

*Arias, Elba
*Bouwens, Joel
Feeney, Karen

Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA)

Term of 2025–2028

Davis, Tony
Draayer, Martha
Faber, Rick
Rathbun, Rev. Van

Pastoral Formation Oversight Board (PFOB)

Term of 2025–2028

Dood, Heather #(Commissioned Pastor Advisory Team)
*Folkert, Rev. Victor
Hemmen, Rev. Verlyn #(Ministerial Formation Certification Agency)

*New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS) Board of Trustees*Term of 2025–2028

Blanchett, Dr. Wanda
 Chu, Rev. Jeffrey
 *Davis, Rev. Dr. Henry
 Doolittle, Rev. Benjamin
 Green, Rev. Stephen
 *Miller, Rev. Steven
 Pimentel, Barbara
 Van Es, Kimberly

*Western Theological Seminary (WTS) Board of Trustees*Term of 2025–2028

Pratt, Rev. Marcia
 *Renner Anderson, Rebecca
 Ver Steeg, Rev. Jill

N 25-1

To elect the above-named nominees to serve as members of the General Synod commissions, agencies, and boards, and the boards of trustees of RCA-related educational institutions, for the terms identified; and further,

To elect Patricia Sealy to serve as moderator of the Commission on Nominations for the annual term beginning July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2026. (ADOPTED)

Proposal for Commission Moderator Training

In the commission's work and communication with the other commissions, boards, and agencies of the RCA, as well as feedback from people completing their service, those declining to continue with an additional term when eligible, and the racial and ethnic councils, we have become increasingly aware of the challenges some of our commissions, boards, and agencies are navigating related to the growing diversity of their membership. In order to enhance the work of our commissions, continue to make the RCA more hospitable to all of her members, address concerns raised by the Commission on Race and Ethnicity and the racial and ethnic councils, and further our shared work at living into a multiracial future freed from racism, the Commission on Nominations makes the following recommendation.

N 25-2

To instruct the general secretary to develop equipping resources for commission moderators in order to best enable them to facilitate their respective commissions in ways that are increasingly sensitive to the growing diversity of the RCA; and further,

To require all commission moderators to participate in said training annually. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

- Consider reading a book this year from the “Counterpoints Collection.” We anticipate an increase in non-English speakers serving on commissions, which requires additional resources and training for everyone involved.
- Consider reading a book this year from the “Counterpoints Collection.” The Commission on Nominations has received communication from the Commission on Race and Ethnicity and the racial and ethnic councils asking for commissions to be better equipped in these areas.
- Consider reading a book this year from the “Counterpoints Collection.” Feedback from people completing their service on commissions as well as from those who have declined to serve a second term suggests that these resources would be helpful.

Appreciation

This year we say farewell to three commission members who have given faithfully of their time and talents for the work of the Commission on Nominations: Judy Nelson, who served one year as immediate past president of General Synod; Linda Gold, who served one term as the representative from the Regional Synod of Albany; and Jael Serrano-Altamirano, who served two terms as the representative from the Global Council for Hispanic Ministries. The commission will miss all three of them greatly.

Report of the Commission on Race and Ethnicity

“After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb ...” (Revelation 7:9).

The RCA will be a fellowship of congregations committed to a multiracial future engaging all of God’s people in mission and ministry and resisting the sin of racism.

Official Responsibilities of CORE

The *Book of Church Order* names the responsibilities of the commission in Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 7b (2024 edition, pp. 116-117):

1. The commission shall advise the church on policies and initiatives that address issues of institutional racism and the commitment of the Reformed Church in America to become a fully multicultural and multiethnic denomination.
2. The commission shall serve as an advocate for transformation of the Reformed Church in America in regard to its multiracial and multiethnic life.
3. The commission shall recommend policies, objectives, guidelines, and strategies to assist the Reformed Church in America in its effort through all of its agencies, commissions, institutions, and other affiliated bodies to become a fully multiracial and multiethnic church.
4. The commission shall monitor, evaluate, and report on the Reformed Church in America’s progress in achieving its multiracial and multiethnic objectives.

Members of CORE are Nathan Gullion, Tony Davis, Sara Anderson, Elvis Alvarez, Earl James (secretary), Young Na (vice moderator), and Nathan Pyle (moderator).

Anti-Racism Policy

Since 1957, the Reformed Church in America has endeavored to address the issue of racism in the church and world with a plethora of statements, programs, processes, and measures in its efforts to become a denomination freed from racism. For the first time in the nearly 400-year history of the RCA, the 2022 General Synod overwhelmingly adopted its first denominational anti-racism policy, which was presented and recommended by the Commission on Race and Ethnicity (CORE) (*MGS 2022*, RE 22-1, p. 235):

To direct the General Synod Council and the general secretary to strongly urge all entities of the Reformed Church in America (racial/ethnic councils, assemblies, commissions, institutions, boards, and agencies) to adopt the following antiracism policy:

The Reformed Church in America shall:

1. Build on the 2009 General Synod declaration that “racism is a sin because it is an offense to God” and declare that the

sin of racism is expressed as a policy, behavior, and/or belief against a person or people based on their identification and/or membership in a particular racial or ethnic group that is considered a minority.

2. Define antiracism as the practice of confronting and changing policies, behaviors, and beliefs that perpetuate racist ideas and actions.
3. Confess that our sin has led us to erect religious, cultural, economic, and political barriers along racial and ethnic lines and that these barriers have separated us from one another and deprived many of us of the right to develop our personal and corporate identities.
4. Respect the rights and freedom of all people of color regardless of race, ethnicity, or nationality where the cries of people who have become victims of racial injustice and/or discrimination are to be taken seriously and are given full voice and opportunity to make their complaints, without retaliation, to their appropriate judicatories; and inform the Office for Advocacy and Race Relations as well as the Commission on Race and Ethnicity.
5. Support allies who speak out against persons and systems that perpetuate racial injustice.
6. Commit to dismantling racism in its attitudes and structures in all assemblies (local churches, classes, regional synods, and General Synod).

This policy was adopted by the 2022 General Synod. Along with the adoption of the anti-racism policy, the synod also approved the recommendation:

To direct the General Synod Council, working together with the Commission on Race and Ethnicity, to provide up to three Sankofa journeys per year for the next three years and up to three Institute for Healing Racism-type experiences per year for the next three years... (MGS 2022, RE 22-2, p. 237).

Organizing these experiences fell to the Office of Diversity and Belonging and its staff. Since the fall of 2022, a number of experiences designed to increase participant knowledge of race-related history and issues have taken place. These include the Freedom Road Institute in Los Angeles, Idlewild in Michigan, the Telos of Diverse Worship with Dewitt Reformed Church in New York, and a trip to South Africa. While race-related, these experiences differ from how Sankofa journeys promote personal, interpersonal, cultural, and systemic anti-racism efforts. The elimination of the position of the director of the Office of Diversity and Belonging affected both Sankofa journeys and Institute for Healing Racism-type experiences, and they have not happened according to the stated timeline of RE 22-2. Since the hiring of Hanoi Avila, the Center for Church Multiplication and Ministry has been hard at work to ensure these experiences occur. The center's current plan is that over the next two years

Sankofa planning will be under the direction of the director of equity-based hospitality and will be led by the council coordinators. Each council will have the opportunity to lead one Sankofa. In addition to the ethnic councils, Disability Concerns, Dismantling Racism, and Women's Transformation and Leadership will lead a Sankofa journey. The potential is for seven Sankofa journeys to occur by the end of 2026. Moving forward, CORE would like to work with the Center for Church Multiplication and Ministry so that these experiences fulfill the anti-racism goals of the denomination.

Because of the implementation delay, CORE is recommending the following:

RE 25-1

To direct the General Synod Council to update timelines surrounding Sankofa journeys and Institute for Healing Racism-type events in order to reflect the delays that have occurred in the implementation of RE 22-2. The new timeline is as follows: provide up to three Sankofa journeys per year for the next three years and up to three Institute for Healing Racism-type experiences per year for the next three years, through fiscal year 2028. (ADOPTED)

As the costs for the first year of implementation of these experiences were already collected through RE 22-2, there is no further financial implication for this year.

The 2022 General Synod approved the reconstitution of the Native American Indigenous Ministries council. We are grateful for the work done to get the council functioning. NAIM, unfortunately, is still without a coordinator as of the submission of this report. The Center for Church Multiplication and Ministry has been working diligently to find a coordinator, but it has been difficult. Earlier this year, a hire was made, but it was not a good fit and so the position remains open. The center has reevaluated the job description, amending it to make it more open to someone who understands the Native American and Indigenous contexts while also being a relational, collaborative partner to serve those congregations.

The 2024 General Synod voted to have each General Synod commission participate in an anti-racism training at least once every two years. The original intent was for these trainings to be offered through the Office of Diversity and Belonging. Those trainings will now be offered through the Center for Church Multiplication and Ministry. To ensure that these trainings are consistently implemented, CORE will collaborate with the center to develop a reporting system that tracks participation and effectiveness.

CORE's responsibilities include reporting on our denomination's work in achieving its multiracial and multiethnic initiatives and advising on issues of institutional racism. This leads us to an area of concern: the racial makeup of our commissions and boards. The Commission on Nominations vets nominees for 16 RCA commissions and boards; in total, these bodies have between 155 and 169 members. Currently, there are only 41 people of racial and ethnic backgrounds other than white serving across these bodies. Forty-

three percent of those 41 people are serving on just 3 of the 16 bodies: General Synod Council, the Commission on Race and Ethnicity, and the Commission on Nominations. It is worth noting that these are the only 3 bodies that are mandated to have racial and ethnic representation. Six of the 16 commissions and boards have 0 or 1 minority in their current membership. This is especially poignant given that these include the commissions on Christian Unity, Christian Discipleship and Education, History, and Theology. As we strive to become a denomination freed of racism, incorporating the thoughts, wisdom, and experience of all members and groups of our denomination is paramount.

The question before us as a denomination is, “Whose responsibility is it to ensure representation across the racial and ethnic diversity of the RCA on our commissions, boards, and agencies?” Is it the denomination through a BCO mandate, is it GSC through recruitment, or is it on the racial and ethnic councils to encourage their members to apply through the Commission on Nominations? While all of these options are possible solutions, we hesitate to put the responsibility of unraveling this systemic reality among the commissions on the shoulders of the councils. We must take agency for anti-racism work in our areas of influence. For this reason, CORE recommends the following:

RE 25-2

To direct the General Synod Council to form a task force to study the issues regarding inability of recruitment practices to identify and put forth significantly more people of color to serve on entities for which the Commission on Nominations vets nominees. At the least, the task force should include GSC members, a member of the Commission on Nominations, representatives from the four councils, and a representative from CORE. The task force should address the challenges in recruiting sufficient numbers of people of color and recommend recruitment measures that can double the number of people of color currently serving on commissions, boards, and agencies. The task force’s work is to be reported to the 2027 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

As the RCA experiences structural changes with the elimination of classes and the formation of middle assemblies, CORE has been made aware of some conversations about the potential of forming racially or ethnically based classes or middle assemblies. It is CORE’s belief that these types of assemblies would be in conflict with the RCA’s stated goal of being a multicultural and multiethnic denomination and would violate the anti-racism policy’s confession that “our sin has led us to erect religious, cultural, economic, and political barriers along racial and ethnic lines and that these barriers have separated us from one another and deprived many of us the right to develop our personal and corporate identities.” For this reason, CORE recommends the following:

RE 25-3

To direct the General Synod Council to form a task force to study whether the formation of classes or

middle assemblies on the basis of race or ethnicity is in conflict with the RCA's anti-racism policy adopted by General Synod 2022. The task force should conduct its work virtually, and should bring a report to the 2026 General Synod that includes its conclusions as well as suggestions for ways forward if the task force concludes that such assemblies are in conflict with the anti-racism policy (if such assemblies have been created).

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business was to amend RE 25-3 as follows (deletions are stricken).

To direct the General Synod Council to form a task force to study whether the formation of classes or middle assemblies on the basis of race or ethnicity is in conflict with the RCA's anti-racism policy adopted by General Synod 2022. The task force should conduct its work virtually, and should bring a report to the 2026 General Synod ~~that includes its conclusions as well as suggestions for ways forward if the task force concludes that such assemblies are in conflict with the anti-racism policy (if such assemblies have been created).~~

Reasons:

1. The beginning portion of the recommendation frames this work as theological reflection; the proposed deleted portion perhaps unintentionally suggested a foregone conclusion.
2. The work and the report are essential to our becoming the Revelation 7:9 denomination we aspire to be.

VOTED: To adopt the amendment to RE 25-3.

VOTED: To adopt RE 25-3 as amended.

The final version of RE 25-3 as amended and adopted reads as follows:

RE 25-3

To direct the General Synod Council to form a task force to study whether the formation of classes or middle assemblies on the basis of race or ethnicity is in conflict with the RCA's anti-racism policy adopted by General Synod 2022. The task force should conduct its work virtually, and should bring a report to the 2026 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Conclusion

As the Reformed Church in America continues its transitional journey, which we pray will be more inclusive and empowering for people of color, CORE is committed to be a safe space for anyone who feels oppressed, discriminated against, wronged, or mistreated by a brother or sister in Christ because of race, ethnicity, or nationality. CORE is open to hear your story and address it accordingly and encourages anyone to come forward and speak truth to power

in the spirit of love and justice. For the only way that injustices come to light is that courageous people stand up and speak out against the sin of racism.

Lastly, CORE thanks Stephen Kim and Riana Shaw-Robinson for their years of service to CORE and the work of the RCA. For that, we are grateful and pray God blesses them as they continue to serve God's kingdom.

In pursuit of the vision depicted in Revelation 7:9, we recognize that the journey toward a truly multiracial and multiethnic church is not without struggle. Revelation 7:14-15 speaks of those who have come through the great tribulation—those who have endured trials, remained faithful, and ultimately stand before God in unity. Likewise, our pursuit of justice and equity within the RCA requires perseverance, courage, and a deep commitment to dismantling barriers that divide us. As we labor together in this sacred work, may we embody God's vision for a diverse and reconciled body, supporting and empowering one another in faith and love.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Nathan Pyle, moderator

Report of the Commission on Theology

The Commission on Theology (CoT) was established by the General Synod of 1959. It is assigned to “study theological matters arising in the life of the church and referred to it by the General Synod or initiated within the commission itself” (BCO Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 9b [2024 edition, p. 119]). This is the commission’s 65th report to a General Synod.

The commission met online on September 4, 2024, joined by Vanessa Funk, General Synod Office administrative assistant. The commission met in person at New Brunswick Theological Seminary on February 5-6, 2025. Two members and a number of guests—Jidong Shan from the General Synod Council; Dan Gillett and Chad Pierce from the Pastoral Formation Oversight Board; JJ TenClay, refugee ministries coordinator for RCA Global Mission; and Eddy Alemán, general secretary—joined us online for that meeting. Working groups of the commission met online in between those meetings.

Assignments from General Synod 2024

The 2024 General Synod assigned the commission, along with the Commission on Church Order, the Commission on Race and Ethnicity, and the Commission for Women, to consult with the Pastoral Formation Oversight Board (PFOB) to develop guidelines for middle assemblies (classes) related to BCO Chapter 1, Part II, Articles 11-14. James Hart Brumm, moderator of the CoT, received an interim report from PFOB, shared it with the commission, and sent back a written response. Dan Gillett and Chad Pierce represented PFOB in a meeting with the commission on February 5.

The 2024 General Synod assigned the commission to send a representative to the *ad hoc* task force to study the opportunities and implications of having Reformed Church in America assemblies beyond North America in response to EC 24-9. Dr. William Ruggles Church was assigned as the commission’s representative. The task force is to provide an interim report to General Synod 2025 and a final report to General Synod 2026, but there has been no report to the Commission on Theology as of the filing of this report.

Encouraging Our Continued Mission

During and after the discussions of the work of the General Synod’s restructuring team and the theological implications of optimizing, sustaining, and gaining “spiritual health in the denomination,” one of the stated purposes of the restructuring team (MGS 2021, RF 21-1, p. 94), the Commission on Theology has continued to discuss the theology of our shared mission in the light of this restructure.

The RCA has a rich history and commitment to global mission work. It is a credit to the RCA and many RCA missionaries that even as churches have left our denomination, they have continued to support these missionaries. The Commission on Theology applauds the RCA’s history of global missions, and, in the spirit of the expressed desire of the restructuring team that our new structure optimize sustained spiritual and organizational health, we commend our churches, classes, and all other bodies to not lose sight of the important work of global mission, and to continue to support this work. The

denomination's commitment to global mission has been a point of union, even in the midst of fracturing, and the Commission on Theology commends the RCA, from local churches to denominational staff, to continue, even in the midst of potential anxiety of change with reorganization, to focus on this important gospel work. David J. Bosch states that "Mission is not primarily an activity of the church but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God."¹ Mission is not so much about us (the church) but about God's mission, *missio Dei*. The goal is for outreach—witnessing to Jesus Christ, evangelism, and cross-cultural mission—locally, regionally, and globally—to the ends of the earth. The mission of God has a church. We commend the Reformed churches for their faithfulness to that mission, which is key to the spiritual health of the denomination.

CHURCH PLANTING: A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

As the RCA continues to grow in matters of church planting, it is periodically valuable to return to and revisit some of the ecclesial foundations that underlie the church. Especially in an American context, and especially in the evangelical hegemony, it can seem as though the church is simply a business that needs to attract customers. This is far from the reality, however. Another, far less faithless view is that the church is a group of people who love Jesus. And this can be very good; we all need relationships and groups where we can grow in faith. A church is not simply this, however: the church is a particular manifestation of the body of Christ on earth, and as such, we need to think deeply about the church. This is the case, as well, when it comes to church planting. As such, the commission offers the church this paper on church planting to help guide the church planting efforts within the RCA.

One of the calls of scripture, and part of the faithful history and ministry of the church, is in creating and nurturing communities in service of God and in preaching the gospel—in other words, building up churches in service to Christ's church. From the earlier work of Paul and others in the early church to today, the church's growth and systems for this ministry have changed across the globe. As denominational structures and systems have developed, though notably with various efficacy and effectiveness, the work of starting new churches has also developed. With this development of multiplication efforts in the RCA, the Commission on Theology presents this paper to ensure the RCA holds a faithful and orthodox theological foundation in church planting so that the efforts may be done as faithfully as possible in service to Christ and in listening to the Spirit.

On the RCA's website the page on church planting states:

People need to know the love of God and the power of that love in their lives. Church plants are more effective at reaching people who don't know Jesus. Why? It's simple: it's their whole purpose. Evangelism is one of many focuses at an established church, but it's the primary call of a church plant.²

While plenty of arguments could be made to nuance the points and claims made in that statement and their veracity, one claim that is without dispute is

¹ Bosch, David J. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 389-390.

² www.rca.org/church-planting, accessed January 15, 2025.

that we are called to show and live out the love of God and that we are called to reach people. While we can debate the efficacy of and approach to helping existing churches better reach those who are outside of the church, be that because of church hurt, being de-churched, or not having encountered the gospel, the necessity of organized churches engaging that heart and ministry does not mean that at times new churches aren't also needed.³ We would note, however, that to claim the entire point of church plants is to reach those who don't know Jesus is far too narrow. In much of the western world, there are plenty of people who do not regularly attend a church who do know Christ.⁴ Particularly in highly church-ed areas of the United States, knowing Christ, or even knowing about Christ, may not be gap that a church plant needs to serve. In fact, in those spaces the faithful plant may need to help invite those who have been hurt by the church, or are de-churched, back into the community of a church.

Regardless of the focus of these plants, however, if we as a denomination are to be starting new churches, then we also need to be clear about what a church is, so that we can be clear about what does, and does not, fall under the arch of church planting. As was established in *On the Rafters of the Cathedral of Love*, a paper from our commission accepted at General Synod 2024, our polity must serve our theology, rather than our theology serving our polity, and so here we will first talk about the theology of churches, and thusly new churches, before turning to system, such as who we are tasking and supporting in church planting; policy, such as where funds are, and are not, distributed; and polity, as they must be secondary to our faithfully living out our theology.

"The true church," Article 29 of the Belgic Confession rightly states, "can be recognized if it has the following marks: The church engages in the pure preaching of the gospel; it makes use of the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them; it practices church discipline for correcting faults."⁵ If we start with what the church is, and so what the church is not, then we can move from this point to establish what endeavors may be *church* planting as opposed to ministries. Christians, led by the Spirit, may notice, recognize, or discern a gap in their community, a place to serve, to care, to show that love of God and love of neighbor that Augustine notes is "the end of the scripture."⁶

Every attempt to love God and to show God's love, however, while it should flow from the church, is not, and does not necessitate, its own church. As such, one of the structural discernment elements that must be executed if the RCA is to faithfully engage in church planting is to be sure that the work and ministry they are supporting is indeed a church and a space for church planting. In situations where God has led a Christian, or a group of Christians, to discern a call for a new ministry, we should discern first what existing churches may be equipped to work with this person to help in that ministry, and should challenge

³ Josh Packard, Ashleigh Hope, and Group Publishing, *Church Refugees: Sociologists Reveal Why People Are DONE with Church but Not Their Faith* (Loveland, Colorado: Group Publishing, 2015); See: Jim Davis et al., *The Great Dechurching: Who's Leaving, Why Are They Going, and What Will It Take to Bring Them Back?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2023).

⁴ To be fair, there are plenty of people who do attend church and still do not know Christ. Matthew 13:30, Luke 3:17.

⁵ Belgic Confession, Article 29 in *Our Faith: Ecumenical Creeds, Reformed Confessions, and Other Resources* (Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2013), 55.

⁶ St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson Jr (New York: Pearson, 1958), 23.

churches to pick up that call. If the mission and ministry is not one that shows the true marks of the church, but rather is an outflow of a faithful church, then that is where that ministry should live—in a church. The other side of this, however, is that there are plenty of cases where God is calling us to start a new church—a place where the Word is faithfully preached, the sacraments rightly administered, and discipline rightly practiced.

Throughout church history, and today across Christianity and the RCA, the exact form of fulfilling the three marks of the church will, within reason and proper doctrine, vary. However, all three must be there. Within our denomination one of the ways that we ensure a church and congregation is being faithful to these marks is with the oversight of a consistory and classis/regional synod/middle assembly. This also allows us here, rather than wax poetic about the theology behind our denomination's polity, to simply direct our attention to the work this denomination has already done that is established in the *Book of Church Order (BCO)*. The *BCO* sets forward two types of churches—organizing and organized. Now, of course, any church plant would, should, and must start as an organizing church, that is, one with “a classis-appointed governing body that functions similarly to both a consistory and a board of elders.”⁷

As such, when a church plant is occurring, the broader support of other churches in this is crucial, and this guidance and oversight is necessary within faithful ministry and execution of the call of the church. Indeed, this interaction will also help move other churches supporting the plant from any sense of competition and toward a faithful recognition that each church in an area is a different part of the body. We fully recognize that a church plant, especially in its early days, will likely function in different ways than an established church as it builds up and gets established. However, since the aim and call is to be a church that holds the three marks of the church, and since the *BCO* only offers two types of churches, the church plant must be an organizing body.⁸ Moreover, since every church exists in relation and connection to one another in our response to our call to love of God and love of neighbor, this practice beautifully embodies the faithful response to that call.

Given that any church plant, no matter its particular call, focus, ministry, and mission in its time, space, and context still is called to live into, and live out of, these three marks, and given that, as a rule (though one admittedly with exceptions), we recognize ministers of Word and sacrament who have gone through the processes laid out in the *BCO* as those who should be called and tasked with pastoring churches, ministers should be the ones ordinarily called and tasked with planting churches. While it is sometimes argued that church planting is different than pastoring an organized church, and there is veracity to that claim, every church that a minister is called to and serves brings with it its own unique challenges and presents a unique call. As such, it is much more faithful to approach this process as we would any process of discerning the call of a minister to an organized church, looking at God's calling and equipping of the minister, rather than using the unique elements that may be involved in the planting process to, as it is said, throw the baby out with the bathwater. Not only have ministers undergone all of the training, testing, and process we

⁷ *Book of Church Order* (2024 edition). (Reformed Church Press, Reformed Church in America, 2024), 11.

⁸ An additional gift and support to the church plant and planter is that by ensuring it is an organizing church, there is now a clear system in place in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8 of the *BCO* (pp. 37-39 in the 2024 edition).

expect of those tasked with leading a church, but they are also those rightly charged with the right preaching of the gospel and proper administration of the sacraments.

One alternative that is sometimes utilized in church planting situations is commissioned pastors. Given that commissioned pastors are “under the auspices of a local church or congregation,” however, placing a commissioned pastor in that role, or any other elder or congregation member, can lead to a confusion of office and the theological call underlying those offices.⁹ This is not to say that any of those people may not be being called by God to be part of a church planting process, but that, in that case and in faithfulness to that person, their equipping, and the RCA’s support of them, they should proceed through the process to becoming a minister of Word and sacrament within that discernment of call to serve as the minister of a church plant.

Moreover, it is the promise of the gospel that whoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish but have eternal life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be announced and declared without differentiation or discrimination to all nations and people, to whom God in his good pleasure sends the gospel.¹⁰

As the Canons of Dordt note, God’s people are called to show God’s love and proclaim the good news of the gospel to their neighbors and to all. This is a central call to all churches, both organized and existing for centuries as well as those that are being organized and planted. As in all things, if we let our orthodoxy guide our orthopraxy, and so our polity, structure, and system, following Scripture and the witness of our creeds, confessions, and the saints that have gone before, we can faithfully and well answer God’s call in ministry and faithfulness.

In conclusion, the Commission on Theology encourages the RCA to faithfully plant new churches and congregations, to support them financially and in other ways, and to create, guided by Scripture, our creeds and doctrine, and the *BCO*, and in conversation with the Commission on Church Order, clear and helpful steps and processes to support the ministers of Word and sacrament who are being called to this form of pastoral ministry.

TH 25-1

To commend “Church Planting: A Theological Perspective” to all congregations and assemblies of the RCA. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The theological issues of planting churches, from a Reformed perspective, will have long-term impacts on the life and health of those congregations.
2. This can be done online with minimal effort or cost.

⁹ *BCO* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 17 (2024 ed., p. 60).

¹⁰ Canons of Dordt, 2.5 in Faith Alive Christian Resources, Christian Reformed Church in North America, and Reformed Church in America, *Our Faith*, 127.

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business was to vote in favor of TH 25-1.

Reformed Responses to Polarized Times

A significant amount of the commission's discussion over the last two years has centered on appropriate Reformed responses to increasing polarization in society and within the church. The commission presented the 2024 General Synod with a bibliography of resources for promoting dialogue within the church ("Building Brave Spaces Together: A Brief Bibliography to Guide Christian Discernment," *MGS 2024*, pp. 307-308). This year, we present a bibliography of resources on the use and abuse of power in the church, which is also enlightening when considering how power is used in secular society, and a paper examining the dangers of only being in dialogue with those who agree with us.

THE USE AND ABUSE OF POWER IN THE CHURCH: A BRIEF BIBLIOGRAPHY

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TH 25-2

To instruct the GSC to make "The Use and Abuse of Power in the Church: A Brief Bibliography" available to all congregations, assemblies, and members of the RCA. (ADOPTED)

Reason:

This can be done online with minimal effort or cost.

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business was to vote in favor of TH 25-2.

THE MANIFOLD WISDOM OF GOD AND THE DANGER OF ECHO CHAMBERS

Echo chambers are the most convenient places to reside in both the current climate of the church and the culture. An echo chamber is “an environment in which a person encounters only beliefs or opinions that coincide with their own, so that their existing views are reinforced and alternative ideas are not considered.”¹¹ We need only to turn on our preferred news source, scroll through our algorithm-run social media apps, or return only to our favorite authors and theologians to run into the problem—we prefer to have our current understanding of God and the world reinforced.¹² As we move into a new structure in the Reformed Church in America that has the potential to further situate us in our echo chambers, it is crucial that we consider the effect this could have on our sanctification and the church’s witness to the gospel of Christ.

The Witness of Scripture

The letter to the Ephesians gives language to God’s mysterious plan that has been at work since the beginning of time. In Ephesians 3:6, the author reaches the pinnacle of his argument by stating that good news is known now through the joining together of the Gentile believers with the Israelites as heirs of God’s promise. He goes on to say that God’s mysterious plan from the beginning of the world was that, “through the church the complicated, many-sided wisdom of God in all its infinite variety *and* innumerable aspects might now be made known to the angelic rulers and authorities—principalities and powers—in the heavenly sphere.” The Greek word used to describe God’s wisdom in this passage is *polypoikilos*, which means “something that is manifested in a great variety of forms.”¹³ It is a word that is meant to invoke images of “complex embroidered patterns.”¹⁴

The variety of God’s wisdom in Ephesians *required* the presence of groups of people who came from different ethnic groups, people who practiced their faith differently and emphasized different aspects of theological understanding.¹⁵ The goal was not for all members of the church to practice and articulate their understanding of the good news in the same way. Rather, the variety in the community was essential to the proclamation of the wisdom of God.

The complexity of God’s wisdom was not original to the authors of the New Testament. We see the necessity of multiple perspectives and experiences

¹¹ “Echo Chamber, n. Meanings, Etymology and More | Oxford English Dictionary,” accessed February 20, 2025, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/echo-chamber_n.

¹² Christina Pazzanese, “Danger in the Internet Echo Chamber,” Harvard Law School, accessed February 20, 2025, <https://hls.harvard.edu/today/danger-internet-echo-chamber>.

¹³ Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Pub Group, 2000).

¹⁴ Janette H. Ok, Osvaldo Padilla, and Amy L. B. Peeler, *The New Testament in Color: A Multiethnic Bible Commentary*, ed. Esau McCaulley (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2024), 423.

¹⁵ The Jewish understanding of the good news would have been deeply linked to the historical and theological understanding of God’s relationship with Israel. Their practice of Christianity would have still included participation in many parts of the Jewish law. Gentile Christians, however, were not required to learn and practice all of these same laws, festivals, etc. Their theological frames were different, yet they also received the good news of Christ. Something about this difference was essential to making known the mystery of God to the “powers and authorities in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 3:10, NRSV).

to obtain wisdom in the narratives in the Old Testament as well. Perhaps one of the clearest examples is in the interactions between Job and his friends in Job's season of trial. Job's well-intentioned friends come to Job in his time of grief and pain with advice that stemmed from their fairly literal interpretations of Torah. Namely, that people who lived rightly before God would receive blessing, while people who lived in sin would receive curses from God. Job's friends reasoned then that since Job was being cursed, he must have sinned. Their theological understanding finds its grounding in the book of Deuteronomy.¹⁶

The problem was that Job's lived experience did not match that theological framework. Job lived blamelessly before God and was still experiencing suffering and curses. Though Job's friends had fairly solid biblical grounding for their perspectives, Job's experience complicated their theological frame. They needed to be in relationship with Job to encounter different perspectives on God's ways to have a fuller picture of who God is and how God operates. The story of Job ends with God correcting Job's friends on their application of scripture saying, "You have not spoken rightly about me, as my servant Job has" (Job 42:7).

From a Torah-driven perspective, Job's friends had solid ground to stand on. The theme of obedience leading to blessing and disobedience leading to curse finds abundant support in the first five books of the Bible. However, this theological frame needed nuancing. It is only through their encounter with a man who brings a different perspective and life experience and the unexpected words of God's affirmation of Job that Job's friends are able to learn more about God's mystery and complexity. Through this relationship across different experiences and theological frameworks, Job's friends expanded their understanding of God.

As we work to understand and apply scripture today, we face the same pitfalls. We bring our own limited theological frameworks, our own set of experiences, and our own limited reasoning to our understanding of God and his Word. It takes a diverse community to sharpen and complicate our understanding so that we might present the variety of the wisdom of God to the world. If we stay in our echo chambers rather than maintaining relationships and learning from people with different perspectives and experiences, we reinforce our own arguments, and can unintentionally harm others with what we believe to be God's truth.

Historical Examples and Cautionary Tales

The RCA has long held a value for being in relationship with and learning from people who come from different cultural, theological, and experiential backgrounds. This stems in some ways from Abraham Kuyper's value for diversity in the church that he felt was necessary due to the "subjectivity of human understanding."¹⁷ One way this value has manifested in our denomination is through our continued membership in the World Council of Churches since 1948 and other similar bodies such as the National Council of Churches, Christian Churches Together, and the Global Christian forum. These theologically and culturally diverse partnerships broaden our understanding of

¹⁶ See Deuteronomy 28.

¹⁷ Vincent Keane, "Unity in the Church Across Traditions: How Abraham Kuyper's Ecclesiology Helps Further Contemporary Ecumenical Engagement Between Protestants and Catholics," n.d., 10–17.

what God is doing through different pockets of the church in the world and help challenge us to a more multifaceted view of God.

Conversely, when Reformed theologians and groups in our denomination have held their theological convictions without a willingness to maintain relationship with other believers because of difference in theology, we have missed rich learning from other parts of the church and have damaged the witness of the good news in the world. Calvin himself was guilty of modeling this type of separation from other theological groups. He wrote his “Treatise against the Anabaptists and Libertines” to defend his own understanding of infant baptism and rebuke the Anabaptists’ withdrawal from participation in government (among other things). Though his theological convictions were well intentioned and founded in his understanding of scripture, this treatise became fodder for persecution and violence against the Anabaptists that damaged the witness of the church to the world. It also further separated these theological strands from dialoguing, thus ridding each group of rich theological conversations around faithful political engagement and faithful abstaining from politics and violence that could have challenged each group to a more nuanced understanding of the role of the church in relationship to government.

In more recent years, disagreements about creation and evolution, worship styles, supernatural gifts of the spirit, women in ministry leadership, political parties, inclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals, and responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have tempted churches to fortify their relationships and interactions with like-minded people and congregations. In the process, many have “unfollowed” or relationally distanced themselves from those they disagree with.¹⁸ In the process, we disconnect ourselves from the variety of the wisdom of God and opportunities to have our blind spots checked and our limited perspectives broadened by maintaining dialogue, love, and curiosity across differences.

A Call to Seek Out Different Perspectives

Our denominational, cultural, and political climates, alongside our media outlets and propensity toward familiarity and similarity in relationships, necessitates intentional counter-practices to encounter the “variety of the wisdom of God” and to make it known to the world. In other words, forces around us want us to stay in our echo chambers and further divide our society and the church. This is dangerous, not just because of the consequences of societal division, but because theologically, this stunts our growth into Christlikeness and leaves us blind to areas of sin or misunderstanding. For example, perhaps we don’t like the way another part of the church engages or talks about justice, so we discredit their theology and seek to distance ourselves from them. Or perhaps we don’t appreciate how closely aligned another part of the church seems to a political party that we disagree with, so we scoff and stop engaging authors and theologians from that “camp.” Perhaps we disagree with how a part of the church expects the Holy Spirit to work, so we make sure that our worship services look nothing like “those” churches’ worship services. When we echo chamber over the diverse body of Jesus Christ, we miss being shaped by the rich diversity of wisdom that God planned from the creation of the world.

¹⁸ This section speaks to the places where this disconnection is done primarily out of convenience or because of discomfort. There are valid reasons to set boundaries in relationships when they are causing harm.

Our despising and division, our snide comments and cleverly insulting memes distort the good news represented by diverse unity in the Church.

What then shall we do? Since orthodoxy should lead to faithful orthopraxy, intentional steps must be taken to maintain curiosity and relationships with those we may disagree with. While this does not require us to change our mind on theological convictions, it should help us see areas that we have been blind to or where we have not considered the impact of our perspectives. In order to cultivate action, below are a few practical ways different bodies in the RCA could respond to leave our echo chambers and make sure we are attentive to the variety of the wisdom of God.

Middle Assemblies

- As assemblies naturally coalesce around areas of agreement, be sure to make a plan for how you will stay connected to and continue to learn from people from different cultures, generations, and theological perspectives.
- As you create bylaws and plan your first year together, consider adding one intentional connection or learning from a different perspective from your own to guard against the danger of echo chambers.
- Consider making resources from The Colossian Forum readily accessible to churches in your assembly (<https://colossianforum.com>).

Pastors

- Affirm in preaching and teaching our shared commitment as followers of Jesus Christ.
- Consider reading a book this year from the “Counterpoints Collection.” This series contrasts scholarly views on relevant Christian topics such as atonement, evolution, the church and politics, pluralism, etc. This is a way to intentionally engage other theological viewpoints. (<https://zondervanacademic.com/promotions/counterpoints>)
- Preach about unity and consider sharing multiple perspectives in your sermons to help your congregation engage diversity of thought and experience and understand how this is a value in scripture.
- Listen with curiosity to people from a variety of viewpoints in your congregation. Try to listen for the best, good-faith argument from multiple sides.

Consistories and Church Members

- Search out narratives from sources that you know you tend to disagree with (e.g., listen in to CNN or Fox News if one of those isn’t your normal news source or listen to a podcast from a pastor or theologian from a different “camp” than your own) and ask the question, “How could a reasonable person who follows Jesus think differently than me about this topic?”
- Take someone to coffee or lunch whose worldview you know you disagree with. Get to know them better and, if appropriate, ask good questions to better understand why they believe what they believe.
- Take stock of how welcoming your church is to people who come from different cultures, life experiences, and theological backgrounds. How could you personally take one step to make the space safer?

Study Questions

1. What are some potential echo chambers you either place or find yourself in?
2. What are you doing in your daily life to break free of these chambers and to hear other perspectives?
3. When you encounter a person or a prescriptive that challenges your preconceived notion, do you approach it with grace, love, and curiosity, or with judgment?
4. St. Augustine writes that the end of scripture is love of God and love of neighbor. How might our breaking free of echo chambers open us to better love God and neighbor?
5. What action might your church take to help its members hear other perspectives and engage them well?
6. What conversations does your leadership need to have to better itself and the congregation?
7. What conversations does your classis/middle assembly need to have to be sure it is not falling into echo chambers?

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TH 25-3

To commend “The Manifold Wisdom of God and The Danger of Echo Chambers” to all congregations, assemblies, and members of the RCA. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. It is important for Reformed Christians to enter into political and social discourse in a manner that brings honor to Christ.
2. This can be done online with minimal effort or cost.

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business was to vote in favor of TH 25-3.

A Christian Response to the Needs of Refugees and Immigrants

The changes in the applications of immigration law since the change in U.S. presidential administrations in January 2025 have been concerning, even alarming, to Christians of many political stripes. As we work to take seriously our Lord's challenge and command in Matthew 25, the church needs tools to reflect theologically on the associated issues. The challenge to responding in a timely manner is increased by the fact that only six weeks elapsed between the change in administrations and the deadline for filing reports to this synod. The Commission on Theology commends to the church the general secretary's letter of February 3, 2025 (www.rca.org/a-call-to-support-immigrants-and-refugees-in-christs-name) and the resources made available by RCA Global Mission (www.rca.org/global-mission/refugees).

The social discourse has again turned toward immigrants and refugees; this is, unfortunately, a variation on a historical theme. This is not the first time that a General Synod commission has had to deal with questions around immigration and how to understand the humanity of immigrants and refugees. In 1993, the Commission on Christian Action submitted a paper entitled "Welcoming the Strangers in Our Midst." Like all papers to the General Synod, there are aspects that are particular to the place and time, and other aspects that are timeless. The Commission on Theology feels the compelling need to speak to the discourse on "strangers" within the current discourse in the United States, while also reminding the General Synod and the Reformed Church of the reality that this is not something that is new, but rather something that we periodically need to be reminded of. As such, your commission re-presents the core teaching of the Commission on Christian Action paper from 1993. We are grateful for the faithful work of the CCA in 1993, and we hope that re-presenting much of the paper will draw worthy attention to their important work.

WELCOMING THE STRANGERS IN OUR MIDST

Excerpted from the 1993 report of the Commission on Christian Action, MGS 1993, pp. 86-90

One of the most powerful themes of Scripture is God's special love for resident aliens, "strangers within the gate." They were rescued by God, healed, and held up as examples of faith and models of profound love. The people of Israel were told to forever remember their own place of estrangement in Egypt and the moment of God's deliverance. In gratitude for their deliverance, they were commanded to welcome strangers. Just as God reached out in Christ to draw estranged humanity into God's family, Scripture teaches Christians to treat the strangers they encounter as neighbors and family. ...

THE SCRIPTURAL MANDATE

Provisions for Strangers in the Old Testament Law

The Exodus is a dramatic and central story of God rescuing a foreign people from exploitation. Restored to a life of independence, self-support, and dignity, they were destined to become a blessing to other nations. Throughout the Old Testament, Israel is reminded in the law and the prophets that precisely because they were delivered by God from bondage, they should remember

the strangers—resident aliens—in their midst (Exod. 22:21; 23:9). They were commanded to treat any stranger kindly, virtually as a fellow Israelite (Deut. 24:17-22).

The law specified certain protection for strangers. Anyone who disobeyed, depriving foreigners of their rights, was to be cursed (Deut. 27:19). But the very letter of the law pointed far beyond a bare minimum. Leviticus 19 balances the command to love the neighbor as yourself (v. 18) with a command to love the stranger as yourself (v. 34). (See also Deut. 10:19.) The prophets called Israel to account for failing to practice toward others the extravagant love and perfect justice that they had known at the hand of God. The Psalmist proclaimed, “The Lord watches over sojourners” (Ps. 146:9); and Malachi warned that the Lord will testify against those who show disrespect for God by taking advantage of foreigners (Mal. 3:5).

Old Testament Accounts of Strangers—Examples of Love, Faith, Hospitality, Courage, and Repentance

Just about the time that a faithful person in Israel began to feel that he and his nation had God in their hip pocket, God would bring in a stranger to show what real love, faith, and obedience were like. Consider Ruth, the foreigner who left her own family, language, culture, and religion behind out of love for Naomi, her Israelite mother-in-law. So celebrated is this story that, in wedding ceremonies, we hear the words of Ruth to Naomi lifted out of context to describe the self-abandoning love of husband for wife and wife for husband: “Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16). Thus, the love of a stranger for her godly mother-in-law is held up as a model for love in marriage.

In response to her love and faith, God blessed Ruth, the stranger, with plenty of food for herself and Naomi. The help came by the hand of a successful farmer, Boaz, who practiced the commandment to “love the stranger as yourself” by allowing Ruth to join other needy peasants and widows who gleaned in his fields. And God didn’t stop at blessing Ruth with the bare necessities of life! She married the rich man Boaz, was blessed with a son, and eventually became the great grandmother of King David and a direct ancestor of Jesus. Apparently, the faithful love of a stranger for the people of her adopted land and the obedient love of faithful citizens for strangers in their midst are both part of God’s plan for our blessing and salvation!

The story of Ruth’s marriage to Boaz is surprising, given the warnings of the law and the prophets against Israelites marrying foreigners—who might lead them into worshipping other gods (Ezra 9:1-2). Ruth’s story is all the more remarkable since her people, the Moabites, were singled out for special disfavor. Because they had called upon Balaam to curse Israel during their journey through the wilderness, the Moabites were never to be allowed to set foot in the assembly of God (Neh. 13:1-2). Yet, it was a daughter of the Moabites who was to serve as an honored forbear of Jesus, the Savior of all people. It seems to be the surprising (at times disturbing) way of our God to turn even enemies into family! Perhaps this is why we can expect amazing things when we follow the Lord’s command to “love your enemies.”

Various strands of this same theme of Israel’s blessing at the hands of strangers

appear in other biblical accounts. Long before he was sent off by God to deliver Israel from bondage, Moses was welcomed as a stranger into a Midianite home and family. Partly in honor of their hospitality, Moses named his first son Gershom—a play on the Hebrew word for stranger (Exod. 2:11-22).

It was a foreign prostitute, Rahab, whose act of courage helped give a stunning victory to Israel over Jericho and saved the lives of her own family (Josh. 2; 6:22-25). According to the genealogy of Jesus, recorded in Matthew 1:5, this Rahab was an ancestor of Jesus through the family of Boaz, Ruth's husband. Thus, Rahab is another stranger through whom the world was to receive its Deliverer.

Strangers, even enemies, were often surprising Israel, even in their capacity to repent. Who would have expected the wicked pagan city of Nineveh to actually heed God's call to repentance? Certainly not the reluctant prophet, Jonah, who was so angry with God for failing to destroy Nineveh that he asked to die. Jonah, personally delivered by God from the belly of a whale, apparently didn't want to see God deliver a city of 120,000 repentant pagans from destruction! This account stands as a dramatic reminder that God's call and grace extend to every nation—even if God has to redirect the paths of the faithful to bring that message.

Jesus and Strangers

The sometimes upsetting message to Israel of God's plan to save and bless strangers in their midst continues in the New Testament. In his hometown synagogue, Jesus read from Isaiah, identifying himself with the liberating and healing Messiah. When the congregation took offense at this claim, Jesus reminded them of a foreign widow who took in Elijah during a severe famine. She, not the Israelites, was blessed with a bowl that never ran out of flour and a cruse of oil that never ran dry. Jesus further reminded them that though there were many lepers in Israel, God chose to heal Na'aman, a pagan commander, by Elisha's hand (Luke 4:16-27, 1 Kings 17:8-16, and 2 Kings 5:1-14). Later Jesus' famous story of the good Samaritan illustrated how the mercy of a stranger may have much to teach self-righteous members of the religious and civil fold about genuine neighborly love.

Jesus' healing ministry touched several foreigners, such as the Canaanite woman whose fearless appeal to Jesus resulted in her daughter being freed from a demon (Matt. 15:22-28). This foreign woman was one of only two people of whom Jesus said they had "great faith." The other was a foreign officer who sought and received healing for his slave. Jesus exclaimed, "Not even in Israel have I found such faith!" (Luke 7:1-10). And when only one of ten healed lepers returned to thank Jesus, he called attention to the fact that this man was a foreigner (Luke 17:11-19).

It is easy to forget these and other lessons from all of Scripture about the centrality of strangers to God's work and witness! Sometimes, like Jonah, we'd rather not believe that God's salvation and blessings are meant to go far beyond the border of the culture and way of life we know. Even when we celebrate the arrival of three wise men at the place where Jesus and his family were staying, we seldom stop to reflect on how God brought foreign dignitaries to bear witness to the Light, which went unnoticed by most of the faithful. We also forget that the "unwashed," like the Samaritan woman who met Jesus at a well (John

4:1-42), may turn out to be the most effective voices calling new people into God's kingdom.

Certainly our own story, as Gentile Christians, illustrates God's persistent outreach to strangers. According to the remarkable Acts account of Peter's dream and his baptism of the household of Cornelius, a foreign officer, God went out of his way to show the apostles that the gospel of Jesus Christ is for all persons (Acts 10). Thanks to Peter's obedience and to the faithful witness of those who carried the gospel far beyond their own land, we are no longer strangers to the family of God. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians, Gentile Christians who were "strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God" through Christ you have been made "citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God" (Eph. 2:12, 19)! Remembering how we came to be adopted into God's family, we can never turn our own backs on strangers among us, nor ignore the needs of strangers far away. Jesus promised that when we take in strangers, we welcome him (Matt. 25:35).

Practicing Justice and Providing a Place for Strangers at the Table Today

What does this expansive theme in Scripture teach us about our relationship to literal strangers in our midst? The Seder meal (during Passover) is the right model. Not only do Jews still reserve a place and a cup for Elijah, but they also invite strangers and the needy to share this special meal with them. Christians, too, should never let strangers remain "across the tracks." They should never be away from the core of our lives, never farther than the other side of our own table. How else are we to remember—as God's people are commanded to do—that "we were aliens/strangers in the land of Egypt" (Lev. 19:34 and Deut. 10:19)? How are we to let God's mercy flow through us, if we don't daily remember where we've come from, namely the other side of the tracks?

For Christians, Easter is the crowning climax of The Story. The Stranger became our Brother and our Savior. Each Sunday is our Easter, and every communion our Passover meal. Elijah's cup is overflowing in the hands of our Host, who is no longer a "stranger" among us. The Christian community, gathered around the table, must make room for those of Christ's family who are still strangers in our midst. And the first tables to which all strangers should be welcome are those in the homes of Christian families.

What does this mean, and how can it be done? There are many models, but the option of ignoring strangers is not ours. Churches have often served as sponsors for refugee families, providing assistance with jobs, food, and tutoring. These families are welcomed into the life of the Christian community, at a pace and depth determined by their own response to the invitation. Some churches have provided refuge to undocumented persons. This they have done because God's commandment to "love the stranger as yourself" is not qualified by any requirement of citizenship. In fact, it was precisely because resident aliens were not citizens of Israel, and were therefore vulnerable, that the Old Testament law made special provision for their protection and commanded that they be loved like family (Lev. 19:34).

The biblical text leaves no doubt that the practice of justice and mercy toward strangers is central to our calling as people of God. The Old Testament law confronts our human tendency to apply a double standard in human rights—one

for citizens and another for resident foreigners—by proclaiming, “You shall have one law for the alien and for the citizen, for I am the Lord your God” (Lev. 24:22). Thus the commandments against exploiting workers, or perverting justice, apply equally to citizens and foreigners (Lev. 19:13, Deut. 1:16, 24:17). Guided by the law of God, we should not be party to the exploitation of workers; we should be eager to speak in the defense of foreigners who are cheated, abused, or denied justice in any way. Like Boaz, who encouraged the foreigner, Ruth, to glean in his fields, we should be providing employment and food for strangers who are able and eager to work (Ruth 2; Deut. 10:18-19).

God’s law required Israel to collect an in-kind tax in the form of tithes of grain to assist widows, orphans, and poor strangers (Deut. 26:12-14). In our day such help takes the form of food banks and other emergency assistance supported through our offerings, as well as public-sector food, housing, and health assistance, paid for by our taxes. Through a multitude of channels, our efforts should aim to imitate the restorative work of God by assuring strangers a secure place, a dignified life, blessings in present crises, and hope for the future.

At a minimum, this model suggests Christian participation in programs to provide legal assistance and emergency relief, as well as access to housing, education, and jobs for strangers. Beyond that, God’s example calls us to challenge prejudice against strangers in our communities and to root it out of our own thinking and behavior.

Clearly many of us appreciate ethnic diversity in America—at a certain level. We eat Mexican cuisine, for instance, enjoy folk festivals, and like to visit Chinatown. Yet at a deeper level, appreciation too often turns to impatience and blame. Do we at times resent the dependence of first-generation immigrants on their mother tongue? Since most of us don’t learn other languages, do we fail to recognize how difficult it is for adults to become fluent in a new language? Do we then equate a stranger’s broken English with ignorance and stupidity, or with lack of respect for her adopted country? Do we participate (or silently acquiesce) in conversations that blame residential blight, drugs, and crime on foreigners? To the extent that we do so, are we not “forgetting where we came from”—some earlier generation of poor, likely non-English-speaking immigrants? Indeed the prelude to disobedience by the people of Israel, and their divine punishment, was often their failure to remember that they had been abused strangers who were delivered by God and restored to a place of blessing and dignity!

Our Call to Receive and Celebrate Blessings from the Lives of Strangers

It is unlikely that a day will ever come when justice and mercy toward the strangers in our midst are fully practiced until we also hear another dimension of Scripture’s teaching concerning strangers. The stories of strangers like Rahab and Naomi, and accounts of Jesus’s respectful and rehabilitating relationships with foreigners, suggest that we ignore and distance ourselves from strangers only at our own peril. Our security may depend, as Naomi’s did, on the loyal love of a foreigner married into our own family. Our lives may be saved by some good “Samaritan’s” journeying through our land (Luke 10:25-37). Our families may be spared destruction because we, like Abraham, welcome strangers who turn out to be angels in disguise (Gen. 18).

Strangers may not only play significant roles in God’s protection over our lives. They can also be instruments in God’s hand for our spiritual growth. Thus, our witness and worship may be blessed if we discover, like St. Paul, the divine light reflected in the works of foreign poets (Acts 17:16-32). Furthermore, our understanding of the power of faith will be enhanced as we meditate on both the scriptural description of Jesus’ encounter with a foreign officer, who sought help for his dying servant, and on the remarkable stories of God’s response to faith-filled strangers in our own midst.

If we are attentive and available, the strangers among us have much to teach us about love, loyalty, and faith. They may protect us from bodily harm and can certainly save us from the spiritual death of self-righteousness. Their reception of the gospel can renew within us the joy of our salvation.

Sometimes what keeps us away from strangers is the powerful uneasiness we can feel upon encountering very vulnerable people. Surely part of what God has in mind in instructing us to attend to strangers in our midst is to deliver us from the idolatry of finding our security in the status we enjoy as citizens of our own country, members of our own culture, and communicants in our own church. Instead, our security is found in the call and grace of God alone. In the presence of strangers, we are reminded that none of us is by birth a citizen of God’s kingdom. Only by adoption, in faith, are we strangers made a part of God’s family.

The Key to Obedience—Remembering

Christians are meant to encounter strangers in all these ways—ensuring their well-being, defending their rights, being instructed in virtue by their example, receiving divine blessings at their hands, and carrying God’s good news into their lives. The key to all is surely remembrance. Using the stories of Scripture, we can “remember” that the experience of Israel as strangers—their rescue, restoration, and reception of the law—is also our individual and collective story. By hearing and relating our own stories of virtue, wisdom, and joy experienced in the company of strangers, we can recover the sense that God is surely in our midst! In unusual places, at unexpected times, and through unfamiliar people, we are touched by God!

Such grateful remembrance is the spring of mercy. It is the foundation of justice. It is the motivation for love. It is a foretaste of heaven, where no one will be a stranger anymore! Indeed, one of the first steps on earth that a Christian can take in anticipation of heaven is to be a neighbor to strangers, recognizing them already as sisters and brothers in God’s extended family.

TH 25-4

To commend “Welcoming the Strangers in Our Midst,” the update included in this report, and the resources on refugees made available by RCA Global Mission to all congregations, assemblies, and members of the RCA. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. It is important for Reformed Christians to have tools to help them stand up for the needs of their neighbors, wherever they may be, indeed to be neighbors.
2. This can be done online with minimal effort or cost.

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business was to vote in favor of TH 25-4.

Looking Ahead

Moving ahead, in addition to whatever work is assigned to us by this synod, the commission is continuing to discuss how the church functions in the current cultural/political space, a possible update of the 2011 paper “The Office of Deacon and the Assemblies of the Church,” the issue of the church’s relationship to the state, the issue of Christian Zionism, a theological response to the use of technology and artificial intelligence (AI) in the church, the Council of Nicaea, the possibility of a common day for Easter as sign of unity, and the ecumenical proposal for a new feast of Creation in the liturgical calendar.

Last, but not least, we give thanks for the work of Matthew van Maastricht on the Commission on Theology these past three years. He is stepping down at the end of this term.

RESPONDING TO THE GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETY: A REFORMED PERSPECTIVE

A Joint Paper from the Commissions on Theology, History, and Christian Action

The church is always responsible to examine its witness to the gospel’s political and social implications. What then is the Reformed Church’s witness in response to the rise of Christian nationalism in both Canada and the United States; in response to a seismic shift in the government’s approach to refugees, immigrants, the environment, diversity, inclusion, justice, and economic equity; and in response to the deep divides among our own people? The Commissions on Christian Action, History, and Theology have prepared this paper to offer some guidance on the public witness of the church.

Theology

The Old Testament presents us with many examples of prophets witnessing to kings, especially when those kings were God’s anointed. Samuel admonished King Saul; Nathan advised King David but also rebuked him. Elijah and Elisha contested the kings of Israel. Jeremiah suffered for prophesying against the whole nation. Daniel gave counsel to Nebuchadnezzar. Ezekiel and Zechariah admonished the people themselves.

With the New Testament and the times that follow, the people of God are no longer a kingdom or a nation but a church among many nations. In this new context, the apostle Paul gave us important guidance: “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God” (Romans 13:1, RSV). Yet, when the apostles Peter and John were commanded to stifle their witness to the Lord Jesus, they insisted, “We must obey God rather than any human authority” (Acts 5:29b, NRSV). The prophetic tension with those in authority remains.

The Belgic Confession confirms the teaching of the apostle Paul.

We believe that because of the depravity of the human race, our good God has ordained kings, princes, and civil officers. God wants the world to be governed by laws and policies so that human lawlessness may be restrained and that everything may be conducted in good order among human beings. For that purpose God has placed the sword in the hands of the government, to punish evil people and protect the good (Belgic Confession, Article 36).

This should not be interpreted as a justification for quiet submission to the authorities. Indeed, the Belgic Confession was addressed to the Crown as testimony, witness, and protest.

The Reformed Church in America has developed its theology of church and state within the “free church” context of North America, with the official disestablishment of religion. Reformed Church members have been “comfortable citizens of this nation,” so that, in the words of Dennis Voskuil, “Patriotism and piety have so often and nearly converged in public Reformed thought that one can in fact identify a pervasive form of ‘civil religion.’”¹⁹

Voskuil elaborates:

Piety and patriotism have been closely related for Reformed Christians in America. Properly so, for church and nation are both agents for God’s peace. But the church has too often failed to recognize that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of America are not one and the same. When the church has too uncritically accepted the claims of the nation it has verged toward an unhealthy nationalism. But when the church has stepped away from culture and asserted God’s sovereignty, it has been a prophetic voice calling the nation back to its appointed task. In the present nuclear age, may God continue to raise up such prophets of justice and peace in the Reformed community.

The Reformed community should always listen for the prophetic voices of Elijah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Peter to be heard again in the church. The church must consider the question of how and when to confront the state, insisting that God and God’s reign have authority over the state. As Voskuil writes, “This means that a tension, real and potential, will exist between the church and the governing authorities, even if those authorities have been elected by a majority of the citizens, of whom many will be Christians.” This tension will exist within the church itself, as the witness will also speak to the convictions, political loyalties, and economic interests of many of its own members. Perhaps the more difficult question is, how and when should the church confront the ideas and convictions of its own members, and when is the integrity of the gospel at stake within the church itself?

These questions can be uncomfortable to face when most Reformed Church members are living as “comfortable citizens” enjoying the benefits of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. But what about those people who do not have such benefits, or whose lack of benefits is the cost of our own comfort and prosperity?

¹⁹ These quotations are from Dennis Voskuil’s landmark essay, “Piety and Patriotism: Reformed Theology and Civil Religion,” published in *Word and World: Reformed Theology in America*, ed. James W. Van Hoeven, no. 16, The Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America (Eerdmans, 1984), 119-139.

What is our responsibility for the poor, for refugees, for the imprisoned, and even for criminals, who still bear the image of God?

Our Belhar Confession is very clear:

We believe

- that the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.
- that the church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others (Belhar Confession 4).

Scripture reminds us to “speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy” (Proverbs 31:8-9, NRSV). Our doctrinal standards remind us “that, in obedience to Jesus Christ, its only head, the church is called to confess and to do all these things, even though the authorities and human laws might forbid them and punishment and suffering be the consequence. Jesus is Lord” (Belhar Confession 5).

History

The Reformed Church in America has had a mixed relationship with the government through its 400-year history. The record shows, unsurprisingly, that the RCA has usually taken a “middle road” in its engagement with civil life. The Reformed Church has usually regarded government as a God-appointed partner in promoting Christian values. “Keep Christianity in the hearts of the people and you need not fear for the government.”²⁰ And yet sometimes we have recognized a call to speak publicly on matters of civic life and even to push back against government overreach. Some examples are instructive and occasionally may be inspiring.

During our first 150 years the RCA weathered the transition from Dutch colony to English rule and honored the British crown. Dutch Reformed pastors spoke little on political themes. “The broader concerns of nation and government...were probably subordinated, in Dutch preaching and pastoral counsel, to the interests of the ethnic community, and insofar as the Dutch church had learned how to protect these ethnic interests under a British Government, there was no call for ecclesiastical, or ‘prophetic,’ resistance to that government.”²¹

Yet, the majority of Reformed pastors were eager to prove themselves American and supported the Revolution. “To deny that divine providence produced the American Revolution has been the most unthinkable kind of un-American

²⁰ Rev. Rufus W. Clark, “The Relations of Religion to Civil Liberty,” *Centennial Discourses* (New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America, 1877), 16, quoted in James W. Van Hoesen, ed., *Piety and Patriotism: Bicentennial Studies of the Reformed Church in America, 1776-1996*, no. 4, The Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America (Eerdmans, 1976), 29.

²¹ John Beardslee III, “The Reformed Church and the American Revolution,” in Van Hoesen, *Piety and Patriotism*, 29.

behavior.”²² The Revolution both required and made possible the organization of the Reformed Church as an independent denomination, and the belief that the Revolution was providential, especially for the RCA’s own fortunes, was stated in the preface to the RCA’s constitution in 1793.

With the Civil War, “a new theme of death, sacrifice, and rebirth enter[ed] the civil religion.”²³ The Reformed Church was not pro-slavery, even naming it a sin. And yet it was slow to preach anti-slavery and hesitant to support the abolitionist cause. Stressing individual piety over systemic change, the RCA suggested that “the true Christian response to the evil of slavery [was] to preach the power of the gospel in the hearts of both slaves and slaveowners.”²⁴ But once the South seceded, the RCA supported the Union fully and championed patriotism as Christian duty. The following poem appeared as a banner in *The Christian Intelligencer* throughout the Civil War years, and again in World War I:

To the star-spangled banner,
O! Long may it wave
O’er the Land of the Free
And the home of the brave.
For right is right, since God is God
And right this day must win:
To doubt would be disloyalty
To falter would be sin.²⁵

In the decades after the Civil War, when some Christian movements called for broad structural reform, the RCA continued to emphasize individual piety.²⁶ Some individual members, however, were highly invested in efforts to bring about a more Christian society, and they participated in such voluntary organizations as “The American Bible Society (1816), the American Colonization Society (1817), The American Tract Society (1825), The American Temperance Society (1826), The American Peace Society (1828), and The American Antislavery Society (1833).”²⁷ On the whole, the RCA was reluctant to share in the Social Gospel movement, with its emphasis on changing societal structures, and this despite Graham Taylor and A. J. Muste, two Social Gospel leaders, both coming from the RCA.

When it came to the First World War, apart from some notable exceptions, the RCA was generally supportive of America’s entry. RCA leaders defined it as a “just war” and celebrated patriotic loyalty. But after the war the RCA shared in the general desire for peace. At the 300th anniversary of the denomination, the featured speaker was none other than Secretary of State Frank Kellogg, who had just signed the Kellogg-Briand Pact that “outlawed war as an instrument of national policy.”

That post-war pacifism did not survive World War II, except for, notably, B. D.

²² Beardslee, 18.

²³ Robert Bellah, quoted in Voskuil, “Piety and Patriotism,” 129.

²⁴ “Paul on Slavery,” in *Christian Intelligencer* 31 (January 3, 1861): 10, quoted in John A. De Jong, “Social Concerns, in *Piety and Patriotism*, 116.

²⁵ *The Christian Intelligencer* 32 (Feb. 28, 1964); see Voskuil, “Piety and Patriotism,” 133.

²⁶ Voskuil notes they “addressed social problems in generally conservative and individualistic ways.” Voskuil, “Piety and Patriotism,” 127; see also DeJong, “Social Concerns,” 118-121.

²⁷ Voskuil, “Piety and Patriotism,” 126.

Dykstra.²⁸ In 1940, the Committee on International Justice and Good Will offered this in its report to the General Synod:

Nations have set themselves up as objects of supreme devotion and demand that loyalty and sacrifice of their subjects that should be given only to God. The individual life has lost its value before the demands of race and nation.²⁹

The RCA saw Nazi Germany's actions as an overreach of the government's divinely-granted authority and was willing to support the United States's military action to combat this affront to God's sovereignty.

The 20th century saw a shift in the RCA's response to social issues. The Committee on Public Morals (est. 1918) moved from pietistic concerns like temperance and Sabbath observance to broader areas of social interest like poverty and women's rights, changing its name to the Committee on Social Welfare (1931). This committee became the Commission on Christian Action (1955) and has since sought to hold before the General Synod matters of concern across a wide range of social justice issues. During the Civil Rights era, it often spoke of the need for Reformed Christians to repent of the sin of racism and recommit to "acts of obedient love."³⁰ But there was some skepticism about the real value of such statements.³¹

The war in Vietnam proved controversial. The RCA responded with initial sorrow over the realities of war and urged the government to negotiate a ceasefire. Statements about Vietnam occur in Christian Action reports to the General Synod every year during the conflict, becoming increasingly insistent on an immediate withdrawal of troops, alongside statements for the church about conscientious objection.³²

In 1980 the RCA spoke prophetically to the United States on the issue of nuclear weapons. The Commission on Theology paper to the General Synod, "Christian Faith and the Nuclear Arms Race: A Reformed Perspective," witnessed directly against U.S. policy to stockpile highly destructive weapons. "While the need for 8,500 existing warheads defies all logic, the U.S. continues to add to its stockpile at a rate of 3 per day." Also, "Common sense, to say nothing of the Christian doctrine of man, argues against the folly of placing such destructive power in the hands of one fallible human being." The statement asserted that "the nuclear arms race is first and foremost a false religion" offering "false security," "false morality," and "false gods," and concluded with a call to "disarm the powers."³³

The RCA chose again to speak against U.S. government action in 1981,

²⁸ Voskuil, "Piety and Patriotism," 134-135.

²⁹ *Minutes of General Synod (MGS) 1940*, 543, quoted in Voskuil, 135.

³⁰ *MGS 1957*, "Credo on Race Relations," 181-184.

³¹ DeJong, "Social Concerns," 126.

³² *MGS 1965*, 220-21, and *MGS 1996*, 215-236. Acknowledging that there were differences of opinion on this matter within the body, the report includes a robust call for peace negotiations, addressed to the president of the United States. This same Christian Action report called for an end to capital punishment.

³³ *MGS 1980*, "Christian Faith and the Nuclear Arms Race: A Reformed Perspective," 117-129. In James I. Cook, ed., *The Church Speaks: Volume 1*, no. 18, The Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America (Eerdmans, 1985), 165-182.

following the news of Bishop Oscar Romero's assassination by the junta government in El Salvador.³⁴ The Hispanic Council reported, "We find profoundly disturbing the decisions made by our government in the past few months to renew military aid to El Salvador's junta, to increase the sale and delivery of weapons and ammunition, and finally to propose even more significant increases for the future." In response, the General Synod adopted the following recommendation:

To communicate to President Ronald Reagan our opposition to the continuation of military aid to El Salvador and our desire for the United States to seek new efforts through international bodies and agencies in negotiating a political solution to the conflict; encouraging, moreover, our congregations to intercede on behalf of the president and the suffering people in El Salvador.

The Commission on Christian Action reaffirmed this position the following year.³⁵ In 1988, the Commission on Christian Action submitted a paper entitled "A Christian Response to Terrorism," which acknowledged the complicated realities that lead people to violence for the sake of liberation and named the reality that the state itself can perpetuate acts of terrorism. The General Synod resolved "to encourage members of the RCA to communicate with their government to urge dialogue with groups that may likely resort to violence and terror."³⁶

In the years since 1980, the Commission on Christian Action has continued to help the church speak to civil life, with statements on capital punishment, gun control, immigration, mass incarceration, and poverty.³⁷ The General Synod has instructed the general secretary to contact the U.S. president and Canadian prime minister on such issues, and urged members of RCA churches to contact their local and state representatives to work for justice and peace.

Christian Action

The church is always responsible to examine its witness to the gospel's political and social implications. What then shall be the Reformed Church's witness in response to today's events?

In the U.S., immigration policies have increased deportations, family separation, and restrictions on asylum, and this presidential administration has cut funding for and, in some cases, criminalized humanitarian aid.³⁸ Recent executive orders not only violate human rights, they reveal a dangerous disregard for democratic

³⁴ *MGS 1981, 74-77.*

³⁵ *MGS 1982, 71-72.*

³⁶ *MGS 1988, 77-85.*

³⁷ "The church reminds the state that it is under obligation to God and among its tasks is ensuring justice for the poor and providing support for the weakest members of society. Every society must answer to God for its treatment of the poor. The church must speak out and support those programs which provide emergency relief, help those in poverty to improve their lot, help children to have every opportunity for growth and healthy development, and recognize the value of all people as citizens in this society. The church must speak out against efforts to trim welfare rolls in any way that causes harm or additional hardship to those currently receiving benefits. Always the goal of reform must be to aid those who need help, not simply to save money" (*MGS 1995, 79-80*).

³⁸ Nadine Yousif, "Six Big Immigration Changes under Trump and Their Impact So Far," BBC News, January 27, 2025, www.bbc.com/news/articles/clyn2p8x2eyo.

processes and the rule of law.³⁹ Members of our denomination are divided, some fully supportive or at least unwilling to challenge this administration's actions while others raise cries of alarm.⁴⁰ What, then, shall we say?

Reformed theology views government as God-ordained for the good of a society, recognizing that this divinely-granted authority is always subject to the complete sovereignty of God. Historically, the RCA has often responded to social concerns by taking a “middle road” approach, preferring to work alongside the government as a partner as long as we are working toward the same ends. Neither has the RCA been immune to the insidious effects of civil religion and Christian nationalism, which endows human governments with an authority that is reserved for God alone. How, then, shall we respond?

The Commissions on Christian Action, Theology, and History urge the denomination to respond to the current political landscape in the following ways:

- In self-examination
- In public advocacy
- In personal and congregational compassionate action

We call for Reformed Christians to examine our hearts, searching for the ways every one of us—regardless of political party affiliation—has been formed by American civil religion. May we ask for the Spirit to show us where our loyalties lie, acknowledging that *no* human political power speaks fully for God's truth. If and when we, through the Spirit, recognize Christian nationalism alive in our hearts, may we repent of the allegiances we have placed above our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We call for Reformed Christians to advocate for human rights for all people as image-bearers of God. As we speak with our neighbors, participate in peaceful protests, and contact our elected officials, may we continually and consistently hold forth the value of human life.

We call for Reformed Christians and churches to take compassionate action, caring for the real needs of those who suffer in our own communities. Immigrants, including refugees, those seeking political asylum, and those at risk of deportation, are not disconnected from any community in which Reformed Christians live and work. The gospel call to care for those at risk among us is clear. A great place to start would be by exploring the many resources listed in the Commission on Christian Action's report. May the church seek to understand the needs of its communities and to respond with God's compassion and love.

³⁹ Alejandra Aramayo, Kelsey Y. Santamaria, Hillel R. Smith, “Recent White House Actions on Immigration,” Congress.gov, February 10, 2025, www.congress.gov/crs-product/LSB11265.

⁴⁰ Many individuals in the RCA have raised concerns. General secretary Eddy Alemán and refugee ministries coordinator JJ TenClay released “A Call to Support Immigrants and Refugees in Christ's Name,” RCA.org (blog), February 3, 2025, www.rca.org/a-call-to-support-immigrants-and-refugees-in-christs-name. Many of our pastors and churches are speaking, as are our ecumenical siblings. See the list of resources in this year's Commission on Christian Action report.

Report of the Commission for Women

Our Identity

The Commission for Women (CfW) is dedicated to gaining a deeper understanding of the lives of women within the RCA and is focused on ensuring their full inclusion and active participation in every aspect of church life. The CfW plays a pivotal role in advocating for women's voices and experiences to be heard and valued within the church community. Its work is centered around raising awareness of the unique challenges women face, both in church life and beyond, and striving to create an environment where women can thrive in all roles.

The commission is committed to creating opportunities for women to engage in church activities, leadership roles, and decision-making processes. It aims to ensure that women have equal access to opportunities for spiritual growth, community involvement, and leadership development. By providing resources and information, the CfW helps empower women to take on leadership roles and fully contribute to the church's life and mission. Through its ongoing efforts, the commission fosters a more inclusive, equitable, and supportive environment where women are encouraged and equipped to participate in the full range of activities and leadership within the RCA. Ultimately, the CfW works to ensure that women's contributions are recognized and valued within the church.

Survey

The Commission for Women prepared a survey that was distributed to the women within our denomination. The voices of the women in our denomination and their experience are valuable and crucial in guiding our future efforts. The information gathered through this survey provided us with valuable insights and feedback, helping us to better understand the needs and desires of the women within our denominational community. Our ultimate goal is to ensure that our efforts are aligned with what matters most to the women we serve.

Celebrating Our Past—Celebration and Affirmation

This collection of reflections highlights the experiences, growth, and impact of women in leadership roles within the church, with a focus on empowerment, support, and community. These women serve in various capacities, including preaching elders, deacons, consistory members, choir directors, Bible study leaders, and pastors. Their roles span a wide range of activities, such as worship coordination, missions, teaching, mentoring, and administrative work. Some of the key themes that emerged from their reflections:

1. **Support and Encouragement**
Many women express that they are fully supported by their congregations. Churches are embracing female leaders, fostering an inclusive environment where gender is not a barrier to leadership. This support strengthens their roles and encourages them to continue serving.
2. **Empowerment**
The leadership roles these women hold empower them to grow

spiritually and personally. They speak about the importance of fellowship, leadership training, and the confidence they gain through women's retreats, Bible studies, and church experiences. Their involvement leads to a deeper sense of purpose and leadership potential.

3. **Spiritual Growth**

A significant theme across responses is spiritual growth. Women describe how their roles, such as preaching, teaching, and community engagement, have deepened their relationship with God. Their leadership experiences enhance their faith, building both confidence and spiritual maturity.

4. **Community and Fellowship**

Women in leadership roles often feel a strong sense of community and belonging. Many mention the importance of mentorship, fellowship, and shared purpose within their church communities. Whether through Bible studies, women's retreats, or service together in ministries, these connections foster personal and spiritual growth while developing leadership skills.

5. **Service and Mission**

Women's leadership is often framed in terms of service to God and others. From leading mission projects and teaching Sunday school to mentoring and guiding others in their spiritual journeys, these women are actively contributing to their communities both inside and outside the church. Their roles are an essential part of the church's outreach and mission efforts.

In summary, these reflections highlight how women are flourishing as leaders within the church. Supported by their congregations, empowered by their roles, and continually growing in their faith, they contribute meaningfully to their communities. Their experiences reflect both personal fulfillment and vital contributions to the church's spiritual and communal life. Despite facing challenges, particularly gender-based obstacles, these women thrive through God's call, their church's support, and the leadership opportunities available to them. Their stories emphasize the strength, resilience, and transformative impact of women in ministry, showing the importance of church communities in supporting individual and collective flourishing.

Our Role as the Commission

As the Commission for Women, we remain committed to providing opportunities and resources that raise awareness about the vital role of women in both the church and society. We are energized by the ways in which this commission can support the church in fostering inclusive attitudes, imagery, and language across all materials published, designed, or provided within the denomination. Our goal is to continue growing and enabling the full and meaningful participation of women in both the church and society.

The CfW is dedicated to advocating for systemic change within the church to ensure the full inclusion of women. While progress has been made, we acknowledge that there is still much work to be done, and we cannot

accomplish this alone. We value the collaboration with other RCA bodies addressing issues affecting women as well as the relationships we maintain with similar groups in other denominations, where we exchange ideas and resources concerning women's issues.

We are committed to fostering continued solidarity and partnership with the Office of Women's Transformation and Leadership, creating an environment in which all can thrive. Through discussions with our ministry partners, the CfW embraces the strength and trust built in these relationships, recognizing the value of our shared work. As we engage in discipleship with everyone in the RCA, we see these relationships, between men and women, laypeople and clergy, as an important celebration of our collaboration for resources, networking, and empowerment in our faith communities.

While there has been significant progress in the Reformed Church in America over the years, we recognize there are still areas in need of attention and action. Education and empowerment remain essential. As women pursue theological education and training, they become better equipped to serve in leadership roles within the church. Providing accessible resources and strong support networks for women in ministry will further enhance their empowerment and effectiveness.

We also acknowledge that some women are leaving our denomination due to a perceived lack of call and recognition, while others are joining the RCA from different denominations. There is important work to be done in educating people about what it means to be an egalitarian/mutualist denomination and what the continued flourishing of women within our church looks like.

Concerns

Many individuals in the church community face challenges to flourishing, with some experiencing doubts about their role or feeling overwhelmed by the responsibilities they carry. Barriers range from feeling underappreciated, such as in cases where hard work goes unnoticed, to dealing with gender biases, such as women in leadership roles encountering inequality in pay and respect. Some face difficulties with church attendance, time constraints due to demanding jobs, or a lack of younger members, which limits growth and involvement. Issues like burnout, financial constraints, and the struggle to engage others in church activities also arise.

Others deal with feelings of isolation or not being fully recognized for their contributions, whether that is handling administrative tasks or stepping into new leadership roles. There have been reported incidents even within the realm of General Synod meeting spaces. Some individuals have experienced personal difficulties outside the church, such as balancing family care or navigating conflicting religious practices within mixed-faith households. Church transitions, such as changes in leadership, also create uncertainty for some members, with a lack of clarity about the direction forward. Additionally, members of the Asian community would benefit from explicit policies that emphasize the need for a supportive culture. Due to the influence of shame culture, women may particularly benefit from being welcomed into a hospitable and supportive community of women leaders or clergy. However, there is also a lingering fear of retaliation. These challenges intersect with issues of gender, ageism,

and ethnicity, adding further complexity to individuals' experiences within the church.

Despite these challenges, many individuals find support in a range of places, including family, friends, fellow clergy, or spiritual directors. Some seek guidance from their pastor, and others turn to peer groups or church leadership teams. For some, ongoing prayer and reflection provide the strength to continue, while others find solace in mentoring relationships or clergy support groups.

Ultimately, many of these challenges are experienced in the context of a faith community, where members seek connection, encouragement, and solutions to the difficulties they face. Though some may feel barriers due to gender or external circumstances, there is a sense of resilience, with support networks and faith serving as key tools in overcoming obstacles to flourishing.

Remaining Work: Our Hope for the Future and Looking to the Future

The growing focus on religious abuse and trauma highlights the importance of women clergy and leaders in addressing the experiences of women who may have faced these issues. Research indicates that many women are leaving the church, which necessitates further study and attention to how the church engages with younger generations of women, as their involvement will shape the future of the church.

The idea of “affinity” structures within the restructured RCA presents both opportunities and concerns, especially regarding women’s ministry. There is hope that these structures won’t result in women being isolated or segregated. Responses from church members reflect a range of needs, with many individuals feeling they receive the support they need. However, some respondents raised specific requests:

1. **Clergy Support:** There is a need for guidance and resources to address issues such as clergy burnout, work-life balance, and support for women in leadership roles. Suggestions include seminars, mentorship programs, and support networks for women pastors, especially in small churches.
2. **Training and Certification:** Respondents emphasized the importance of clear programs for those seeking to become commissioned pastors, with an emphasis on preparing individuals to navigate the process and offer support to others.
3. **Communication and Community Engagement:** There is a call for improved communication within the church network, including updates on denominational changes, resources for leaders, and opportunities for collaboration between churches. Some respondents feel disconnected from ongoing RCA restructuring.
4. **Support for Women:** Many expressed concerns about the challenges women face in church leadership, such as societal pressures and role exhaustion, especially when there is a blatant lack of respect for a woman participating in the greater denominational meetings. There is

a request for more spiritual and practical support for women leaders to help them thrive without compromising their well-being. In particular, CfW would like to work with the bias response team that GSC has established at this General Synod to provide support for anyone experiencing any type of microaggression within the General Synod meeting context.

5. **Prayer and Spiritual Support:** Prayer was highlighted as essential for pastors, congregations, and leaders, with specific requests for strength, healing, and guidance during current denominational and individual church transitions.

In general, there is a call for greater empowerment, transparency, and practical support to address the evolving needs of clergy and congregations.

Commission Meetings

The Commission for Women has met virtually several times since 2024 General Synod—September 19, 2024; November 21, 2024; January 16, 2025; and February 7, 2025.

The Commission for Women is deeply grateful for the dedicated and faithful service of Rev. Deb Rensink for the past six years and Rev. Mark Waterstone for the last three years. Their terms of service will be completed at the end of June 2025.

The Commission for Women is deeply grateful for the dedicated and faithful service of Rev. Vanessa Funk and our continued collaboration with Women's Transformation and Leadership through Rev. Liz Testa.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Kristin Brouwer, moderator

Report of the Professorate

The office of General Synod professor involves representing “the living tradition of the church in the preparation and certification of candidates for its ministry,” as well as exercising “the ministry of teaching within the RCA as a whole” (*Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 8, Section 1 [2024 edition, p. 74]). We fulfill this office both individually and collectively. Elected and installed by the General Synod, we remain amenable to the General Synod in matters of doctrine, striving at all times and in all ways to fulfill our calling faithfully, diligently, and cheerfully. There are presently four General Synod professors:

Rev. Dr. Carol Bechtel
Rev. Dr. Jaeseung Cha
Rev. Dr. Micah McCreary
Rev. Dr. Chad Pierce

Each professor was nominated by a theological agent of the General Synod and then elected by the General Synod to exercise a substantial and continuing role in preparing candidates for ministry in the Reformed Church in America under the authority of their nominating agency.

Pastoral Formation Oversight Board

The General Synod professorate is represented on the Pastoral Formation Oversight Board and continues to be in dialogue with that board regarding matters pertaining to the Certificate of Readiness for Examination (CRE). Our work in this area has focused on the effects of the potential restructuring of the RCA on the ordination and supervision process for candidates under the care of classes. We are also working on creating and recommending potential guidelines for the ordination process as well as the transfer of ordinations into the RCA, particularly among candidates and ministers from Latin America.

Additionally, we continue to look for best practices regarding commissioned pastor training, the Approved Alternative Route (AAR) through the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency, as well as other areas pertinent to the reception, care, examination, and ordination of candidates into the RCA.

Denominational Commissions and Agencies

The General Synod professors are represented on a number of commissions and agencies important to the work of the church. Rev. Dr. McCreary has served on the restructuring team, providing his own theological insights as well as being the liaison to the team from the professors, particularly regarding the oversight of the professorate by the General Synod.

Members of the General Synod professorate are represented on the committees of the MFCA that recommend the granting of the CRE for students at non-RCA seminaries and candidates pursuing the AAR for ordination. Finally, the members of the professorate are represented on the Commissioned Pastor Advisory Team to create, facilitate, and monitor best practices among our classes for their commissioned pastors.

Professional Work

In addition to serving on denominational teams, the professorate continues to guide the education of students seeking ordination at New Brunswick Theological Seminary or Western Theological Seminary, or through the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency. While our numbers are few, members of the professorate teach in areas of Old and New Testaments, theology, and practical theology, helping to form our candidates for ministry in the RCA. We also continue to teach the church in broader community through our published writings as well as through speaking engagements across the church. We continue to be in conversation with qualified ministers who are discerning their potential willingness to serve in the professorate.

As a body and as individuals we mark with sadness and appreciation the retirement of our friend and colleague, Rev. Dr. Carol Bechtel. Carol served Western Theological Seminary in a number of capacities including as a professor of Old Testament. Carol lived into her calling of shaping generations of pastors and teachers “to preach and teach the good news of salvation in Christ, to build up and equip the church for mission in the world, to free the enslaved, to relieve the oppressed, to comfort the afflicted, and to walk humbly with God” (from the Declaration for Ministers of Word and Sacrament, Formulary 3 [*Book of Church Order*, 2024 edition, pp. 136-137]). Carol’s published commentaries, books, and articles have also shaped not only students at Western but the entire Old Testament field. Carol also faithfully served the church in many ways, including as president of the General Synod in 2009-2010. We pray that God will continue to bless her and “prosper the work of [her] hands” (Psalm 90:17).

We are grateful for having been charged with this call and are deeply sensible of our responsibility to the church. We solicit your prayers and your advice, and we are committed to engaging conversation at all levels of the RCA’s life and work.

Respectfully submitted,
Chad Pierce, moderator

Report of the Pastoral Formation Oversight Board

The Pastoral Formation Oversight Board (PFOB) exists to serve classes, candidates, and congregations in the formation of pastoral leadership for the church. The purpose of the PFOB is to coordinate, evaluate, innovate, strategically anticipate, and collaboratively shape theological education and pastoral formation that will form pastoral leadership for the Reformed Church in America that is rooted in the Reformed faith and tradition while engaging in the present and future.

The 2024 General Synod charged PFOB with the following:

RF 24-5

To direct the Pastoral Formation Oversight Board (PFOB), in consultation with the Commission on Church Order, the Commission on Theology, the Commission on Race and Ethnicity, and the Commission for Women, to develop guidelines for middle assemblies [classes] related to *BCO* Chapter 1, Part II, Articles 11-14, for report to the General Synod in 2025. These guidelines should:

- Clarify how the existing processes for ordination of candidates and reception of ordained ministers from other denominations apply to candidates and ministers coming from institutions of theological education and other denominations both inside the U.S. and Canada and outside the U.S. and Canada.
- Ensure that the theology of the candidate is in alignment with the theology of the RCA.
- Ensure the ordination and reception process in the RCA is equitable and just across languages, cultures, and ministry experiences.
- Include a process for the determination of equivalency of degrees, especially for candidates coming from areas of the world where the master of divinity degree does not exist (*MGS 2024*, p. 130).

PFOB has met several times over the last year and has crafted the following proposal to help address the four points of this charge. This proposal was sent to the listed commissions, as well as the four racial and ethnic councils for feedback, and their input was considered in the final draft.

Before PFOB presents its proposal, the following background will be helpful to consider.

1. **The CFM (Certificate of Formation for Ministry) has been changed to the CRE (Certificate for Readiness for Examination).** The *BCO* amendments to effect this change were recommended to the General Synod by PFOB and approved in 2022 (*MGS 2022*, TE 22-1 and TE 22-2, pp. 253-256 and 262-264), received approval of two thirds of the classes, and were declared effective by General Synod 2023. This is consistent with the classes/middle assemblies having the authority of judging satisfactory formation for ministry, rather than the theological agents.
2. **Implied in the proposal below is the eventual replacement of MFCA with ROLO (RCA Office of Licensure and Ordination).**

ROLO would exist as an office of the GSC, under the direction of the general secretary. The Approved Alternate Route (AAR) process would remain in place and MFCA responsibilities that need to continue would be subsumed by ROLO. This will allow the GSC to reduce the costs previously associated with MFCA through the redistribution of staff hours and overhead costs. The financial reality of the MFCA leaves it unable to continue to operate at its current capacity with the available financial resources for more than one to two years (see the MFCA report to this General Synod, pp. 241-244). In order to maintain the essential functions of granting the CRE and supervising AAR candidates, PFOB is recommending shifting these responsibilities to ROLO.

3. **All three agents are represented in this process.** WTS, NBTS, and MFCA representatives sit on PFOB and have helped craft this proposal.

The Pastoral Formation Oversight Board is proposing the establishment of a new office, the RCA Office of Licensure and Ordination, within the existing GSC structure. This office would be under the supervision of the general secretary and be a part of the GSC staff.

Ordained ministers and licensed candidates transferring into the RCA from other denominations will NOT go through ROLO. This will remain a middle assembly/classis responsibility. PFOB is working on developing guidelines to assist the middle assemblies/classes with this challenging issue. While the MDiv is the benchmark degree in North America, it does not exist in many parts of the world and has only been in use in North America for 85 years. PFOB is working on the issue of MDiv equivalencies and will be a resource to middle assemblies/classes. The RCA respects the ordination of other denominations. It is important that ministers and candidates transferring into the RCA be equipped to be sufficiently grounded in a Reformed identity as it has been nuanced by the polity in the RCA.

The Pastoral Formation Oversight Board envisions ROLO and the C3 operating with a close working relationship. The staff of ROLO would handle daily administrative tasks, interface with middle assemblies/classes, and monitor candidate progress through the prescribed program. The C3 will be a new commission, operating as a theological agent of the General Synod; its role will be to review candidate progress and assess theological education, mental and personal health, and understanding of RCA polity and culture. ROLO will provide necessary information and procedural support to the C3.

The Pastoral Formation Oversight Board will also work alongside ROLO to ensure that policies and resources to support candidates in their formation are developed and shared appropriately. PFOB will continue to work on issues such as MDiv equivalency, commissioned pastor training resources, best practices for middle assemblies/classes, and other related topics. The Pastoral Formation Oversight Board will not oversee ROLO or the C3.

This proposal to create ROLO and the C3 is intended to reduce financial burden while continuing to offer care and support to candidates who are attending seminaries that are not officially related to or affiliated with the RCA and candidates who are in the AAR process.

The Pastoral Formation Oversight Board would like to thank the other bodies that offered their input during this process.

TE 25-1

To instruct the GSC to establish the Reformed Office of Licensure and Ordination (ROLO) as delineated in this report; and further,

To direct the MFCA to participate in the transition process with deep gratitude for many years of faithful service; and further,

To direct the Commission on Church Order, in consultation with the PFOB and the GSC, to prepare the necessary amendments to the *BCO* to establish the Candidate Certification Commission for report to the General Synod of 2026. The Candidate Certification Commission will serve as an agent of the General Synod for the purpose of granting the Certificate of Readiness for Examination (CRE). The commission's membership requirements should include representation from across the RCA, including at least one General Synod professor, one representative each from Western Theological Seminary and New Brunswick Theological Seminary (recommended by the respective seminary and nominated by the Commission on Nominations), two ministers of Word and sacrament, one elder, one commissioned pastor, and one member at large with knowledge of global practices in ministerial formation. These amendments should also effect the transfer of MFCA's current responsibilities related to the Certificate of Readiness for Examination as outlined in *BCO* Chapter 1, Part II, to the new Candidate Certification Commission.

Rationale:

1. This change streamlines the important work of the oversight of the formation of ministers of Word and sacrament. In light of budget constraints and diminishing resources, this proposal will allow the GSC to reduce costs previously associated with MFCA and redistribute staff hours and overhead costs accordingly.
2. This proposal maintains the RCA's current system, which places major authority for the ordination of candidates with the middle assemblies/classes, while resourcing middle assemblies/classes and candidates in this complicated and important process.
3. This proposal allows some baseline standards to exist for uniformity of preparation and standards of the MDiv. The authority for ordination rests with the middle assemblies/classes, *and* the General Synod is granted general oversight by the *BCO*. "The General Synod shall exercise responsibility in the oversight of standards for the preparation of candidates for ministry of Word and sacrament" (*BCO* Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 8 [2024 edition, p. 70]).

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business was as follows:

TE 25-1a

To refer TE 25-1 back to the Pastoral Formation Oversight Board for further development. (ADOPTED)

Reason:

The proposal lacks clarity regarding how it will be administered. Some examples:

1. Where does authority lie for determining the process by which candidates receive a CRE under this system?
2. What are the baseline standards and who has the authority to determine them?
3. How will this be coordinated with classes/middle assemblies?
4. What would be the direct responsibilities of ROLO? Of the Candidate Care Commission?

The PFOB would also like to thank Norma Coleman-James and Carol Mutch for their faithful service to this board, as they are concluding their final terms of service.

Respectfully submitted,
Daniel Gillett, moderator

Report of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency

General Synod, for years, has exercised oversight of ministerial formation through its two seminaries and the MFCA. Like the RCA seminaries, the MFCA has possessed a deep commitment to developing faithful, educated, and Reformed leaders. Its purpose is the preparation of men and women for the ministries of Christ and his church, most specifically those called to the office of minister of Word and sacrament.

From its inception twenty-six years ago, the MFCA has been tasked with and has embraced a mandate to expand opportunities for RCA ordination to groups not previously served. This is clearly stated in the MFCA Board of Trustees' mission statement:

The Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA) exists to strengthen the ministry of Word and sacrament in the Reformed Church in America by awarding Certificates of Readiness for Examination to specific groups of candidates and working cooperatively with partners inside and outside the RCA to broaden opportunities for diverse ministerial formation.

Given the authority delegated to it by General Synod, the MFCA board, its certification committee members, and its staff continue to accomplish this mission by:

- Awarding the Certificate of Readiness for Examination (CRE) to RCA candidates graduating from non-RCA seminaries via Reformed Candidates Supervision and Care (RCSC), or pursuing an Approved Alternate Route (AAR).
- Through the certification committee and staff, evaluating the progress of candidates and their continuation in and completion of the process leading to the CRE, as their achievements dictate.
- Periodically ensuring that the RCA Standards for Preparation for Ministry are upheld in the oversight of the CRE and are reviewed, with recommendations made to the appropriate RCA body if the MFCA board believes changes would be appropriate.
- Collaborating with the RCA seminaries to offer graduate-level courses designed to meet the standards for the CRE.
- Collaborating with and providing counsel to congregations and classes in the care and nurture of candidates for the ministry who are seeking the CRE through the MFCA.
- Interpreting and advocating for the work of the MFCA to the larger church.

The MFCA has evolved from its predecessor, the Theological Education Agency (TEA), which was established as an RCA institution to serve the then-growing Regional Synod of the Far West. The largest number of its candidates, almost all of whom were white and male, attended Fuller Theological Seminary.

As of March 2025, there were 35 candidates enrolled in the CRE process through the MFCA; four (9 percent) of these are pursuing the Certificate of Readiness for Examination through the Approved Alternate Route (AAR), which did not exist until MFCA was officially established in 1999.

Over 34 percent of the candidates are female, with one enrolled in the AAR and 11 enrolled in the RCSC.

Thirty-one percent of the total candidates represent racial and ethnic minorities.

Given the continuing significant changes in the RCA and the current church climate, the MFCA will continue to adapt and broaden its methods of accomplishing this mission, and will seek to work with the partners God provides to accomplish this work, with special emphasis on the following:

- Adapting its operations and programs as necessary to embrace a multiracial future freed from racism.
- As appropriate, given our polity, working with the Pastoral Formation Oversight Board (PFOB), classes, and institutions to enhance educational opportunities for commissioned pastors and others and to encourage a seamless transition to study for the ministry of Word and sacrament where possible.
- Wherever possible, ensure that the CRE and ordination process is equitable across languages and cultures.
- Ensure the diversity of the MFCA Board of Trustees and the certification committee.

How the MFCA Board Operates

By permission and approval of the General Synod Council, the MFCA Board of Trustees operates under policy governance. The board sets clear goals for the agency by delegating the means of achieving them to the executive director and staff, subject only to explicit executive limitations. The board stays abreast of the MFCA program through the monitoring reports of the director.

With the role of the Pastoral Formation Oversight Board, the visioning and policy development may no longer be a main responsibility of the MFCA board, as most policy and direction will come from the PFOB. The board's experience has caused the board to revisit how it operates. The initial consensus regarding its role is that the main purpose is to award the CRE and oversee the program through its supervision of the director. The director creates the initial budget each year, and the director manages the budget. There is little involvement in terms of budgets and finances on the part of the board.

Budgets and Finances

The MFCA's finances have been under strain for a number of years and the agency continues to draw from reserves on an annual basis. MFCA receives minimal support from congregations and has no capacity to raise funds. The average candidate will invest approximately \$2,000 over and above regular education costs in order to complete the requirements for the CRE.

The chief financial officer (CFO) of the denomination also serves in that capacity for the MFCA. Budgets, and particularly the reserves, are closely monitored by the CFO. The CFO reported that we ended the year with a loss, but it was less than originally budgeted. The budget for 2025 is set and there is a deficit expected. There remains enough money in the MFCA reserves to continue with similar deficits for approximately one or two more years.

Seventy-nine percent of the MFCA budget comes from the theological education assessment. The remainder comes from user fees and investment income. The MFCA Board of Trustees is grateful for the generous support of the churches by way of the General Synod assessments. The agency would not exist if it was not for the theological education assessment income.

MFCA staff have continued to operate at a reduced budget.

Partnership with the RCA Seminaries

MFCA has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS) and Western Theological Seminary (WTS), allowing MFCA candidates to take courses at NBTS and WTS to meet the CRE requirements.

During the fall of 2024, three candidates registered for a course at NBTS and six candidates registered for a course at WTS. During the spring of 2025, seven candidates registered for two courses at NBTS and ten candidates registered for three courses at WTS.

MFCA is grateful for the partnership with NBTS and WTS.

Certificates of Readiness for Examination Awarded

The Board of Trustees awarded nine Certificates of Readiness for Examination since the last report to General Synod in June 2024, one through the AAR and eight through the RCSC process.

Approved Alternate Route (AAR)

David Clark Sippel

Classis of Passaic Valley

Reformed Candidates Supervision and Care (RCSC)

Leslie Carrion

Classis of Brooklyn

Lucas Jason De Koster

Classis of West Sioux

Naoki Inoue

Classis of Greater Palisades

HengSheng Lin

Classis of Queens

Danielle Lyn Postma

Classis of West Sioux

Kai Chung Tam

Classis of New York

David Michael Rylaarsdam Vandokkumburg

Classis of North Grand Rapids

Elliot James Weidenaar

Classis of Schenectady

Alternate Means Petitions

1. *Reduction in Twenty-four Month Requirement:* The request of the Classis of North Grand Rapids, on behalf of David Michael Rylaarsdam Vandokkumburg, to reduce the length of enrollment was approved by the MFCA Board of Trustees at its November 2024 meeting. The board was able to identify a sufficient period of supervised ministry experience to substitute for deficiencies, thus determining the candidate is qualified to earn the Certificate of Readiness for

Examination (*BCO* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11, Section 3 [2024 edition, p. 47]).

2. *Reduction in Twenty-four Month Requirement:* The request of the Classis of Holland, on behalf of Madison Nicole Pierce, to reduce the length of enrollment was approved by the MFCA Board of Trustees at its March 2025 meeting. The board was able to identify a sufficient period of supervised ministry experience to substitute for deficiencies, thus determining the candidate is qualified to earn the Certificate of Readiness for Examination (*BCO* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11, Section 3 [2024 edition, p. 47]).

Report of New Brunswick Theological Seminary

I, Rev. Dr. Micah McCreary, salute you in the name that is above every name—Jesus Christ our Lord. In my role as president, I offer this report from New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS) with humility and heartfelt thanksgiving. It is both a privilege and a responsibility to share our promotions, transitions, progress, challenges, and aspirations in service to the mission we share with the RCA.

At NBTS we envision empowered leaders, ministries, and communities who actively pursue, promote, and engage in the work of justice, reconciliation, and unity, affirming the equality of all God's people. We envision a community of graduates who bear witness to God's light in the world, where all lives are dignified and all voices are heard, and all are invited to share in God's bountiful love. We envision spiritual communities that embody grace and love, rooted in critical, creative, contextual thinking and leadership that inspires others to live fruitful and faithful lives. We envision a world where hearts are renewed, justice is established, and faith is restored.

Our mission, rooted in God's grace, is to empower people and communities

- to explore their calling and live into their futures by providing a place of connection and spiritual formation;
- to bring curiosity, openness, creativity, and logic to the critical examination of text and context; and
- to act with fairness and integrity through analyzing systems of power and privilege.

Our purpose, as stated in the NBTS bylaws, is this:

Called in Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, New Brunswick Theological Seminary participates in God's own laboring to fulfill God's reign on earth. Rooted in the Reformed tradition and centered in its trust of God's sovereignty and grace, the Seminary is an inter-cultural, ecumenical school of Christian faith, learning, and scholarship committed to its metro-urban and global contexts. Our purpose is to educate persons and strengthen communities for transformational, public ministries in church and society. We fulfill this mission through creative, contextual, and critical engagement with texts, traditions, and practices.

In the spirit of our vision, mission, and purpose, I present this report as a testament to our ongoing commitment to excellent graduate theological education, spiritual formation, and academic engagement. I pray this report will nourish your faith in God's transforming work at the seminary and solidify your trust and belief in the educational ministry of NBTS.

Faculty Promotion

Dr. Nathan Jérémie-Brink is expected to be promoted to the L. Russel Feakes Associate Professor of History and Global Christianity in May 2025. Dr. Jérémie-Brink is a historian of religion who specializes in Christianity and cultural and social movements of the Atlantic world and the early U.S. republic. His research

and teaching interests include the history of Christianity and slavery, revolution and resistance in Haiti and the Black Atlantic, and African American activism and print culture. Dr. Jérémie-Brink earned his Ph.D. in history from Loyola University Chicago in 2018. He is currently preparing a book manuscript, *Spreading Fire: Black Print Activism in the Early US Republic*, a text that examines how early-nineteenth-century African American activists, clergy, and leaders of civic organizations used print to challenge slavery and advance Black empowerment. His work has been supported by the Henry Luce Foundation, the Louisville Institute, and a number of other leading foundations and research institutions.

Dr. Jérémie-Brink, an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), is an active member of the Reformed Church of Highland Park (RCHP) and works with RCHP and other RCA churches around issues of anti-racism, the history of slavery, and reparations. We congratulate Dr. Jérémie-Brink.

Administrative Transitions

Dr. Charles M. Rix has been selected to lead the academic program at NBTS as interim dean and vice president of academic affairs. Dr. Rix brings a rich and diverse background to his leadership at NBTS. Before transitioning into academia, he spent 13 years in corporate finance, developing skills in strategic planning, organizational leadership, and financial management. His corporate experience enhances his administrative leadership, providing a pragmatic approach to managing institutional growth and student success.

He then spent 12 years on the faculty at Oklahoma Christian University, where he served as a tenured professor of Bible and later as dean of the College of Humanities and Bible. Dr. Rix also has deep pastoral experience, serving for 17 years as senior minister at Monmouth Church, a multicultural congregation in Tinton Falls, New Jersey. His experience in ministry equips him with a practitioner's perspective, ensuring that theological education at NBTS remains rooted in real-world application. We welcome Dr. Rix back to his alma mater.

In November 2024, Rev. Kevin White became the new director of admissions at NBTS. His road to this position took him from Wall Street to seminary. After graduating with a B.S. in finance from Siena College, Rev. White executed trades and sold financial products through the discount brokerage firm of Quick & Reilly. Rev. White became the institutional director of admissions for both undergraduate and graduate programs.

Rev. White hopes to increase enrollment at NBTS by developing partnerships with churches and nonprofits. Rev. White is exploring how NBTS can serve these institutions (e.g., pulpit supply, guest speakers, workshops), and how these organizations can encourage people in their circles to pursue theological education at NBTS.

The Class of 2025

This May, NBTS will graduate students who will receive the following degrees: fifteen Doctor of Ministry degrees, seven Master of Divinity degrees, four Master of Arts in Theological Studies degrees, one Master of Arts in Pastoral Care and Counseling degree, four Master of Arts in Ministry Studies degrees, and nine

certificates in theological studies, as well as two Certificates of Readiness for Examination. This year's baccalaureate preacher will be the Rev. Dr. Suzanne Duchesne, NBTS professor of preaching, and our commencement speaker will be the Rev. Dr. Joy J. Moore, president of Northern Seminary.

Reformed Church Center and RCA Students at NBTS

NBTS has 40 RCA students currently enrolled in various degree programs. We are elated to have several NBTS students serving as Seminarian Seminar participants at this General Synod.

The year 2025 marks a quarter century since the founding of the Reformed Church Center at NBTS. It continues giving expression to the RCA's presence in the life and witness of its seminary by helping to form ministers who are knowledgeable and committed to our denomination and by engaging our whole church, its pastors, and congregations in reflection that directly bears on its life and contributes to its mission, even as we welcome other denominations into conversation with us.

The Center continues to host a variety of programs that look at the past, present, and future, and address pastoral, historical, liturgical, and theological concerns. This year the Center has helped hundreds of people understand the largest and most comprehensive recommendation related to the RCA's proposed restructure (to form middle assemblies) and has provided free resources to classes and regional synods across the denomination for receiving ministers from outside the RCA. On April 24, we welcomed Dr. Setri Nyomi, interim general secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, to celebrate our 25th anniversary with a discussion entitled "Being Reformed in the Twenty-first Century: A Gift or a Challenge?" The Center also offers grants for short-term studies in Reformed worship, RCA women's studies, and RCA history.

For more information on the Reformed Church Center, to see past programs, or to suggest future programs, go to <https://nbts.edu/student-life/reformed-church-center> or contact Dr. James Hart Brumm at jbrumm@nbts.edu.

Finances: A Plan for a Sustainable Future

The NBTS Board of Trustees and I have established the following seven financial principles for NBTS to ensure long-term sustainability:

1. Remaining debt-free
2. Balanced budget with a five percent endowment draw-down
3. Recouping the corpus (principal) and appropriately managing all endowment funds
4. Endowment remains at four to five times the size of our annual budget
5. Strengthening each of our four primary income streams:
 - Net tuition and fees
 - Donor support
 - Endowment drawdown
 - Business enterprises
6. Application of four percent of total operating budget toward strategic initiatives

7. Fundraising for specific academic and administrative chairs

Our current budget shortfall is approximately \$350,000. We plan to eliminate this deficit by increasing revenue through student retention and recruitment and decreasing operational expenses over the next two years.

We have continued to participate in the Association of Theological Schools' Building Alternative Futures project. This project is designed for schools to create sustainable economic futures. We have decided to focus our project on a detailed plan to develop asynchronous education programs for the church.

Advancement

Under the leadership of vice president of advancement Ms. Cathy Proctor, we have received more than \$1.2 million in donations so far this fiscal year. These donations help us fulfill our mission of preparing servant leaders for the church and the world. The sections below further outline the work of NBTS Advancement.

240 Years of Faithful Witness

In 2025, NBTS will celebrate 240 years of theological education and 10 years at our new campus in New Brunswick. This milestone provides a powerful opportunity to reflect on God's faithfulness and recommit the seminary community to shaping leaders who embody justice, mercy, and love in their ministry.

Additionally, 2025 marks the 150th anniversary of the Gardner A. Sage Library, which houses the Archives of the Reformed Church in America, directed by Dr. Elizabeth Pallitto. The library is a historic treasure that has served as the intellectual and theological heart of our seminary. This beloved institution continues to provide invaluable resources to students, scholars, and clergy. As we celebrate its legacy, we are committed to ensuring its continued impact for generations to come.

Advancing Our Mission: The 240th Anniversary Campaign

We have launched a special fundraising initiative in honor of our 240th anniversary. This campaign will support critical priorities:

- The Annual Seminary Fund: sustaining the core mission and daily operations of NBTS.
- The Gardner A. Sage Library's 150th Anniversary: investing in this treasured resource for theological education.
- Student scholarships: ensuring that financial barriers do not hinder those called to ministry.
- Faculty and program support: equipping our world-class faculty and expanding innovative programs to meet the evolving needs of the church.

We are pleased to announce that we have just received a \$50,000 gift to establish the Graham Taylor Social Justice Book Fund. This fund will support the acquisition of books and resources that explore how faith communities

contribute to justice, equity, and inclusion.

Scholarships: Investing in Future Leaders

Thanks to generous donors, NBTS continues to expand scholarship opportunities to make theological education accessible to all. We have established several new endowed scholarships, including:

- A \$400,000 endowment dedicated to pastoral care and counseling
- Another significant endowment that will provide \$115,000 annually in scholarship support

Faculty and Program Support: Strengthening Our Academic Foundation

NBTS is committed to sustaining and expanding its academic programs to meet the needs of the church and community. Our faculty have been actively engaged in securing grants to support strategic initiatives.

Grant Activity

We received a \$50,000 planning grant from the Lilly Endowment to explore micro-credentials for ministry training. Under the leadership of Dr. Charles Rix, we will be submitting a \$1 million implementation grant proposal to the Lilly Endowment to grow micro-credential programming.

We secured a \$10,000 grant from the In Trust Center to conduct board of trustees and seminary president evaluations.

In collaboration with nine other seminaries, including Western Theological Seminary, and a nonprofit shared services agency, NBTS has submitted a \$10 million concept paper to the Lilly Endowment to strengthen theological education.

Our WELL grant, led by Dr. Gihane Jérémie-Brink, continues to operate with excellence and has applied for an additional sustainability grant.

Dr. Nathan Jérémie-Brink has submitted a storytelling grant proposal to the Lilly Endowment, further expanding our commitment to theological innovation.

Looking Ahead: A Call to Action

As we move toward our anniversary celebration in October 2025, we seek your prayers, participation, and support. We will commemorate this milestone with the Gardner A. Sage Library 150th Anniversary Gala—honoring the legacy of this historic library and its continued impact on theological scholarship. Together, we can continue the legacy of NBTS, equipping leaders to serve the RCA and beyond with courage and compassion.

Recommendations

At this 218th regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Tucson, Arizona, from June 5 to 10, 2025, the NBTS Board of Trustees offers two recommendations.

*Changes to NBTS Bylaws***TE 25-2**

To adopt the following amendments to the bylaws of New Brunswick Theological Seminary:

ARTICLE V: Membership of the Board of Trustees

...

Sec. 2 The Board of Trustees shall consist of a minimum of twelve and a maximum of twenty-four members who, Unless otherwise approved by General Synod, members shall be elected for a term of three years beginning the first day of July following their election by the General Synod and continuing until their term expires, except in the cases of death, resignation, or declaration of incompetence by the Board of Trustees as described in Article VI, Sec. 2. Ex officio members shall not be considered when determining the number of members of the Board of Trustees.

Sec. 6 ~~No~~Unless otherwise approved by General Synod, no trustee who has served two full terms (appointment or election to fill a vacancy of more than one half of a term shall constitute a full term for this purpose) shall be eligible for reelection until at least one year has elapsed. (ADOPTED)

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance was to vote in favor of TE 25-2.

A few comments on these two amendments:

- The proposed changes will give the seminary the flexibility it needs to populate its board with people who have the skills, backgrounds, commitments, and gifts that the board requires.
- These revisions would allow General Synod to set the term of a new board member to something other than three years (Section 2), and to allow a board member to serve more than two consecutive terms (Section 6). This complies with the provisions of the NJ Nonprofit Corporations Act, with the only proviso being that the Act requires a minimum term of one year and a maximum term of six years, which the board does not envision being an issue. The six-year maximum listed in the Act refers to a single term and does not prohibit a board member from being re-elected for subsequent terms.

Appointment of Rev. Dr. James H. Brumm as General Synod Professor

The NBTS Board of Trustees recommends the appointment of the Rev. Dr. James H. Brumm to the office of General Synod professor, and offers the following resolution:

TE 25-3

Whereas the Rev. Dr. James L. H. Brumm was ordained as a minister of Word and sacrament in the Reformed Church in America in 1987 and has served as pastor of RCA churches in South River, New Jersey; Grahamsville, New York; and Rensselaer, New York; and as an area minister for the Regional Synod of New York; and

Whereas the Rev. Dr. James L. H. Brumm has served the Reformed Church in America faithfully as moderator of the Commission on History for many years and most recently as moderator of the Commission on Theology, and has worked ecumenically with counterparts in the Christian Reformed Church in North America; and

Whereas the Rev. Dr. James L. H. Brumm is a recognized scholar, having authored or edited nine volumes in the *Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America*, as well as numerous articles, and has taught RCA liturgy and history in various schools and institutes; and

Whereas, since 2014, the Rev. Dr. James L. H. Brumm has been the principal mentor to the seminary's RCA students and their instructor in RCA history and worship; and as a member of the seminary faculty participates in the granting of Certificates of Readiness for Examination; and

Whereas, as director of the Reformed Church Center at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, the Rev. Dr. James L. H. Brumm has expanded the Center's teaching ministry for the Reformed Church in America at large, organizing forums for the whole church that enable a variety of voices to be heard on matters of importance to the church's ministry and witness; and has encouraged research on such matters through grant programs;

Therefore be it resolved that the 218th regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Tucson, Arizona, from June 5 to 10, 2025, declares the Rev. Dr. James L. H. Brumm a General Synod professor. (ADOPTED)

In Conclusion

I, Micah L. McCreary, am deeply honored to serve as president of New Brunswick Theological Seminary. As the first seminary of the Reformed Church in America, we cherish our 241-year partnership with the denomination. We remain committed to our identity as a multiethnic, intergenerational, and ecumenical institution of theological education—one that fosters creative, contextual, and critical thinking, as well as a passion for justice that reflects God’s transformative love in Jesus Christ.

This year has had many highlights and several “lowlights.” One important low was the death of our friend and former NBTS president Rev. Dr. Robert White on October 18, 2024. Dr. White’s obituary describes his service to NBTS, the RCA, and the broader church. (See <https://johnj.sanvidgefuneralhome.com/tribute/details/2383/The-Rev-Dr-Robert-White/obituary.html>.)

Our relationship with the RCA continues to be of great significance to NBTS. We are privileged to educate RCA ministers, offer RCA-focused educational opportunities, and actively participate in commissions and committees. Encouragingly, the number of RCA students at NBTS has grown significantly across all our programs. RCA students now comprise 26 percent of our student body. We look forward to expanding these connections with RCA colleges and assemblies.

NBTS is blessed with a richly diverse student population, drawing individuals from various cultural, ethnic, and theological backgrounds. This diversity enhances our learning environment, cultivating a dynamic community of scholars and ministers equipped to serve in an increasingly multicultural world.

Throughout this academic year, I have had the opportunity to speak at many RCA congregations around my book *Trauma and Race: A Path to Wellbeing*, published by Fortress Press. Thank you for welcoming me into your congregations, pulpits, conferences, workshops, and book clubs.

Finally, I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to the NBTS Board of Trustees, under the leadership of moderator Rev. Abby Norton-Levering, for their steadfast governance and support. We remain grateful for the partnership of the Reformed Church in America in this vital ministry of graduate theological education. May we, together, be faithful stewards of the gospel and the gifts of Christ in this time and place.

In Joy and in Justice,
Rev. Dr. Micah L. McCreary
President and John Henry Livingston Professor of Theology
General Synod Professor, Reformed Church in America

Report of Western Theological Seminary

By God's grace, Western Theological Seminary forms women and men for faithful Christian ministry and participation in the Triune God's ongoing redemptive work in the world.

Western Theological Seminary enjoyed a strong 2024-2025 academic year, marked by a record incoming class, a successful capital campaign, and increasing opportunities for church engagements. A variety of events and gatherings have taken place on campus, bringing together students, faculty, pastors, and thought leaders for worship, learning, and spiritual formation, even as the seminary navigates the increasingly challenging landscape of theological education.

Eugene Peterson Center for Christian Imagination

One of the highlights of the year was the third annual Doxology gathering, hosted by the Eugene Peterson Center for Christian Imagination. The gathering took place from September 30 to October 2, 2024, once again drawing a full audience. More than 230 attendees participated in the event, which culminated in an evening session featuring New York Times–bestselling author Daniel Nayeri (*Everything Sad Is Untrue*). This special session attracted approximately 300 people, adding to the vibrancy of the gathering. Immediately following, from October 2 to 4, around 60 pastors convened for the Order of the Kingfisher Society gathering. These pastors, organized into small groups of 12, engage in deep friendship, prayer, and mutual support. Their time together is centered on a shared commitment to prayer, immersion in Scripture, and attentiveness to God's work in their lives.

The next Doxology gathering will take place on October 6-8, 2025, and will feature Pulitzer Prize–winning author Marilynne Robinson, Bishop Chris Green, and artists Asher Imtiaz and Jon Guerra. Registration is open now and is filling up quickly!

Additionally, the Peterson Center has launched a new podcast, *Low in the Water*. The podcast is gaining significant traction, with pastors across the country and across many denominations listening in weekly. Christians from all kinds of vocations and spiritual traditions are finding the weekly rhythm a place of sustenance and joy. One community group listens together each week as a way to guide their prayers, conversation, and reflections on Scripture. The original music crafted each week for the podcast makes the experience something lived and encountered, even more than a place to merely pass along information. *Low in the Water* can be found anywhere podcasts are available.

Center for Disability and Ministry

Western's Center for Disability and Ministry continues its transformative work with local churches, helping them reimagine worship for children with disabilities. Over the next two years, the center will collaborate with eight congregations, working alongside pastoral staff, children, parents, volunteers, and siblings to develop inclusive worship, liturgy, and faith expressions. The center's annual Symposium on Disability and Ministry continues to grow. The 2025 symposium, which will take place on Saturday, July 12, is titled

Missing Voices in Theology and will feature Dr. John Swinton, Chair of Divinity and Religious Studies at the University of Aberdeen. This free event is also available via livestream. The seminary welcomes you to learn more and register for this year's symposium by visiting <https://events.westernsem.edu/event/westernsem.events.848565>.

Additionally, the center's new podcast, *Disabling the Church*, is now live! This series amplifies the voices, giftedness, and perspectives of disabled people, challenging ableist biases and reimagining the church as a space of true belonging. Through conversations with scholars, ministers, and community members, the podcast explores how the church can dismantle barriers—physical, theological, and cultural—to create a more inclusive and enriched faith community. The podcast is also available anywhere podcasts are available.

Finally, be on the lookout for a free course coming from the Center for Disability and Ministry to help churches strengthen and expand their capacity for engaging with disability-related issues in their ministry setting.

The Henry Bast Center for Christian Proclamation

With the generous support of the Lilly Endowment, Western Theological Seminary established the Henry Bast Center for Christian Proclamation, an initiative dedicated to cultivating a culture of compelling preaching. This center, a collaborative effort between Pillar Church, Hope College, and Western Theological Seminary, will be housed at Western and will oversee 20 preacher cohorts across the country. Additionally, the center will host an annual preaching conference in May, tentatively named *Behold!*, which will be an expansion of the Henry Bast Preaching Festival.

Academic Updates

The spring 2024 graduating class, with approximately 155 degrees conferred, marked the largest in Western's history. Additionally, the seminary hosted its inaugural on-site Hispanic Summer Institute in May, bringing Spanish-speaking students to campus and increasing WTS' visibility within the West Michigan community.

The seminary celebrated an on-time and successful launch of the MA in Clinical Mental Health Counseling program with 17 students. The Vita Scholars program, an accelerated BA/MDiv degree program delivered in partnership with Hope College, continues to grow and now has 14 students.

The Hope–Western Prison Education Program enrolled its fourth cohort this August, and the first cohort is set to graduate in June 2025, a moment that promises to be deeply moving and celebratory.

Additionally, Western Theological Seminary also celebrates with Dr. Kristen Johnson on her appointment as the 11th president of Wycliffe College in Toronto, Ontario. Founded in 1877, Wycliffe College is a historic evangelical seminary rooted in the evangelical Anglican heritage and a founding member of the Toronto School of Theology, the largest ecumenical consortium in Canada. It is an embedded school within the University of Toronto system and offers programs similar to Western, from certificates to doctoral degrees, including a Doctor of Philosophy degree.

Western Theological Seminary has every confidence that Dr. Johnson is ready to provide faithful and outstanding leadership for Wycliffe College. Her talents, wisdom, and experience at Western will serve her well as she assumes this new responsibility. She is a highly competent leader with strong convictions and a high capacity. Her leadership has been instrumental in the growth of WTS. Western congratulates Wycliffe College on their wise choice and prays for God's richest blessings upon them as they embark on this new chapter under Dr. Johnson's leadership.

In light of Dr. Johnson's transition, Dr. Keith Starkenburg and Dr. John Brogan will provide leadership to the academic office.

Dr. Keith Starkenburg has agreed to serve as the interim dean and vice president of academic affairs beginning on July 1, 2025. Dr. Starkenburg graduated from Western Theological Seminary in 2000, was ordained in the Reformed Church in America, and received his Doctor of Philosophy degree from the University of Virginia. Before joining Western in 2022, he served as a faculty member for 14 years at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Illinois, including three years as director of new faculty formation. In the role of interim dean, Dr. Starkenburg will provide leadership for the academic administration of the seminary, including supervision of faculty and academic staff; the design, implementation, and evaluation of academic programs and policies; and nurturing participation in a shared and deepening vision for theological education among the faculty and academic staff of the seminary. Dr. Starkenburg brings a creative mind, a pastoral spirit, and institutional wisdom to this role, traits that are much needed as Western Theological Seminary continues to navigate the changing landscape of theological education.

Additionally, Dr. John Brogan has agreed to serve as the dean of faculty for the seminary. In this role, Dr. Brogan will be tasked with representing and advocating for faculty, creating and maintaining a vibrant and supportive faculty community, supporting faculty development, and working in collaboration with the interim dean and vice president of academic affairs in faculty recruitment and retention; evaluating faculty workloads; reappointment, promotion, and tenure reviews; and maintaining academic standards and policies. Before joining Western in 2013, Dr. Brogan served as the dean of students and student life and as the Marvin and Jerene DeWitt Professor of Religion and department chair at Northwestern College. Dr. Brogan holds Master's degrees from the University of Michigan and Bethel Seminary (Minnesota) and received his Doctor of Philosophy degree from Duke University. His new role will also begin on July 1, 2025.

Admissions

The fall 2024 incoming class was the largest in Western's history, with 184 students enrolling in a new degree program since spring commencement—a 35 percent increase over the previous record. A total of 196 new students have enrolled in classes since that time. Notably, the new in-residence Master of Divinity class doubled in size compared to fall 2023, with 18 students. The in-residence new student orientation saw its highest attendance in six years, welcoming 40 students.

The Doctor of Ministry program is also expanding, with five new cohorts

launched or scheduled for the coming academic year. Dr. Carol Bechtel is leading one of the cohorts, “Seeking Sabbath.” A second round of the Eugene Peterson Center–sponsored cohorts “Holy Presence” and “The Sacred Art of Writing” were also launched. Finally, the new “Relational Neuroscience and Spiritual Formation” cohort generated such high interest that a second cohort will be launching this summer.

Capital Campaign and Development Update

The seminary has launched a new capital campaign, “Cultivating Our Call,” to equip pastors and ministry leaders to serve the church. With Jesus Christ as the center, Western Theological Seminary is cultivating our call to serve the church so the world may be invited to experience abundant life in Christ.

The campaign supports four main initiatives: launch a clinical mental health counseling program, award scholarships, expand Western’s current initiatives and centers (Hispanic Ministries Program, Center for Disability and Ministry, the Eugene Peterson Center for Christian Imagination), and grow our intercultural capacity and international engagement. To date, a total of \$10.8 million has been raised for the campaign. The campaign will be in its public phase in 2025 as the seminary invites donors and alumni to partner with us in cultivating the next generation of leaders for the church.

Additionally, Mr. Andy Bast has accepted an offer to become the vice president of development for Words of Hope. Mr. Bast’s family has deep ties to Words of Hope. His father, David, was a former president, and his grandfather, Henry, was a featured speaker when it was known as Temple Time. This move presents Mr. Bast with an exceptional opportunity to further the legacy of the Bast family at Words of Hope. Words of Hope and Western Theological Seminary also enjoy a close relationship. We firmly believe that the partnership between our organizations will only strengthen with Mr. Bast’s new role.

Mr. Bast has dedicated 11 years to Western, playing a critical role in two capital campaigns and leading our current campaign. His commitment has fostered strong relationships with donors and built their confidence in our mission. Mr. Bast’s last day with the seminary was January 17, 2025.

Faculty Celebrations

Western Theological Seminary celebrates the publication of Rev. Dr. Chuck deGroat’s latest book, *Healing What’s Within: Coming Home to Yourself—and to God—When You’re Wounded, Weary, and Wandering*. Western is also eagerly anticipating the release of Rev. Dr. Travis West’s new book in June 2025.

On September 16, 2024, Rev. Dr. Han-luen Kantzer Koline was installed to the Marvin and Jerene DeWitt Chair in Theology and Church History. To honor the DeWitt family’s extraordinary generosity and commitment, a special dinner was held before the installation. Collectively, the DeWitt family has supported Western through three previous campaigns, contributing nearly \$15 million to the seminary.

Faculty members continue to represent WTS at prestigious events and conferences across the globe. Most recently, Rev. Dr. Ruth Padilla DeBorst

was a plenary speaker at the Fourth Lausanne Congress in Incheon and Seoul, South Korea, while Rev. Dr. Kantzer Komline spoke at the Theology Matters conference in South Carolina. In the literary space, Rev. Dr. Chuck deGroat's new book, *Healing What's Within*, was released on October 8, 2024, and Dr. Ruth Padilla DeBorst's co-authored work, *Reading the Bible Latinamente: Latino/a Interpretation for the Life of the Church*, was published on October 29, 2024.

A representative (and certainly not exhaustive) sampling of our faculty's engagements is as follows.

Rev. Dr. Carol Bechtel, General Synod professor, has had a full preaching schedule. She has ministered in the following locations during the spring 2025 semester alone: preaching at First Presbyterian Church in Muskegon, Michigan; speaking on "New Takes on an Old Story" for an event sponsored by the Waldensian Heritage Museum in Valdese, North Carolina; preaching at Waldensian Presbyterian Church in Valdese, North Carolina; teaching on the book of Job at Faith Reformed Church in Zeeland, Michigan; speaking on "Teaching Tough Old Testament Stories to Children" for the Children's Ministry Network in Grand Rapids, Michigan; teaching on the book of Malachi at Fellowship Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan; and speaking for Founders' Day at Western on April 1.

In the summer of 2024, Rev. Dr. Todd Billings had a book chapter, an article, and a substantial foreword to a multi-author scholarly book on trinitarian theology (798 pages long) released. The book chapter was entitled "Calvin on 'Distracting Emotions' and 'Sinful Complaints' in Lament Psalms: Receiving Laments as Christian Scripture," in *The Old Testament, Calvin, and the Reformed Tradition*, ed. Yudha Thianto (Leiden: Brill, 2024), on pages 58-82. The article, entitled "Sowing Hope: Integrating Faith and Mental Health in a Fragmented World," was published in the Summer 2024 issue of Western's publication *The Commons*. Rev. Dr. Billings authored the foreword to *On Classical Trinitarianism: Retrieving the Nicene Doctrine of the Triune God*, ed. Matthew Barrett (Zondervan Academic: 2024). Dr. Billings is currently on sabbatical, finishing a co-authored book entitled *Generously Reformed: Rooted Deep and Reaching Wide*, as well as researching a theology of chronic illness and discipleship. As a part of the second project, he served as a visiting faculty member with the Theology, Medicine, and Culture program at Duke Divinity School (doing research, not teaching); he was also involved in hosting the Faith and Illness Colloquy.

Rev. Dr. Todd Billings, Dr. Alberto La Rosa Rojas, and Dr. Suzanne McDonald are delighted to have sent the manuscript of their co-authored book, *Generously Reformed: Rooted Deep, Reaching Wide* to Baker Academic in November 2024. They are hoping that it will be published in late 2025.

Rev. Dr. Han-luen Kantzer Komline recently had an article published in *Modern Theology* under the title "Of Birds and Breastfeeding: Augustine and Feminist Concerns about Kenosis." She has also given a number of lectures related to her current book project: at Regent College in Vancouver for Regent's summer lecture series (July 3, 2024), at the Oxford Patristics Conference (August 8, 2024), and at Western Theological Seminary for her installation to the DeWitt chair and this year's Osterhaven lecture (September 16, 2024). She

also spoke at a breakfast for Wheaton College donors at Wheaton's alumni reunion weekend, delivered two lectures on Augustine as a plenary speaker for the Theology Matters conference at Hilton Head Island in South Carolina, and preached at Pillar Church. She was one of the two plenary speakers for the Patristic, Medieval and Renaissance Conference at Villanova University in November 2024 and also delivered a response to two new books on Augustine and slavery at the American Academy of Religion. She recently received word that her paper "Augustine and Innovation: Reconsidering His Rhetoric of 'Newness' in the Pelagian Controversy" was accepted for publication in the journal *Augustiniana*. For the spring 2025 semester she has kept speaking engagements to a minimum and is delighted to be immersed in work on her book, *Innovation in the Early Church*.

Rev. Dr. David Komline continues to edit book reviews for *Fides et Historia*. A new issue of the journal is currently in press and includes reviews of 31 books. In April he visited Whitworth University and made a guest appearance in a required class for their history majors. He has also been involved in local churches, preaching at Second Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan, in July 2024 and leading a two-week adult education series on the Heidelberg Catechism at Central Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in September 2024. In February 2025 he joined the adult education hour at 14th Street CRC to talk about the rise of denominations in America. He continues to serve as chair of the finance committee of the American Society of Church History and on the RCA's Pastoral Formation Oversight Board.

Rev. Dr. Ruth Padilla DeBorst has preached several times over the past year: at Antioch Church in Bend, Oregon; at Hope Fellowship CRC in Denver, Colorado; and at Church of the Servant in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She also spoke at New College Berkeley in October 2024 and at two online consultations of the Latin American Theological Fellowship, one on Lausanne and its implications for Latin America and one in honor of Samuel Escobar on his 90th birthday. Dr. Padilla DeBorst also participated in a small consultation on the pastoral and missiological implications of Lausanne for Latin America (November 5-6, 2024, in Costa Rica).

The seminary celebrates with Rev. Dr. Travis West the completion of his manuscript *The Sabbath Way: Making Room in Your Life for Rest, Connection, and Delight*, to be released in June 2025. The cover design, voted on by his enthusiastic colleagues, and the foreword, by Dr. Winn Collier, are beautiful! In fall 2024, Dr. West did quite a bit of speaking and preaching about the Sabbath, including preaching at Church of the Servant in Grand Rapids on October 6; preaching for Dr. Carol Bechtel's Seeking Sabbath D.Min. cohort on October 23, facilitating a workshop on "Making Room for Sabbath" for the Wellness Night for Hope College's Phelps Scholars, FirstGen, and Hope Forward students (October 23), preaching at Fellowship Church in Holland (November 3); and serving as the keynote speaker for Crossroads PC(USA)'s Great Getaway Retreat, titled "Making Room for Sabbath Delight," at Green Lake Conference Center, in Green Lake, Wisconsin (November 8-10).

Recommendation to Confer the Title of General Synod Professor Emerita upon Rev. Dr. Carol M. Bechtel

Rev. Dr. Carol M. Bechtel, professor of Old Testament, will be retiring from Western Theological Seminary effective June 30, 2025. In honor of her faithful service, the board of trustees and faculty of Western Theological Seminary have recommended that a resolution be brought to the 2025 General Synod to declare her a General Synod professor emerita.

TE 25-4

Whereas Rev. Dr. Carol M. Bechtel has served with distinction as professor of Old Testament at Western Theological Seminary since 1994, demonstrating unwavering commitment to theological education and the mission of the Reformed Church in America; and

Whereas Rev. Dr. Bechtel received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Hope College, Master of Divinity degree from Western Theological Seminary, and Doctor of Philosophy degree from Yale University; and

Whereas Rev. Dr. Bechtel has been instrumental in nurturing future leaders of the church through her teaching of courses such as Old Testament Introduction, Hebrew Language and Exegesis, and seminars on Psalms, Wisdom Literature, Esther, Ruth, and Jonah; and

Whereas she has made significant scholarly contributions, including authoring books like *Esther: A Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, *Life after Grace*, and *Glimpses of Glory*, which have enriched both the academy and the church; and

Whereas she has greatly ministered to the church through her commitment to writing materials that are scholarly without being boring, relevant without being reactionary, and accessible without being watered down; and

Whereas Rev. Dr. Bechtel has actively engaged in denominational leadership, serving as president of the General Synod from 2009-2010, and has been a guiding voice in worship and education within the denomination; and

Whereas her dedication extends beyond academia into community involvement, including her participation with the Holland Chorale and sharing her musical talents as a harpist at local

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events, hospitals, and nursing homes; and

Whereas Rev. Dr. Bechtel's profound impact on students, colleagues, and the broader church community exemplifies the highest standards of Christian scholarship and service;

Therefore be it resolved that the 218th regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting at the Westin La Paloma in Tucson, Arizona, from June 5-10, 2025, in recognition of her exemplary service and contributions, confers upon Rev. Dr. Carol M. Bechtel the title of General Synod professor emerita as of June 30, 2025; and,

Be it further resolved that this title serves as a testament to Dr. Bechtel's enduring legacy in theological education and her unwavering commitment to the Reformed Church in America; and

Be it also resolved that the 218th regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America expresses its deepest gratitude to Dr. Bechtel for her years of service and offers its prayers for a fulfilling retirement. (ADOPTED)

Report of Central College

Central College of Pella, Iowa, is a private, four-year college known for its academic rigor, engaged citizenship and character formation, experiential learning, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), athletics, and service. For more information about Central College, visit central.edu.

For more than 100 years, Central has valued its affiliation with the Reformed Church in America. Central's connection with the RCA is invaluable for students learning to live out their faith through service to God and humanity. RCA members serve on Central's board of trustees. Reformed churches support students through Central's Journey Scholarship Fund. RCA students also can receive the Heritage Award. Many Central graduates go on to serve as leaders in RCA congregations worldwide.

Central's mission integrates career preparation with developing values essential to responsible citizenship. Central empowers graduates to serve and do a world of good in local, national, and international communities. A Central education prepares students for civic responsibility, to "let their light shine before others, so that they may see your good works" (Matthew 5:16). Through activities, courses, service opportunities, and Central's relationship with the RCA, students learn to take their place in the world as justice seekers.

Campus Ministries

Campus Ministries students and staff plan and lead a variety of activities and events on campus as a body of Christ-followers with a desire for people to know the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ. The mission is to "Make, grow, and send disciples of Jesus Christ who have a love for the Word of God, prayer, worship, fellowship, and service."

The Calm

Each week, 30 to 70 students participate in *The Calm*, a worship service that fosters focus and Bible study. Recently, they explored how idols—anything prioritized over God—can hinder true joy, sharing testimonies of Christ's rescue from empty pursuits. Additionally, students host a weekly prayer group, uniting the community in gratitude and faith.

Outreach

Campus Ministries is involved with Urban Bike Ministry, World Vision, Love Packages, Single Parent Provision, Jonathan's House for Orphans, Angel Tree, and other service organizations. Additionally, Central students travel to Des Moines, Iowa, and join others to distribute food, blankets, gloves, and hats to people in need. Students also connect with children in need by playing games, telling Bible stories, and sharing a meal together. Campus Ministries holds several fundraisers annually for organizations in which they are involved as well as domestic and international mission trips.

Mission Trips

Campus Ministries fosters faith through service on mission trips worldwide, including Texas, Tanzania, Kentucky, New York, London, Haiti, and Honduras. In spring 2025, students will minister in Moldova through children's programs, visits with the elderly, Bible studies, and home construction. In May 2024, they served alongside Hope of the Nations in Tanzania, and in fall 2024, they led retreats in Northeast Iowa and Kansas City. Over winter break, 50 students traveled to Mission, Texas, building homes, serving near the border, assisting a local church, and hosting a carnival—an annual favorite.

Services and Discipleship

Many students are involved with local churches, including assisting with worship services and youth and children's ministries. In addition to connections with local churches, 54 students, staff, and community members are participating in a discipleship program designed to help grow their faith and relationship with God.

Small Groups and Bible Studies

Campus Ministries encourages small group studies to build trust and faith. Men's and women's Bible studies are offered along with focused groups to support both first-year men and first-year women. There is also a book study on *All In* by Mark Batterson.

Community Engaged Learning

Service plays a major role on Central's campus. It is expressed through student organizations, classes with service-learning components, and projects by students, faculty, and staff. Community engaged learning teaches civic engagement and establishes relationships with community partners. Central is committed to teaching civic responsibility through multiple activities.

*Community Engaged Learning Coursework*Service-Learning

Service-learning fosters cognitive, vocational, social, emotional, behavioral, and moral growth. The Career and Community Engaged Learning Office links students to nonprofits, where they teach senior citizens technology, lead fitness classes, assist after-school programs, and serve food to families in need. This year, 78 students served 6 nonprofits in the fall and 25 in the spring. Many students continued volunteering beyond their required hours.

Capacity Building

Courses allow students opportunities to identify challenges, develop skills, and provide resources that organizations desire by working in groups on whole semester class projects. Between the two semesters the Community Engaged Learning Office collaborated with 8 courses, 199 students, and 11 nonprofit organizations.

Engaged Citizen Core

Engaged Citizen Core courses cultivate engaged, reflective, and responsible campus citizens. This year, 276 students worked with nonprofits through service, guest speakers, field experiences, and reflection. In the Disinformation in the Digital Age course, students partnered with Pella Historical Society to create QR codes for historical village displays, hosted a guest speaker, served on service day, and filmed the Wyatt Earp event.

Service Day

Service Day makes it possible for all members of the Central family to collaborate on projects that address a community need. In fall 2024, 702 students, faculty, and staff completed 48 projects, many at faith-based organizations. In total, there were 2,080 hours donated on a single day with an economic impact of \$60,070.40. On Service Day, the Storytelling and Change class visited Fairhaven residents in Pella, where students did a story exchange and had impactful dialogue. One faculty member also stated, "I led 15 students to prepare meals for hundreds of people and The Well said our work would save them 24 hours of labor preparing those meals."

Season of Gratitude and Food Security Projects

In fall 2024, the college and community partners collaborated for Season of Gratitude events. The campus community wrote positive greeting cards and coffee cup compliments, observed World Kindness Day with a gratitude board, hosted a food drive for the Pella Food Pantry, crocheted mats made of used plastic grocery bags for homeless individuals, organized a coat drive for refugees, and celebrated Giving Tuesday to encourage giving to nonprofits.

Martin Luther King Jr. Day

In 2025, students attended an opening session and selected from academic sessions and service projects throughout the day. Programs address King's vision for social justice and acceptance. 120 students volunteered their time and participated in a service project on MLK Day. Students assembled over 700 art2go kits, served a free meal, assembled Blessing Bags, and made cards of encouragement.

School Visits

Central's commitment to partnerships began in 2015 with the By Degrees Foundation. In the fall of 2024, the Community Engaged Learning Office partnered with the admission office to host 45 Findley Elementary School third graders and 11 North High School students from Des Moines, Iowa. These students represent underserved, first-generation families who have never been on a college campus. This increases college access for students with diverse socioeconomic and cultural perspectives.

College Affordability

Individuals with a servant's heart come from all corners of the earth. Central addresses college affordability with competitive tuition compared to state schools (\$21,934). In 2023, Central began giving all incoming students a \$1,000 Journey Scholarship. The goal is to award students the scholarship each year they attend Central. The Journey Scholarships are 100 percent donor funded.

Conclusion

Central is deeply committed to its mission of preparing students to become leaders for good. This journey includes understanding the importance of service and making a meaningful impact on the world.

Central College has enjoyed the warmth of a formal relationship with the RCA for more than a century. The college has been grateful to participate in the careful deliberations regarding the newly crafted affiliation agreement, and endorses both the process and the result as being a thoughtful expression of our historic relationship and our envisioned future together.

Report of Hope College

Hope College, a steadfast affiliate of the Reformed Church in America since its founding in 1866, continues to flourish as a beacon of Christian higher education. Known for our welcoming Christian environment, vibrant campus community, and outstanding academic and co-curricular offerings, we remain dedicated to our mission of educating students for lives of leadership and service within the context of the historic Christian faith.

Mission

The mission of Hope College is to educate students for lives of leadership and service in a global society through academic and co-curricular programs of recognized excellence in the liberal arts and in the context of the historic Christian faith.

Academic Excellence and Growth

At Hope College, we excel in undergraduate research, scholarly pursuits, and readiness for both further education and the professional sphere. Hope College proudly serves approximately 3,300 undergraduate students from over 35 countries and 45 states, reflecting our growing reach and appeal. Our dedicated faculty deliver a rigorous educational experience while maintaining our commitment to personalized classroom setting with an 11-to-1 student-to-faculty ratio. Through intimate class settings and extensive collaborative research opportunities, students engage deeply with faculty mentors, fostering intellectual curiosity and professional development. The college's more than 80 student groups are marked by tradition, service, and enthusiasm, through which students are encouraged to explore their interests, build their leadership skills, and give back to the community. Our successful placement rate remains exceptional, with 95 percent of our graduates transitioning into the workforce or pursuing advanced studies within six months of graduation.

Hope Forward: Transforming Educational Access

The Hope Forward initiative, proposed by President Matthew A. Scogin, has gained tremendous momentum. This visionary approach to fully funding student tuition through a generosity-based model has now raised over \$85 million, with national recognition continuing to grow. The initiative has been featured in numerous media articles highlighting innovative approaches to tackling college affordability.

Building on our historical commitment to accessibility—Hope College did not charge tuition for its first fifty years—this initiative has enabled us to welcome our fourth cohort of fully-funded Hope Forward students, and this spring will see the first cohort graduate in the Hope College Class of 2025. These students exemplify our commitment to educational access rooted in principles of generosity and gratitude, fundamentally aligned with our Christian ethos.

Leadership Expansion: Strengthening Our Foundation

Hope College is pleased to announce the appointment of two key leadership positions that will further advance our mission and strategic priorities.

Alexander Jones has joined the college as vice president of philanthropy and engagement, bringing extensive leadership experience in advancement and development. Prior to joining Hope College, Dr. Jones served as the vice president of institutional advancement at Roberts Wesleyan University, where he successfully led capital campaign initiatives exceeding \$100 million. His expertise in donor relations, strategic philanthropy, and alumni engagement has already made a significant impact at Hope, with notable early success in advancing our Hope Forward fundraising efforts. Dr. Jones holds an MBA from the University of Chicago and a PhD in higher education from Azusa Pacific University, and has demonstrated throughout his career a deep commitment to faith-based higher education and its transformative potential.

We are also blessed to welcome Rev. Nathan Hart as our new dean of the chapel. Rev. Hart comes to Hope after serving as the senior pastor at Stanwich Congregational Church in Greenwich, Connecticut, for 13 years. A Hope College alumnus (Class of 2001), Rev. Hart also holds a Master of Divinity degree from Princeton Theological Seminary and a Doctor of Ministry from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Rev. Hart's heartfelt commitment to fostering spiritual growth in young adults and his innovative approach to worship have already revitalized our campus ministries program. Under his leadership, we have seen increased participation in chapel services, expanded small group ministries, and renewed emphasis on integrating faith development across all aspects of campus life.

These strategic leadership appointments represent our ongoing commitment to strengthening both the operational foundation and spiritual heart of Hope College as we pursue our mission of excellence in Christian liberal arts education.

Campus Ministries: Faith Formation and Service

Hope College remains a Christian community that invites all its members into a holistic and robust engagement with the historic Christian faith and a personal encounter with the living Christ through the Holy Spirit. Our Christian identity continues to be guided by three aspirations: Hope aspires to be faithful, welcoming, and transformational. Hope is committed to the historical Christian faith as expressed in the ecumenical creeds of the ancient church, and the variety of expressions of the Christian faith we hold contributes to the vitality of the life of the college. Hope seeks to affirm the dignity of all persons as bearers of God's image, and welcome those of different faiths or of no faith at all. We are committed to freedom of inquiry, yet also to the centrality of Scripture and renewal of our minds according to the will of God. The whole Hope community is encouraged in a lifelong commitment to grow in God's grace and to pursue vocations through which the world so loved by God is renewed.

This spring, more than 300 students participated in immersion trips coordinated by our campus ministries team, serving communities across the country and around the world. These experiences embody our belief that we are called not to save the world but to serve it in the name of Jesus. Our weekly chapel services continue to draw hundreds of students for worship, reflection, and community building, while small group Bible studies engage students in deeper exploration of faith and its application to daily life.

Academic Innovation and Interdisciplinary Excellence

Hope College offers specialized programs across more than 90 majors, minors, and pre-professional tracks. Our faculty continues to excel in teaching and scholarship, contributing significantly to diverse fields of knowledge while fostering transformative learning experiences for students. Our status as a leader in undergraduate research continues to strengthen, now ranking #31 according to U.S. News & World Report, while our overall ranking among liberal arts colleges has advanced to #90 nationally (improved from #98 in 2024). Hope College also ranked #23 in Most Innovative Schools by U.S. News & World Report. With over 2,000 internship opportunities and 300 study abroad programs across 60 countries, we continue to expand our global perspective, ensuring our graduates excel in an interconnected world.

Artistic Excellence and Cultural Impact

As one of the few private liberal arts colleges in the nation holding national accreditation in art, dance, music, and theatre, Hope College continues to distinguish itself in the arts. Our commitment to artistic excellence extends beyond our state-of-the-art facilities to comprehensive exhibition programs and transformative performance experiences.

This year, our music department celebrated Hope College Symphony's invitation to perform in the New York International Music Festival at Carnegie Hall. Our dance program received national recognition for its innovative approach to integrating faith perspectives in contemporary choreography, while our theatre department produced an original work that toured regional festivals. We also celebrate the completion and opening of the Jim and Eileen Heeringa Dance Wing, a state-of-the-art dance studio.

Excellence in Athletics

The athletic program at Hope College continues to exemplify our commitment to holistic education and personal development. As part of our kinesiology department, our athletics program is guided by coaches, scholars, and leaders who prioritize excellence and the student-athlete experience. The members of our athletics program remain committed to the utmost integrity in competition, engagement in Christian faith formation, and dedication to excelling in sports, academics, and life.

This year, our football team had a historic season that included an MIAA championship, the most wins ever by a Hope team in a season, and the Flying Dutchmen's first-ever NCAA Division III playoff victory.

Career Development and Vocational Discernment

The Boerigter Center for Calling and Career continues to thrive as a college-wide initiative engaging students and alumni in lifelong practices for career development. Beginning in a student's freshman year, the BCCC provides a comprehensive approach that goes beyond traditional career services. It offers a process, a plan, and a guided journey over four or more years.

This year, the center expanded its innovative "Hope Connect" program, which

has now facilitated more than 5,000 mentoring connections between current students and alumni. Additionally, the center launched a new digital portfolio system enabling students to document their growth and achievements across academic, co-curricular, and professional experiences throughout their Hope journey.

Hope-Western Prison Education Program (HWPEP): Expanding Impact

Our partnership with Western Theological Seminary continues to flourish through the Hope-Western Prison Education Program. Now serving 60 incarcerated students enrolled in credit-bearing courses, the program has expanded significantly toward its goal of accommodating 80 students when fully subscribed. This year marked a significant milestone as the program celebrates its first graduating class, with nine students receiving bachelor's degrees from Hope College. Research continues to affirm the program's impact, showing reduced recidivism rates among participants while providing transformative educational experiences that benefit both the incarcerated students and the Hope College community more broadly.

Environmental Stewardship Initiative

In response to our Christian calling to care for creation, Hope College launched a comprehensive Campus Sustainability Plan last year. The initiative integrates environmental stewardship into campus operations, academic curricula, and student life.

Conclusion

Hope College stands resolute in its commitment to providing transformative Christian liberal arts education. Through academic excellence, innovative initiatives like Hope Forward, and our unwavering dedication to holistic development, we continue to prepare students to lead and serve in a complex world. Our commitment to accessible education, innovative initiatives, and holistic development ensures that every student thrives, embodying the values of our institution.

Report of Northwestern College

Northwestern College is celebrating a sixth consecutive year of record enrollment with 1,719 students. This year's freshman enrollment is 327 compared to 2023's total of 283. This is a 13-year high! Nationally, freshman enrollment was down five percent across all of higher education last fall, so Northwestern is in an enviable position with a 15 percent increase in freshman enrollment. Praise God for his faithfulness!

Best Christian Workplace

Northwestern has been certified as a Best Christian Workplace for the second year in a row based on data from the 2024 Best Christian Workplaces Institute (BCWI) survey, which measures the health of workplace culture in Christian organizations. The college scored an all-time high of 4.05 on a five-point scale, placing it in the 70th percentile for the higher education category.

The BCWI survey addresses several key drivers that contribute to employees' flourishing in the work environment: teamwork within departments and across campus, ability of employees to find purpose in their work and to utilize their spiritual gifts, retention and promotion of highly capable employees, supportive supervisors, rewarding compensation and benefits, high-quality administrative leadership, sustainable strategy and goal-setting, and healthy communication.

Northwestern employees value our Christian mission; they appreciate how they're encouraged and empowered to achieve excellence; and they love our community, especially their students and colleagues. In addition to praising Northwestern's leadership and strategic direction, most employees noted that they believe NWC reflects Christ to the world, including the respondent who wrote, "Our shared faith in Christ is at the forefront of Northwestern's mission and work, proven by our leaders' attention to prayer and commitment to reminding employees of our true and greater purpose."

Graduate Placement Rate

Northwestern College's 2024 graduates achieved a 99.5 percent placement rate within six months of graduation. A survey of members of the class of 2024 revealed that 80 percent are employed, 19 percent are in grad school, and 0.5 percent are either volunteering or not searching for a job.

Data was collected by the college's Compass Center for Career and Calling using the First-Destination Survey of the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE). Northwestern's survey response rate of 100 percent far exceeds the national standard of 65 percent set by NACE.

With jobs including credit analyst, interpreter, and worship director, graduates are employed at more than 143 companies, including the Mayo Clinic, Fidelity Investments, Nebraska Sports Council, KELO TV, Lincoln Public School District, and Interstates. Other 2024 grads are continuing their education in graduate programs ranging from law and medicine to social work and international relations, studying at schools that include Iowa State, Johns Hopkins University, Mayo Clinic College of Medicine, and Princeton Theological Seminary.

Academic Program Updates

New Undergraduate Majors

Northwestern's new engineering major launched in fall 2024 with 15 students in the initial cohort. In January, faculty and students moved into the college's new engineering lab, which is near the DeWitt Family Science Center. Next fall four new undergraduate majors will launch: creative industries–visual arts, cybersecurity, strength and conditioning, and writing and digital media. The new majors respond to both student and employer demand.

Creative industries–visual arts is aimed at students who want to combine business or entrepreneurial goals with their creative talent to work in industry or even start their own businesses.

In addition to requirements in server administration, digital forensics, project management, and risk management, cybersecurity majors will also take psychology courses to learn about human vulnerabilities attackers might use to gain unauthorized access.

Strength and conditioning majors will prepare for careers in athletics at all levels of competition as well as for roles helping non-athletes lead healthier, more active lives at all ages.

The writing and digital media major seeks to prepare students for roles in communications, social media, content strategy, and journalism. In addition to providing future career flexibility, this program will prepare students who love words and ideas to engage audiences in ways that are both intellectually rich and emotionally compelling.

StandOut Students, Faculty, and Alumni

Dr. Jeff Schouten, associate professor of kinesiology at Northwestern College, has published a curriculum guide, *Home School Physical Education for K-5 Families and Cooperatives*. The guide offers lesson plans for skills like throwing and catching, as well as for ball games and racquet sports. His curriculum includes five lessons for each grade, with age-appropriate activities. Schouten deliberately chose basic types of activities that a non-trained teacher could do with students so if a homeschooling parent needs a lesson for a specific grade, they have one.

Schouten developed the book from lesson plans he and his Northwestern students majoring in physical education created for a homeschool PE program conducted for the greater Orange City area. Since its 2022 inception, the program has drawn an average of 100 students per session from up to 80 miles away.

A sports enthusiast and assistant baseball coach for the Red Raiders, with a podcast called "Be a Difference Maker," Schouten earned a doctorate at Florida State University. He has nearly 20 years of experience as a kinesiology professor.

Jack MacGregor '25. For the second consecutive year, Jack MacGregor, a

Northwestern theatre major from Denison, Iowa, achieved a first-place finish at the Region Five Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival (KCACTF). This festival is an annual event that includes undergraduate and graduate students from six Midwestern states.

MacGregor won Region Five's top award in the allied design and technology category for the puppets he designed and crafted for Northwestern's production of "Sense and Sensibility." The award earned him an all-expenses-paid trip to the annual conference and stage expo of the United States Institute for Theatre Technology (USITT) in March. In 2024, MacGregor won Region Five's top scenic design award for his work on Northwestern's production of "Silent Sky" and subsequently placed second nationally.

Mari Hirota '25 and Pratik Paudel '25. Two computer science majors competed at HackHarvard 2024, a computer coding event. Mari Hirota and Pratik Paudel were selected as two of more than 1,000 competitors for the competition held on Harvard University's campus.

At HackHarvard, participants develop important skills, learn new technologies, and work together, all while tackling a specific problem in a short time, usually 24 to 48 hours. The competition is about building an impactful project in a short amount of time with a team picked remotely before competitors arrive. The competition is not just about winning the "hackathon" but also about the opportunity to build connections with different students across the nation, improving technical skills in a short amount of time, and getting to know more about career opportunities in technology.

Hannah Van Meeteren '23 has been named one of 40 winners of the 2023 Elijah Watt Sells Award by the American Institute of CPAs. The award is given to CPA candidates who achieve a cumulative average score above 95.50 across all four sections of the Uniform CPA Examination, passing all four sections on their first attempt. More than 86,000 individuals sat for the CPA exam in 2023.

In addition to earning one of the top 40 scores, Van Meeteren earned the highest score of those who were licensed in the state of South Dakota, and she is one of only two students from an Iowa college to receive the award.

Hannah believes her Northwestern experience equipped her with skills and tools to succeed that she may not have received elsewhere. The four years she spent at Northwestern were transformative in her development as a future accounting professional and, more importantly, as a servant of Christ.

Raiders Stand Out

The Northwestern experience has a tangible impact on the lives of students and alumni. Below is a portion of a letter from an alum honored during homecoming weekend:

NWC was responsible for a lot of life/heart/mind shaping events that have made me the person I am today. I could see the "standout" quality of the students this weekend—always going one step further.

- My friends were lost trying to find the banquet room. They asked a student for directions. Instead of just pointing to the

- location, they offered to walk them there.
- At the football game, my mom engaged in conversation with a female student sitting next to her and the student was so respectful, engaged, and attentive to her. Many overlook the elderly—she did not.

Thank you for continuing the strong legacy of NWC! My friends who've never been there were very impressed. It is obviously a place that values standout characteristics that honor God.

College Affiliation Agreements with the General Synod

Note: Each of the three colleges that have historically been officially related to the General Synod (Central College, Hope College, and Northwestern College) brought the following form of affiliation agreement for approval by the General Synod. It changes the relationship between the colleges and the General Synod from “officially related” to “affiliated.” The “affiliated college” status was newly created by amendments to the Bylaws of the General Synod that were adopted in first reading by General Synod 2024 (*MGS 2024, CO 24-2, p. 240*) and were declared effective by this General Synod. The following describes the development of the form of affiliation agreements and presents recommendations that the General Synod adopt affiliation agreements separately with each college.

* * * * *

In 2024, the General Synod adopted proposed changes to the bylaws of the General Synod (Chapter 3, Part I of the *Book of Church Order*) that would allow for a new relationship between a college and the General Synod—that of an “affiliated” college rather than an “officially related” college. Those changes are now before General Synod 2025 for final adoption.

The proposed changes developed out of an August 2023 meeting between the college and seminary presidents, GSC staff, and members of the RCA restructuring team to discuss the nature of the relationship between the RCA and its colleges and seminaries.

During this meeting, the presidents of the colleges noted that as the membership of the RCA has changed significantly in recent years, it has grown increasingly difficult to fulfill *BCO* requirements for officially-related institutions of higher education, particularly the provision that at least three members of their respective boards of trustees must be designated by the General Synod (*BCO* Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 7, Section 5 [2024 ed., p. 74]). They suggested the creation of a new “affiliated” category of relationship for the RCA colleges, which would not mandate that RCA members serve on boards of trustees or that institutional bylaws be approved by the General Synod.

The 2024 Commission on Church Order report noted that

This new category of affiliation would allow each college to sign an agreement with the General Synod as to the nature of the affiliation and the rights and responsibilities of each partner in the agreement. This option allowing the colleges to redefine their relationship to the General Synod avoids the problems associated with the appointment of trustees and allows more flexibility in the nature of the formal relationships (*MGS 2024, p. 240*).

After the 2024 General Synod adopted the bylaws changes in first reading, Central, Hope, and Northwestern worked together to develop common language for an affiliation agreement, in consultation with General Synod staff, the general secretary, and the CCO.

The proposed affiliation agreement is presented below for General Synod

adoption. It has already been adopted by each of the three colleges. While the General Synod will adopt a separate agreement with each of the three colleges, the text of all three agreements is identical.

AFFILIATION AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA AND _____ COLLEGE

The Reformed Church in America (“RCA” or “Church”) and _____ College (“_____” or “College”) join in mutual, voluntary, and non-exclusive agreement to pursue a relationship of affiliation that reflects the shared history and character the RCA and the College enjoy. The RCA seeks to extend the reach of its ministry through the important work of higher education and the College seeks to extend the reach of its educational activities in the context of church ministry and global mission. By way of this agreement, both organizations endeavor to animate a longstanding shared purpose to prepare young lives for ministry in the church, service in professional settings across society, and effective citizenship in the many communities in which they participate. Each will support the other in the furtherance of its interests in ministry and education in the following ways:

The College agrees to provide . . .

- Educational opportunities for students that embrace academic, professional and experiential learning activities characterized by excellence and offered in a framework consistent with its mission and purpose.
- Ministries for students to deepen their journey of Christian faith with particular attention to the important work of spiritual formation as manifested in a knowledge of Scripture, a practice of spiritual disciplines and a commitment to service.
- Communities of learning, love, and forbearance that foster unity in the presence of diversity.
- Advice and counsel to the Church on the emerging generation of students who will take up leadership roles in communities of faith and service in local churches.
- Partnerships with the Church to encourage the active involvement of students in connection with local, regional, national and global ministry and mission opportunities.

The Reformed Church in America agrees to provide . . .

- Convening opportunities for the College and related colleges to partner in the work of education and ministry with the Church.
- Advice and counsel on the work of ministry to students including best practices, connections to church leaders, and access to experts in related fields.
- Access to ministry resources useful in connecting students to the work of the Church in all its settings.
- Joint ventures in connecting students to the local, regional, national and global work of the Church.
- Partnership opportunities to encourage talented students to enroll, and churches to support the College.

This agreement is intended to be enduring but may be concluded by either party through the courtesy of timely notice. It may further be revised from time to time by mutual agreement. The desire to work together is an expression of an abiding commitment to a shared ambition for education and ministry to go hand in hand. It is accordingly affirmed by the signatures of the appropriate organizational leaders as expressed below.

Recommendations

Because the General Synod is adopting a separate affiliation agreement with each of the three colleges, even though the wording of all three affiliation agreements is the same, the approvals are presented separately for the General Synod's vote.

TE 25-5

To adopt the affiliation agreement between the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America and Central College as stated above. (ADOPTED)

TE 25-6

To adopt the affiliation agreement between the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America and Hope College as stated above. (ADOPTED)

TE 25-7

To adopt the affiliation agreement between the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America and Northwestern College as stated above. (ADOPTED)

CLOSING**ELECTION OF OFFICERS**

Rev. Sarah Palsma, General Synod vice president, was elected General Synod president. Brad Prince, elder delegate from the Classis of Holland, was elected General Synod vice president.

WORSHIP SERVICE AND ADJOURNMENT

The closing worship service concluded at 9:14 a.m. Mountain Time on Tuesday, June 10, 2025. Thus, the 218th General Synod of the Reformed Church in America adjourned at 9:14 a.m. Mountain Time on Tuesday, June 10, 2025.

**SUPPLEMENT A: CHANGES IN ORGANIZED CHURCH
AND CLASSIS STATUS/NAME
JANUARY 2024 THROUGH JUNE 2025
(AND PREVIOUSLY UNREPORTED)**

2/24, organized	Iglesia Aliento de Vida Pharr, Texas	tx
2/24, organized	Iglesia Cristiana Alianza Reformada Pharr, Texas	tx
2/24, organized	Iglesia Reformada la Luz del Valle Mission, Texas	tx
2/24, organized	Iglesia Remanente de Gracia Mission, Texas	tx
2/24, organized	Rectify Church Allegan, Michigan	glc
2/24, organized	Centro Evangelico Lluvias de Gracia Pharr, Texas	tx
3/24, organized	Liberti Main Line Havertown, Pennsylvania	city
3/24, adopted	Expansion Santiago, Chile	tx
4/24, organized	Iglesia El Buen Pastor Round Rock, Texas	city
4/24, organized	Ministerio Internacional Cristiano Vida de Dios La Cisterna, Chile	amer
6/24, organized	RCA City Church Humble, Texas	tx
9/24, organized	Oxford Reformed Church Ingersoll, Ontario	ont
10/24, received from Presbyterian Church in Korea (HapDong)	The Communities of Jesus Christ Church Toronto, Ontario	ont
2/25, organized	The Living Well Kalamazoo, Michigan	glc
3/25, organized	Joy Reformed Church Hamilton, Ontario	ont

4/25, organized	La Casa De Mi Padre Grandville, Michigan	glc
6/25, organized	City Chapel Grand Rapids, Michigan	ngr

1/23, disbanded	Classis of Dakota Harrisburg, South Dakota	dak
1/24, disbanded	Upper Ridgewood Community Church Ridgewood, New Jersey	gpal
1/24, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Pleasant Valley Reformed Church Holland, Iowa	pp
3/24, disbanded	Christ's Church St Peters, Missouri	ill
3/24, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Chandler Reformed Church Chandler, Minnesota	minn
3/24, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Community Reformed Church Clinton, Iowa	ill
3/24, transferred to Reformation Canada Network	Emmanuel Reformed Church Whitby, Ontario	ont
3/24, transferred to Reformation Canada Network	Hope Reformed Church Vancouver, British Columbia	bc
3/24, transferred to Vision Ministries Canada	New Life Community Church Burnaby, British Columbia	bc
4/24, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Second Reformed Church Grand Haven, Michigan	musk
5/24, disbanded	12 Springs Church Sarasota, Florida	nac
5/24, transferred to The Kingdom Network	First Reformed Church Tampa, Florida	nac
5/24, transferred to Reformation Canada Network	Cedar Grove Reformed Church Port Alberni, British Columbia	bc

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5/24, disbanded	Reformed Dutch Church Hyde Park, New York	m-h
5/24, transferred to non-denominational	Second Reformed Church Howes Cave, New York	scho
6/24, disbanded	Centro De Vida Greenacres, Florida	nac
6/24, disbanded	Community Church of Ho Ho Kus Ho Ho Kus, New Jersey	gal
6/24, disbanded	Cuddebackville Reformed Church Cuddebackville, New York	orn
6/24, transferred to Evangelical Covenant Church	Marda Loop Church Calgary, Alberta	canp
6/24, transferred to Reformation Canada Network	Place of Grace Winnipeg, Manitoba	canp
6/24, transferred to Gateway Network	Hope Reformed Church Grand Haven, Michigan	musk
6/24, transferred to The Kingdom Network	Beechwood Reformed Church Holland, Michigan	hol
7/24, disbanded	Centro Cristiano Oásis de Benediccion Venezuela	amer
7/24, disbanded	Ministerio Apostolico de Restauración Profetica Venezuela	amer
7/24, disbanded	Reformed Community Church Venice, Florida	nac
8/24, disbanded	Downers Grove Community Church Downers Grove, Illinois	chi
7/24, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Trinity Reformed Church Grand Haven, Michigan	musk
10/24, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Sharon Reformed Church Sharon Springs, New York	scho
10/24, transferred to Reformation Canada Network	Maranatha Reformed Church Wainfleet, Ontario	ont

10/24, transferred to Reformation Canada Network	Christ Community Church Welland, Ontario	ont
10/24, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Conklin Reformed Church Conklin, Michigan	musk
10/24, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Faith Reformed Church Lodi, New Jersey	gpal
10/24, disbanded	La Senda Del Amor Toronto, Ontario	ont
11/24, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Community Reformed Church Lafayette, Indiana	illna
11/24, disbanded	Chosen Generation Fellowship Church Long Beach, California	cal
1/25, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	New Life Community Church Sayville, New York	n-s
1/25, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Church of the Living Christ Fremont, Michigan	nmi
1/25, released	Buenas Nueva de Dios para Multitudes (BND) Venezuela *****	amer
1/25, released	Renacer Church Doral, Florida	amer
2/25, disbanded	Third Reformed Church Albany, New York	alb
2/25, released	Iglesia Evangélica Renacer Venezuela	amer
2/25, released	Iglesia Manifestación del Reino Venezuela	amer
2/25, released	Iglesia Renacer Guyana Venezuela	amer
2/25, released	Ministerio Cristiano Ciudad Fuerte Venezuela	amer

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3/25, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	New Prospect Reformed Church Pine Bush, New York	orng
3/25, transferred to Evangelical Free Church	Reformed Church of Palmyra Palmyra, New York	roch
3/25, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	First Reformed Church Rock Rapids, Iowa	ws
3/25, transferred to Evangelical Presbyterian Church	Bethel Reformed Church Leota, Minnesota	minn
3/25, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Ebenezer Reformed Church Morrison, Illinois	ill
3/25, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Archer Reformed Church Archer, Iowa	es
4/25, transferred to United Church of Christ	Middle Collegiate Church New York, New York	ny
4/25, transferred to United Church of Christ	West End Collegiate Church New York, New York	ny
5/25, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	First Reformed Church Sibley, Iowa	es
5/25, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	Heartland Community Church Lafayette, Indiana	illna
5/25, transferred to Alliance of Reformed Churches	New Era Reformed Church New Era, Michigan	nmi
6/25, disbanded	Fort Washington Collegiate Church New York, New York	ny

4/24, name change	Iglesia El Buen Pastor Round Rock, Texas formerly Iglesia Reformada Gracia Latina	city

4/24, name change	(DBA)Foundations Ravenna, Michigan Legally remains First Reformed Church	musk
5/24, classis transfer	Arbutus Grove Church Parksville, British Columbia	canp (from bc)
5/24, classis transfer	Powell River Reformed Church Powell River, British Columbia	canp (from bc)
6/24, name change	Intersection Ministries Holland, Michigan formerly Grace Community Church	hol
7/24, classis transfer	The Branch Grand Rapids, Michigan	ngr (from glc)
7/24, classis transfer	Urban Apostolic Network Church Kalamazoo, Michigan	glc (from swm)
7/24, classis transfer	Voyage Church Kalamazoo, Michigan	glc (from swm)
7/24, classis transfer	Cantico Nuevo - Humble Humble, Texas	tx (from amer)
7/24, classis transfer	Iglesia Nueva Vida Plano, Texas	tx (from amer)
7/24, classis transfer	Iglesia Oasis Internacional Carrollton, Texas	tx (from amer)
7/24, classis transfer	Iglesia Reformada Impacto Pittsburg, Texas	tx (from amer)
8/24, name change	Grace Churches Milwaukee Ann Arbor, Michigan formerly New Life Community Church	wis
6/25, classis transfer	Bethany Reformed Church Kalamazoo, Michigan	city (from swm)
6/25, classis transfer	Iglesia Reformada Impacto Pittsburg, Texas	amer (from tx)
6/25, classis transfer	Peace Reformed Church Eagan, Minnesota	city (from minn)
6/25, classis transfer	Platt Park Church Denver, Colorado	city (from rm)

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6/25, classis transfer

Trinity Reformed Church
Ridgewood, New York

city
(from que)

4/24, created as
union church

United Presbyterian & Reformed Church of orng
Port Jervis N.Y.
Port Jervis, New York
a union church comprised of
Deerpark Reformed Church
Port Jervis, New York;
and
First Presbyterian Church Port Jervis N.Y. (PC[USA])
Port Jervis, New York

FINANCIAL REPORTS

The American Institute of CPAs Auditing Standards Board issued a Statement on Auditing Standards (no. 137, The Auditor's Responsibilities Relating to Other Information Included in Annual Reports) that affects the way in which the audited financial reports have been referenced within the General Synod Minutes in the past. Under this new standard, any link to the audited financials within the General Synod Minutes would require the entire text of the General Synod Minutes to be professionally audited; both the timeline and cost of this are prohibitive. Financial highlights of each organization are presented within the report of the Office of Finance in these minutes. For more information, please contact the Office of Finance at finance@rca.org.

2024 STATISTICAL TABLES

Statistical tables containing data from the Consistorial Report Form from 2000 to 2024 are available online at crf.rca.org/public.

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The index is in three parts. Part one is the typical index of biblical citations, arranged in the order of the books of the Bible. This index includes citations included in the numerous reports made to synod by agencies, assemblies, and commissions. It does not include citations in reprinted reference and informational sources submitted in the overtures.

Part two is the subject index, which includes all the major report divisions. A third index lists all the names mentioned in the many reports. Not included are the names of delegates, nominees appointed to bodies, or members of bodies listed in the front pages of the minutes. The *Book of Church Order (BCO)* citations index the various citations of the *BCO* throughout the reports and actions.

The desire is to provide access to the vast range of information available in the minutes in an efficient manner. Comments on the accessibility of this style and suggestions for future improvements are appreciated.

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2025 Acts and Proceedings of the General Synod



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