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 (RCA). 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 confessions and ecumenical practices as outlined in "An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America," adopted by General Synod in 1996 (*Minutes of General Synod 1996,* R-1, p. 197). General Synod may also refer ecumenical matters to the commission for study and implementation. The commission meets several times each year by Zoom and holds one multi-day in-person meeting in the fall.

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 to 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. We are grateful to our general secretary, Rev. Eddy Alemán, and to the Rev. Dr. Laura Osborne, RCA staff liaison, for their commitment to and participation in many of these organizations.

World Council of Churches

The World Council of Churches (WCC) 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 356 churches in 120 countries, representing more than half a billion Christians around the world.

Central Committee

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 and last met June 18-24, 2025, in Johannesburg, South Africa. RCA general secretary Rev. Eddy Alemán attended the meeting as proxy for Rev. Stacey Duensing Pearce, who was on maternity leave. At the Johannesburg meeting, Rev. Duensing Pearce was elected to serve on the WCC Assembly Planning Committee.

Sixth World Council on Faith and Order

In October 2025, Dr. Monica Schaap Pierce participated as the Reformed Church in America's delegate to the sixth World Conference on Faith and Order, convened by the World Council of Churches at the Logos Papal Centre in Wadi El Natrun, Egypt, under the theme "Where Now for Visible Unity?" Held at the invitation of His Holiness Pope Tawadros II of the Coptic Orthodox Church, the conference gathered approximately 400 participants, including 100 official delegates and nearly 100 young adults participating in the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI). The setting—near the historic St. Bishoy Monastery and within the theological legacy of the See of Alexandria—underscored the deep historical roots of Christian unity efforts.

Alexandria has long held significance for global Christianity, particularly in the development and reception of the Nicene faith, most notable through the work of St. Athanasius in the early church's response to Arianism. The location provided a context in which contemporary ecumenical dialogue could be grounded in the ancient practices of prayer, monastic wisdom, and theological reflection.

The purpose of the conference was to review developments in ecumenical theology since the last world conference in 1993, to discern the challenges facing global Christianity today, and to advise the Faith and Order Commission on its future work. Participants met in confessional, regional, thematic, and workshop groups, seeking to articulate shared understandings of "visible unity." The conference affirmed that unity is not reducible to institutional uniformity or doctrinal conformity, but is instead communion rooted in baptism, expressed through shared prayer, mutual recognition of ministries, and common witness and service to the world. Delegates also emphasized the need to articulate unity in ways that are attentive to historical wounds, including those related to colonialism, slavery, and cultural domination, and to pursue forms of mission marked by repentance, justice, and reconciliation. A significant highlight was the theological and spiritual leadership offered by the GETI young adult participants, whose final report called the global church to greater courage, clarity, and embodied witness to Christ's reconciling love; their contribution received a standing ovation.

The conference concluded with the adoption, by consensus, of two documents: a brief pastoral message addressed as a "Call to All Christians" and a longer set of theological affirmations addressed to churches and theologians. Together, they call

the churches to a renewed commitment to faith, mission, and unity in Christ. The link to these documents is below.

In light of this work, Dr. Schaap Pierce encouraged RCA congregations to reclaim and deepen their engagement with the Nicene Creed in worship. The creed is not only a summary of foundational Christian belief, but also a living expression of the unity that binds us to Christians across traditions, cultures, and centuries. Regular use of the creed in worship reminds us that our identity is rooted in a shared confession of the Triune God and that our call to visible unity is not merely institutional, but spiritual, sacramental, and missional.

Dr. Schaap Pierce would like to express her gratitude for the honor of representing the RCA in this global discernment; she is especially grateful to the Commission on Christian Unity, the general secretary, and the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship for making her participation possible.

www.oikoumene.org/news/sixth-world-conference-on-faith-and-order-issues-call-to-all-christians

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

The WCC invites Christians to join in prayer January 18-25 for the annual "Week of Prayer for Christian Unity" and offers resources for worship, prayer, and Bible study. The 2026 theme was "There is ONE BODY and ONE SPIRIT, just as you are called to the ONE HOPE of your calling" (Ephesians 4:4). The materials were prepared by the Interchurch Relations Department of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The Commission on Christian Unity created daily social media videos with local ecumenical partners 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 (www.oikoumene.org/resources).

Public Statements

The WCC regularly makes public statements about world events. The commission commends to pastors and churches these public statements as resources that can be shared with church leadership teams and congregations for prayer, discussion, and discernment about how to live in faithful discipleship. All the published WCC public statements can be read in full on the WCC website (www.oikoumene.org). This year, the WCC's public statements have included the following:

- Praying for "just peace for the people of Ukraine" (August 15, 2025)
- the "international community to confront destructive trajectory for settlement plans in Palestine" (August 19, 2025)
- Condemning "the large scale assault in Gaza" (August 21, 2025)
- "Condolences to people of Minneapolis in wake of school shooting" (August 28, 2025)
- Marking "World Mental Health Day: 'we must be vigilant and respond'" (October 10, 2025)

- Stating "'There is a biblical mandate for us to be at the table': Faith leader on climate justice at COP30" (November 28, 2025)
- Condemning "US Attacks in Venezuela, calls for respect for international law" (January 3, 2026)
- Declaring "people of Greenland have an inalienable right to self-determination" (January 15, 2026)
- Statement "on the escalating violence in Minneapolis" (January 28, 2026)
- WCC expresses grave concern over military attacks against Iran (February 28, 2026)

Global Christian Forum

The Guiding Purpose Statement of the Global Christian Forum (GCF) is "to create an open space wherein representatives from a broad range of Christian churches and inter-church organizations, 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 has continued its unique ecumenical role in gathering together the leadership of the World Evangelical Alliance, the Pentecostal World Fellowship, the World Council of Churches, and the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, along with leaders from several other denominations and global Christian organizations. This makes it the most expansive global ecumenical body in world Christianity today. Its International Committee was hosted by the Vatican in April 2026. Priorities include expanding the participation of youth in all its activities, increasing its communication capacity, and sharing the examples and methodology of "faith sharing" which is at the foundation of its gatherings.

The Rev. Dr. Casely Essamuah serves as its executive secretary. RCA general secretary emeritus Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson serves on the Facilitation Group of its International Committee and as president of the Global Christian Forum Foundation. The Rev. Stacey Duensing Pearce serves on the International Committee as a youth connector.

For more information on the Global Christian Forum, visit: www.globalchristianforum.org.

World Communion of Reformed Churches

The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) is a global communion made up of Congregational, Presbyterian, Reformed, United/Uniting, and Waldensian churches representing more than 100 million Christians from 109 countries around the world. Bringing together reformed churches from the Global South and North, the WCRC has consistently condemned oppression and injustice in the world—challenging colonialism, apartheid, gender inequality, and the unjust treatment of the poor and the environment.

At its General Council held in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in October 2025, the member churches of the WCRC celebrated 150 years of communion and cooperation. The Reformed Church in America was strongly represented: general secretary Rev. Eddy Alemán, Rev. Dr. Laura Osborne, Rev. Kim Pavlovich, and seminarian Jessica Loper were sent by the commission as delegates to the event, while Rev. Chelsea Lampen served as lead chaplain, and Marvella Harberts as minute taker. Of special note is the dedicated service of Rev. Dr. Lisa Vander Wal in her role as vice president of the WCRC over the previous seven years and her excellent moderation of many sessions of the General Council. A powerful moment of reconciliation and humility took place when the Rev. Dr. Setri Nyomi (WCRC interim general secretary) and the Rev. Cesar Garcia (general secretary of the Mennonite World Conference) washed each other's feet, a sign of the ongoing healing taking place between reformed and anabaptist communities.

In addition to its ongoing pursuit of justice and koinonia throughout the world, the WCRC recently welcomed Rev. Philip Peacock as its new general secretary and the first person to serve in this role from the continent of Asia. Recently released materials from the WCRC also include a 700-page volume commemorating the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, entitled *Receiving Nicaea Today: Global Voices from Reformed Perspectives* (available for purchase or free PDF download at https://www.eva-leipzig.de/de/lessing-sadananda-case-winters-ernst-habib-king-kuo-mueller-smit-receiving-nicaea-today). Additionally, a graphic novel giving life and voice to the Accra Confession for a new generation was produced: *The Empire Trembled: The Birth of a Confession* (available for download at https://wcrc.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/ACCRA_SEPT-18-1.pdf).

In her report to the CCU, Rev. Kim Pavlovich shared these personal reflections:

> In October 2025, I had the privilege of participating in the gathering of the World Communion of Reformed Churches in Chiang Mai, Thailand, joining leaders and delegates from across the globe in prayer, worship, and discernment. Together, we engaged in significant issues facing the global church, including climate justice, migration, economic inequality, and the ongoing call to unity and reconciliation within the body of Christ. The assembly adopted several statements and commitments that reaffirm our shared theological convictions and strengthened our resolve to stand in solidarity with communities experiencing conflict and displacement.
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> One of the most meaningful aspects of the gathering was a visit to the Myanmar border, where we spent time at a school serving Karen refugees. There, we met with college and seminary students whose faith, resilience, and dedication to ministry were deeply moving. Our conversations were thoughtful and sincere. That time of listening and learning embodied the very spirit of the Communion—global in scope, yet deeply personal—reminding me that our shared commitments are lived out in real communities and real lives. It was a profound experience of connection that continues to shape my understanding of our global Reformed family.

More information about the WCRC can be found at its website: www.wcrc.eu.

National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA

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 over 40 million persons in more than 100,000 local congregations across the nation. The RCA was a charter member of the NCC, and our general secretary, the Rev. Eddy Alemán, serves on its governing board and on the executive committee as chair of the finance committee. The RCA is also represented on the NCC's Faith and Order Convening Table by the Rev. Matthew van Maastricht. Led by the Rev. Vashti Murphy McKenzie, a retired bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, who serves as the president and general secretary, the NCC has continued its long history of advocacy on important issues such as world peace, gun violence, antiracism efforts, and economic and social justice.

In October 2025, the NCC celebrated its 75th anniversary in conjunction with its annual Christian Unity Gathering in Boston, Massachusetts. The overall theme was "One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts" (Psalm 145:4, NRSVue). Plenary sessions and worship services were held at the Huffington Ecumenical Institute on the campus of the Greek Orthodox Hellenic College in Brookline, St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral in Boston, and the Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church in Cambridge. Highlights included the installation of His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America as the new president of the NCC Governing Board, the launch of the MOSAIC Storytelling Project, and the introduction of a new publication from the Faith and Order Convening Table on the Nicene Creed. Entitled "Nicaea: The Council and the Creed That Defined Christianity," and published to coincide with the World Council of Churches' celebration of the 1,700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed, this volume includes contributions (including one from the Rev. Matthew van Maastricht) on the historical importance of Nicaea, the meaning of Nicaea for us today, and the importance of Nicaea moving forward.

For more information on the NCC and its work, visit its website, www.nationalcouncilofchurches.us.

Christian Churches Together

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." This year, the Forum will celebrate 20 years. The Rev. Dr. Laura Osborne, Rev. Judy Nelson, and Rev. Joshua Pruis attended the fall gathering of CCT in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, a city with great historical significance. According to CCT's website:

> On October 7-9, 2025, leaders from CCT's 36 communions and organizations met in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to share faith stories, pray in the traditions of CCT's five families, and reflect on the gospel and the church's witness. The gathering explored the ecumenical confession of Jesus as "Light" and a renewed commitment to being a light in the world as we mark the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. Additionally, the 500th anniversary of Anabaptism offered an opportunity to acknowledge historical wounds of dissent and injustice, while reaffirming a shared call to repentance, reconciliation, and the flourishing of all.

As part of the gathering, there was a joint service of repentance and reconciliation between the Anabaptist traditions and the Reformed traditions.

Dr. Monica Schaap Pierce, a member of the RCA, is the executive director of CCT. Past General Synod president Rev. Judy Nelson serves on its steering committee.

More information can be found on CCT's website: www.christianchurchestogether.org.

Anabaptist Rapprochement

Although the following recommendation was made several years ago, action was not taken on it until recently.

> 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*, H 19-2, p. 276).

In accordance with H 19-2 adopted by General Synod 2019, the Commission on Christian Unity continues working with Christian Churches Together to facilitate a discussion with the Mennonites, the Church of the Brethren, and the Bruderhof.

This past year, commission members Laura Osborne and Kim Pavlovich attended the meeting of Christian Churches Together where they participated in a Service of Remembrance and Healing with Danielle Hickman from the UCC and Monica Schaap Pierce from CCT. The Church of the Brethren was also involved in the service. This was an important step in responding to the RCA's mandate to begin the process of reconciliation and healing between the RCA and Anabaptist worshiping communities. The service incorporated various symbols that pointed to remembrance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. A similar service had been led by the WCRC in Switzerland. One important reference was Michael Baumann's *Steps to Reconciliation: Reformed and Anabaptist Churches in Dialogue.* Other RCA attendees included Judy Nelson and Josh Pruis. A video of the service is available online via the CCT's YouTube page.

The CCU plans to continue the process toward rapprochement, repentance, and reconciliation by scheduling a visit to a local Bruderhof community in the coming year.

Churches for Middle East Peace

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. It advocates for just U.S. policies toward the Middle East by contacting members of Congress, participating in Hill and government meetings, and attending Advocacy Summits. The Rev. Dr. Laura Osborne sits on its governing board.

CMEP mobilizes Christians in the United States to advocate equality, human rights, security, and justice for Israelis, Palestinians, and all people of the Middle East. These values are inherent to the gospel, and it is CMEP's mission to promote these values on the world stage. It works toward these ends in three ways: educate, elevate, and advocate. The RCA has been involved in their "Let Children Live" and "Ceasefire Now" campaigns (https://cmep.org/let-children-live).

The RCA participates in the spring CMEP Advocacy days in Washington, D.C. There are two solidarity trips planned for 2026 with CMEP and the RCA. The first trip will be to South Africa on April 18-27, 2026. In this trip we will be meeting with the leadership of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, the Uniting Reformed Church (this denomination produced the Belhar Confession), and the South African Council of Churches. The second solidarity trip to Israel/Palestine is planned for this fall.

For more information, visit http://cmep.org.

Creation Justice Ministries

The mission of Creation Justice Ministries (CJM) is "to educate, equip and mobilize Christian individuals, congregations, denominations, and communions to protect, restore, and rightly share God's creation." To carry out this mission, CJM organizes public witness events, provides resources for theological education, and mobilizes people to defend bedrock environmental laws.

The Reformed Church in America served as a denominational co-sponsor of the 2025 Season of Creation witness events, a series of public theology events with gatherings in Washington, D.C., Phoenix, Atlanta, and Grand Rapids. Robin Suydam and the Rev. Dr. Daniel Carlson are the key RCA representatives to Creation Justice Ministries. This past year a cohort of nearly 150 preachers explored what it means to preach compellingly in a climate-changed world. A new resource has been published for 2026, entitled "Canopy of Creation." It is centered on tree equity, climate resilience, and the spiritual and communal significance of urban canopy. Several community "Tree Equity" projects have been launched in Baltimore, Austin, Orlando, and other cities.

Learn more and download these resources at www.creationjustice.org/resources.

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. 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 produced a revised guide on "The Orderly Exchange of Ministers of Word and Sacrament" document: https://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(U.S.A.), 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.

The Rev. Dr. Laura Osborne works with other ecumenical associates to fulfill our ecumenical mandate.

When invited, RCA representatives attend the general assemblies of our Formula of Agreement partners. We have a minister who also attends the PC(U.S.A.)'s ecumenical and interreligious committee meetings twice a year.

Relations with the Christian Reformed Church in North America

Shortly after the RCA's General Synod 2025, the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) held its Synod, in which they debated Overture 23, which would fundamentally change the RCA/CRCNA relationship. The Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC), the CRCNA's counterpart to the Commission on Christian Unity, made several recommendations in response: 1) To pray for the RCA, 2) To establish that RCA ministers serving in CRCNA contexts would sign the CRC's declaration for officeholders regarding human sexuality, 3) To instruct the EIRC to conduct a five-year review of the RCA/CRCNA relationship and to examine the practice of the RCA in regards to having affirming ministers/congregations, 4) To urge caution in forming any additional union churches between the two denominations, 5) To instruct CRCNA delegates to RCA assemblies to communicate both "love" and "concern" to the RCA.

All five of those recommendations passed. The CRCNA is now conducting its five-year review of the relationship with the RCA. The Commission on Christian Unity is in prayer for the EIRC and its work, while also praying for RCA ministers serving CRCNA congregations during this time of uncertainty.

Relations with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the USA

The CCU received the following directive from General Synod in 2023:

> To 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. 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 now been four 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."

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.

For more information, visit www.uocofusa.org, the website of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA.

Acknowledgements

The commission welcomed Jeannette Plat as a new member this year. We are grateful for the service of the following members whose terms are ending this June: Rev. Robert Hoffman, Elder Kitt Jackson (who has served as moderator the past two years), Rev. Jeff Lampen (longtime secretary), and our non-RCA colleague, Rev. Anthony Elenbaas (a Christian Reformed Church in North America pastor).

We also wish to celebrate the many local ecumenical collaborations that take place every year. Being involved at the conciliar level of ecumenism is important, but the day-to-day connections of local clergy groups, community ministries, joint Bible studies, prayer vigils, and worship services are all very real ways to demonstrate and live out the unity we already share as followers of Jesus Christ.