

Executive Summary of the Denominations 2020 Vision Report

August 18, 2020

Our denomination finds itself in a very critical time. Our denomination has been divided on the issue of human sexuality and Biblical interpretation for over 40 years. In recent years the divide has grown deeper, and some churches are leaving the denomination. On top of this, extraordinary amounts of time and energy are put into this topic every year rather than focusing on our common mission. For years the Denomination has reconfirmed its stance as marriage between a man and a woman. It has also confirmed a posture of loving dignity and acceptance of all people, and affirmed that all sex outside of marriage is sin. However there is a vocal minority that has advocated strongly over the years for an acceptance of and encouragement for clergy to perform gay weddings, and the right to ordain practicing homosexuals, affirms the sexual practices of those in the LGBT community, and to fight for the adoption of these “rights” for our denomination as a whole. As a result, a 12-member task force was appointed to figure out a way forward for us as a denomination. The 2020 vision report is their recommendation to our denomination as a way to move forward. Below is a summary of their extensive work, polling, surveys, conversations, the results.

Two years ago at General Synod 2018, then–interim general secretary, Don Poest, shared a necessary and critical observation; namely, that these questions have never been answered to the full denomination’s satisfaction, and our ongoing attempts to answer them are ultimately “keeping us from the mission on which we should be focusing” (*MGS 2018*, p.18).

With the support of then-general secretary candidate Eddy Alemán and the General Synod Council and informed by consultation with the Council of Synod Executives (COSE), Don proposed a team be formed to examine possible ways forward for the denomination. In the proposal, the team was directed to thoroughly examine and discern (at a minimum) the following three scenarios:

- 1) Staying together
- 2) Radical reconstituting and reorganizing
- 3) Grace-filled separation

Together, Yet Changed (Recommendation 1—Restructuring)

1. Classes are reorganized as affinity-based rather than geographically-based, with the ability of any church to choose the classis to which it belongs.

2. Classes are responsible for decisions related to ordination and marriage. This would end the debate at the General Synod level around these topics and fit naturally with the proposed affinity model for classes.

3. Discipline of individual consistories occurs at the classis level.

4. The viability, responsibility, and effectiveness of regional synods and General Synod are examined in light of the size, scope, and structure of the denomination that remains. Regional Synod would likely be eliminated.

Preserving Our Shared History (Recommendation 2—A New Mission Agency)

To form a new nonprofit mission agency independent of the RCA that will house what currently makes up the RCA’s work in global missions

Forward with Grace (Recommendation 3—Mutually Generous Separation)

Our hope is that both of the preceding proposals, once formally presented to General Synod, will be adopted by the denomination and that they will meet many of the needs that we have heard expressed. Some who had considered leaving the denomination may choose to stay and see the restructuring as an opportunity to breathe new life into an organization they love. Others may still leave but find ongoing connection with their former denomination through the new mission agency. Still others may decide to forge an entirely new path, to seek God's call on their lives through other relationships and partnerships.

Recognizing that some separation is inevitable, we believe the RCA has an opportunity to act in an exemplary way by providing a generous exit path for those churches which decide to leave and by inviting those churches to also act generously.

Gracious separation would include such things as:

- That any exit from the denomination would be done by churches or individual ministers of Word and sacrament from their classes. If entire classes and regional synods wish to leave, they must do so one church at a time, as already provided for in the *BCO*.
- Regarding a church's financial relationship with and commitments to the RCA,
- That churches which decide to leave would be allowed to retain their property and other assets and would be solely responsible for any liabilities.
Classes would be required to allow exiting churches to leave
- Churches which decide to leave would be required to continue paying all assessments for a two-year period of time to General Synod, regional synod, and classis, starting from the time that they express their written intent to leave the denomination.