

Global Mission and Ecumenical Matters

Chair: Rev. Jeffrey Scripps
Reporter: Rev. Darrin Compagner

I. Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee and Response to Overture 23, Communication 7, and Communication 8

A. Materials

1. EIRC Report, Section VII.B and Appendix (Agenda p. 247-251, p. 253-254)
2. EIRC Supplement, Appendix C
3. Overture 23, pp. 387-388
4. Communication 7, pp. 427-429
5. Communication 8, pp. 429-431

B. Preamble

As the Apostle Paul proclaims, “In Christ Jesus, all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church” (Col 1:17-18). In him and through him, we are declared to be a holy and united people. This holiness and unity is both gift and goal, as the CRC’s Ecumenical Charter notes.

Seeking to live out of this, our true identity in Christ, the CRC pursues relationship with other branches of the church. The closest and most deeply interrelated relationship is with the Reformed Church in America. For more than 160 years, the relationship between the two denominations has been rich and encouraging, yet full of challenges. In 2014, the Pella Accord committed the two denominations “to act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately.” We celebrate and give thanks for the rich and enduring relationships and many shared ventures in ministry and mission.

In many places and ways, this relationship continues to be fruitful for Christ’s kingdom. Even so, we acknowledge with deep concern and significant lament that the relationship between the two currently experiences tensions and pressure points. Many in the CRC are concerned about what has become a persistent presenting issue, an inconsistency in the RCA’s stated confessional commitments regarding marriage and sexuality, and the actual teaching and practice. For some, the concern is of such depth that ongoing communion and shared mission and ministry is placed in question.

In Christ all things hold together, but with fallen sinners, things fall apart. Acknowledging both the significant joys and the very real struggles, we present the recommendations below seeking both greater holiness and deeper unity, with God’s help.

C. Recommendations

1. That synod pray for the Reformed Church of America and for the health of the relationship between our two denominations. May we spur one another to greater faithfulness and fruitfulness in Christ Jesus.
2. That synod adopt a change (indicated by underline) to Church Order Supplement, Article

8, D, 6:

6. To be able to serve in another church, an ordained minister will demonstrate to the appropriate body of the inviting church a knowledge of and appreciation for the theological and liturgical identity, history, polity, and discipline of the church. RCA office-bearers serving in the CRC will sign the Covenant for Officebearers on the occasions stipulated by council, classical, and synodical regulations.

Grounds:

- a. Due to changes underway in RCA polity, this change would clarify that accountability rests with the receiving church's council and the Covenant for Officebearers.
- b. The current language of Church Order Supplement, Article 8, D, 6 emphasizes "knowledge of and appreciation for the theological and liturgical identity, history, polity, and discipline of the church," but signing of the Covenant for Officebearers signifies a deeper level of commitment.
- c. "The mandatory provisions of one [denomination's Church Order] shall apply in all cases when the others are permissive" (Supplement, Art. 38-g, 1, v; Supplement, Art. 38-h, r). d. Due to the great need for confessionally-Reformed ministers to serve in the pulpits of the CRC, there is good reason to keep Art.8b with the proposed Supplemental change (re: signing the Covenant for Officebearers) in place.
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3. That synod instruct the EIRC to conduct a five-year review of the ecumenical relationship, assessing the benefits and drawbacks of an *in communion* relationship. This review would consider ministry partnerships, agency support, "Union Churches," exchange of ministers, and other joint ventures (such as the Reformed Benefits Association). The EIRC should give annual updates to synod, with a final report and any recommendations to Synod 2029. Among other topics, the EIRC should continue the dialogue regarding (*Agenda* 2025, p. 253):

- a. The RCA's ongoing commitment in faith and practice to Heidelberg Catechism Q&A's 108 and 109, specifically as it relates to the forbidding of unchastity, which encompasses homosexual sex.
- b. Whether RCA clergy have been, or are being, permitted to solemnize same-sex marriages, or to themselves remain in same-sex marriages or romantic partnerships, while remaining ministers in good standing.

Grounds:

- 1) The current landscape is shifting for both denominations and between them, in terms of confessional commitments, polity, and structure. A re-evaluation of the many components of the relationship will benefit from a thoughtful, discerning, patient process. Though urgent, it should be unhurried.
- 2) The EIRC is best positioned to conduct this review.

4. That synod, during the period of this review, urge caution regarding the formation of further "Union Churches," lest changes in the denominational relationship cause future difficulties.

5. That synod instruct CRC ecumenical delegates to the RCA to communicate the CRC's love and concern for the RCA, its integrity, witness, and faithfulness in all matters.

6. That synod declare this to be its response to Overture 23, Communication 7, and Communication 8.