

We, the undersigned, are members of the Body of Christ, the Church, and Jesus is its only head. We are leaders of the Gospel Alliance and Room for All. The two organizations are not assemblies, agencies, or commissions of the Reformed Church in America (RCA). In our roles as leaders of the two organizations, we do not have authority to effect constitutional changes in the denomination. We have come together, guided by the Holy Spirit, to discern how the RCA might move forward as a denomination.

We gathered in person for two days of discussion, fellowship, and prayer. With us were the President of General Synod, Lee DeYoung, and the Interim General Secretary, Don Poest. We explored answers to two questions:

How might the RCA move forward as a denomination together?

How might the RCA move forward as a denomination apart?

Our time together was productive, creative, and respectful. We listened carefully to each other. We were vulnerable. We were forgiving. We moved forward in our discussion slowly together, even when we could not agree.

During our discussions, we named and lamented some of the hurts and wounds that have been inflicted in denominational discussions about human sexuality. Some people have been hurt intentionally. Many people have been wounded when harm was not intended. We confessed how we personally have hurt others. We are still learning how we have and may continue to wound others.

For many years, siblings in Christ in the RCA have acted in wrongful ways around our disagreements. Some of our disagreements are fundamental to our faith. We disagree about the interpretation of Scripture and the Standards of the RCA. We disagree about the most effective form of governance for our classes and regional ministries. We are tired of arguing. We are tired of hurting each other. If we continue to behave in mutually destructive ways around our disagreements, The Reformed Church in America will perish.

We seek healing from the hurts we have inflicted on each other.

We seek movement forward together.

We seek the freedom to serve, unburdened by our disagreements.

We seek clarity of a shared vision for our denomination.

We seek new life for the Church and its people.

During our discussions, we learned some of our misconceptions about each other. Although we have different understandings of human sexuality, we share many views:

We love the RCA and seek its flourishing.

We believe in the gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and as expressed in the Standards of the RCA.

We accept the Scriptures as the only rule of faith and life.
We accept the Standards as historic and faithful witnesses to the Word of God.
We seek to live into our calling to teach and preach 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.
We are called to love and support people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and/or questioning (LGBTQ).
While all things are possible through God, we do not believe that prayer or conversion therapy can change one's sexual orientation or gender identity.
We believe that the healthiest way to express human sexuality is through a committed, mutually loving relationship between two people.
We have much to learn about human sexuality. We do not have all the answers. We want to listen and learn from each other.
We are committed to move forward as one denomination.

We imagined moving forward using the existing governmental framework as set forth in the Book of Church Order. Some of us felt strongly that the denomination must adopt a position on whether or not to fully include LGBTQ people in the life of the church. This approach would therefore require changes to our Constitution. It would also imply a “conscience clause” to allow Classes of different views to consider LGBTQ candidates for ordination, and to allow Consistories of different views to consider authorizing same-sex marriages. Many of us felt that establishing a “conscience clause” was not an acceptable way to move forward together.

We also imagined and sensed energy, though not consensus, around a restructuring of the denomination that accommodates our diverse understandings of the Bible, theology and polity. While we did not explore details of such a restructuring, we imagined the RCA becoming a home for two or more assemblies (or synods, conferences, or groupings) of Classes. Each assembly would be rooted in Reformed history, theology, liturgy, and the Standards, but going forward could be responsible for its own polity, theology, and liturgy. These assemblies could gather together every few years for fellowship, learning, and celebration of our ministries. Many of the institutions of the RCA could remain and provide shared services to the two or more assemblies of the RCA, including the seminaries, the Board of Benefits Services, RCA Missions, RCA offices and staff.

On whatever path the RCA moves forward, it will undergo change. Change will involve loss. Loss will involve grief. We pledge to join with the people of the RCA in confession, grief, and loss. We also pledge to continually proclaim the good news in Christ: By the death and resurrection of Jesus, we are forgiven to go forth and live in peace. As leaders of the Church, we will move forward not as enemies but as friends. Not as opponents but as siblings in Christ. Together, we pray for wisdom and humility, relying on the Spirit to lead us in love.

Bob Bouwer
Charlie Contreras
Marilyn Paarlberg

Tricia Sheffield
Chad Tanaka Pack
Scott Treadway

Attended, but does not support this idea of denominational restructuring: Lynn Japinga