

**With Gratitude and Hope**  
Dennis Voskuil

It is with a grateful heart that I address the synod today.

I am grateful for the privilege of serving the Reformed Church in America for forty years as a pastor, teacher, president, and General Synod professor of theology.

On behalf of my wife, Betty, who has also served the RCA, I want to thank you for nurturing us, supporting us, and praying for us during times of celebration, and during times of crisis and illness.

How wonderful it is to be part of a caring and praying denomination—a spiritual family.

Thank you, brothers and sisters in Christ.

Allow me to conclude on a note of hope.

As a student of American Christianity, and more specifically the RCA, I am fully aware of the challenges that we face as a denomination.

The trend lines indicate that a growing number of Americans and Canadians do not identify themselves with the Christian faith.

This is especially true among the “millennials,” those young people who have come into adulthood since the year 2000.

Nearly all denominations are experiencing decline in membership and church attendance.

Moreover, there are growing legions of young “church-less Christians” who tell us that they love Jesus but want nothing to do with institutional Christianity.

A few years ago *Newsweek* featured a cover with these words printed in bright red on a black background: “The Decline and Fall of Christian America.”

Is it any wonder that many Christians are discouraged and dismayed about the future of our faith?

As leaders of the RCA you are well aware of the challenges that face our denomination.

Despite laudable programs of revitalization and multiplication, we are struggling to be faithful to the Great Commission.

Moreover, we are in danger of being polarized because of disagreements over issues such as homosexuality and the role of women in the church.

But, my friends, despite all the trendlines and all the challenges ahead of us, we are people of hope.

We are people of hope because we trust a sovereign gracious God who loves the church of Jesus Christ.

We are people of hope because Jesus Christ is the head of the church, which is his body.

We are people of hope because Jesus promised his disciples that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church.

The gates of hell shall not prevail against the church!

As we move into the future we will experience challenges that will require changes in approaches, methods, and programs.

Change will continue to occur. It must occur.

But as we change in order to more effectively reach our culture with the gospel of hope, let us employ the building blocks of our rich heritage:

- A Reformed theology of grace
- Standards of faith born out of the Caldron History
- A representative presbyterial polity
- Worship that is centered in the Word
- Theologically-prepared leadership
- A missional impulse—local and global
- A willingness to be led by the Holy Spirit

It is with gratitude and with hope that I share these strengths of our heritage as we meet the challenges of today and tomorrow.

As I move toward retirement I am confident that the Reformed Church in America will continue to serve Christ with integrity and faithfulness, but more importantly my students—young millennials, those who will serve the church in this future—agree. A student from California concluded his essay exam for RCA History and Missions online course with these words:

The future of the RCA is very bright and I am happy to be part of it. I look forward to being more connected to the deep heritage of the RCA and its continued work for the sake of the glory of God in Christ Jesus (Bobby Schuller essay examination, April 2014).

Amen!

Thank you!