

Report of the Commission for Women

The Commission for Women seeks to understand the life of women within the RCA and to support and encourage the full inclusion and participation of women within all contexts of church life. In the RCA, our diversity is our strength; thus, the participation of women will only enhance the life and the ministry of the church and elevate the work that we can accomplish together. Within Transformed & Transforming, the Commission for Women hopes to assist the denomination in providing equal opportunities to women in mission, discipleship, and leadership and to bring visibility to areas where support for women can be improved.

The Commission for Women met twice this year: once in Chicago with the rest of the commissions in October, and again in February at New Brunswick Theological Seminary. We met with women NBTs seminarians over dinner on both the St. John's and New Brunswick campuses to better understand their experience and to learn how we can support their learning and call to ministry.

At the February meeting, the commission also received a letter regarding the Rocky Mountain High youth event and the lack of women in leadership roles at this event. The Commission for Women agreed that it would be helpful to model women's leadership at such events, as this is a critical time in young people's lives.

Thus, the Commission for Women would like to submit the following recommendations:

R 17-33

To recommend that classes assign mentors to their students under care, both men and women, to better guide and equip them through the process of seminary, ordination, job searching, and ministry.

R 17-34

To encourage classes to send women elders, ministers of Word and sacrament, and specialized ministers as voting delegates to both regional and General Synod meetings and other gatherings, and to encourage classes to be more intentional about presenting women in leadership roles in RCA churches and camps.

R 17-35

To request that the president of General Synod 2018 assign women to worship leadership roles for the 2018 General Synod.

Clergy Survey

It is only by speaking with clergy that we can fully understand their experience. While the Commission for Women focuses on supporting women, we felt it was important to understand the experience of all clergy within the denomination. Thus, our clergy survey included both men and women. We are proud to announce that we have received very positive responses regarding job satisfaction among women clergy serving in their various ministry settings. There was no statistical difference between men and women when it came to their own perceived wellbeing and flourishing.

However, because women are a minority in the ranks of RCA clergy, women do have greater challenges in the ministry placement search. The Commission for Women believes that if we

assist gifted women to be more visible, it will normalize their participation in ministries and missions in the church. To this end, the Commission for Women offers the following recommendation:

R 17-36

To instruct the GSC to develop a list of women pastors, elders, and leaders who can be mentors and/or coaches for women throughout the RCA who would like access to such an opportunity.

Another opportunity for improvement revealed by the survey is that both men and women surveyed noted that there is a discrepancy between RCA's official stated policy regarding women's ordination and leadership and actual practice. One way this has manifested itself is that the conscience clause remains within certain documents and on websites. The conscience clause was removed from the *BCO* in 2012. Thus, the Commission for Women makes the following recommendation:

R 17-37

To urge classes and regional synods to review their bylaws, literature, and electronic media to ensure they are in alignment with the *Book of Church Order*, especially with regard to the removal of the conscience clause.

The Commission for Women is committed to continuing to understand the experience of women clergy and other leaders, young and old, so that we can encourage the full inclusion and participation of women in all areas of the RCA. Further results of the clergy survey will be disseminated to the RCA later this year.

We are currently working with the Commission on History to create a celebration of 40 years of women's ordination; this will commence in 2018.

And finally, we thank Barbara Pimentel for faithfully serving on the commission for the last three years and wish her all the best as she embarks on a term of service on the GSC!

Respectfully submitted,

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