

# **Report of the Commission for Women**

## **Our Identity**

The Commission for Women (CFW) seeks to understand the life of women within the Reformed Church in America (RCA) and is committed to the support and advocacy for the full inclusion and participation of women within all contexts of church life. The Commission for Women is committed to raising awareness, to providing opportunities for women in the church, and to providing information so that women can fully participate in the leadership and life of the church.

## **Celebration and Affirmation**

Celebrating the past year can be a wonderful way to reflect on achievements, milestones, and personal growth.

We celebrate and give thanks for the time at General Synod plenary last year. The 2023 General Synod celebrated five decades of women's ordination to offices of elder, deacon, and minister of Word and sacrament in the Reformed Church in America. It was a time of rejoicing over the ways God has created space for women and men in the church to live fully and freely into all of their gifts and callings.

We recognize that we couldn't have had this celebration without the support of Rev. Eddy Alemán. Eddy has been a champion for women in the RCA and in support of full inclusion of women. Along with Eddy, Rev. Dwayne Jackson (president of General Synod 2023) and the presiding 2024 General Synod president, Rev. Judy Nelson, have been encouraging and supportive to women. In 2022, we asked for 20 minutes at a plenary session to celebrate. Eddy, Dwayne, and Judy gifted us an entire plenary session.

We are also grateful for continued partnership with Rev. Liz Testa and her continued work helping the RCA pursue a vision for the full inclusion of the gifts and influence of women. Liz's work cultivating, empowering, and equipping women who are established and emerging leaders is a great partnership with us on the commission.

## **The Commission's Role**

As the Commission for Women, we continue to provide opportunities and resources for developing awareness related to the role of women in church and society. We are energized about how this commission can continue to assist the church toward inclusive attitudes, images, and language in all materials published, designed, or provided for use in the denomination. We want to continue to grow and enable the full and complete participation of women in church and society.

The CFW is dedicated toward seeking systemic change in the church for the full inclusion of women. The commission recognizes there has been some progress, but there continues to be work to be done and we cannot work at this alone. This commission appreciates the collaboration with other RCA bodies working on issues

affecting women, and develops and maintains relationships with similar groups in other denominations, exchanging ideas and material regarding issues affecting women.

The commission is dedicated to fostering continued solidarity and partnership with the Office of Women's Transformation and Leadership to foster an environment in which everyone thrives. Throughout discussions with these partners in ministry, the CFW embraces the strength and trust that are built in these relationships, and we champion the value of this work together. As we embody discipleship with all people in the RCA, we see this value in all these relationships, both men and women, lay people and clergy, as a celebration of our collaboration for resources, networking, and equipping in our faith communities.

Over the years, there has been significant progress in the Reformed Church in America. However, we realize there are still areas where there is work to be done. There is still a need for education and empowerment. As women pursue theological education and training, they are better equipped to serve in leadership roles within the church. The availability of resources and support networks for women in ministry can also contribute to their empowerment and effectiveness.

We acknowledge that we have women leaving our denomination for other denominations because of a lack of call. We also recognize that we are a changing denomination with churches coming into the RCA. There is work for us to do in educating what it means to be an egalitarian denomination and what the continued flourishing of women looks like.

## **Concerns**

Transfers out and demissions: We note that even after the gracious separation, some RCA women clergy have left for other denominations that may offer a more supportive climate for their ministry.

In the process of gracious separation, we would encourage speaking well of each other. While we differ on important matters to each of us, we recognize our shared identity as fellow believers and part of the holy catholic church. We have heard from women clergy and elders of difficult encounters with those who have chosen to leave.

## **Looking to the Future**

The current emergence of attention to religious abuse and trauma leads us to recognize the importance of women clergy and leaders as those who can enter into the experiences of women who may have experienced such abuse and trauma. Some research indicates that many women are leaving the church and there is a need for further study and attention to this. The engagement of younger generations of women with the church will likely shape our future.

The possibility of “affinity” structures in the restructured RCA raises both opportunities and concerns as we think about women’s ministry. We would hope that we do not find women siloed or segregated in such structures.

### **Commission Meetings**

The Commission for Women has met virtually several times since the 2023 General Synod: October 27, 2023; January 22, 2024; February 8, 2024; February 21, 2024; February 27, 2024; and March 7, 2024.

The Commission for Women is deeply grateful for the dedicated and faithful service of Barbara Spooner and Rev. Claudette Reid over the past three years. Their terms of service will be completed at the end of June 2024.

The Commission for Women is also deeply grateful for the dedicated and faithful service of Rev. Mornier Rich as our General Synod Council (GSC) staff liaison and for our continued collaboration with women’s transformation and leadership through Rev. Liz Testa.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rev. Debra Rensink, moderator