

## Report of the General Secretary Eddy Alemán

The Lord be with you!

It is with great joy and gratitude that I come to you today to offer my first report as general secretary of this wonderful, historic denomination.

My first year serving in this capacity has been exciting, frustrating, amazing, challenging, and joyful all at the same time. I must confess to you today, my dear friends, that there have been days that I have asked God in prayer: Lord, why did you call me to serve you as general secretary of the Reformed Church in America in one of the most difficult times of our 391 years of history?

My dear friends, these are challenging times! Like most historical Protestant denominations in North America, we are facing great challenges. We have deep divisions that are threatening our very existence as a denomination. Theological disagreements about human sexuality are tearing us apart. God has called us to our 15-year goal of Transformed & Transforming, and yet there's no alignment at classis, regional, and General Synod levels to help us follow that call. (This is not helped by our polity, which was designed for a different era.) Today, we must ask the question: Do we have a future? This is a difficult question, but it is a very important and necessary question to ask. Do we have a future?

This is not news to anyone—we have been dealing with these disagreements that are in the way of mission and ministry for so many years already—but we have now come to a defining moment in our history. Yes, the RCA is at a crossroads. Our denomination as we have known it for centuries no longer exists!

We cannot continue holding on to the status quo year after year. We are experiencing a slow death, and it seems that we don't care. We all believe that unity is important, necessary, and central for our lives as disciples of Jesus in the world. We preach about unity in our churches. We teach and write books about unity. No one will challenge or question that, but in reality, in the Reformed Church in America, we are not united!

Then, we come to Scripture and read Jesus's final prayer before his crucifixion, according to the Gospel of John in chapter 17:20-22:

I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one.

Dear brothers and sisters, Jesus longs for his church to be united. Jesus longs for his disciples in the Reformed Church in America to be his hands and feet in a lost and

broken world so loved by God. This may not be a popular view at the moment, but I'm just trying to name reality as I see it in our midst.

We are at a "Red Sea moment," where God must make a way for us *if* we are to continue in our journey together. We are at a critical moment! The good thing is that it is at these kinds of critical moments when God shows up in a mighty way to take his people to the next level, and I believe that's exactly what God wants to do with us.

I believe that, in the years ahead of us, we will continue be a great testimony of faithfulness to Scripture and to mission and ministry in North America and the world. God's covenant and promises to Solomon at the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem give us the steps to follow if we want to see God work a miracle among us. In 2 Chronicles 7:14-16 we read:

If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place. For now I have chosen and consecrated this house so that my name may be there forever; my eyes and my heart will be there for all time.

We need more humility.

We need more prayer.

We need to seek the face of God more.

We need to turn from our sins.

This passage is clear: for God to hear us from heaven and to forgive our sins and to heal our land, we have to humble ourselves. We have to sacrifice our egos and our self-righteousness on the altar of the Lord.

We need to be more like Jesus, who constantly prayed to the Father for long—very long—periods of time. We need to be serious with our commitment to seek the face of God at all times, and we need to confess our sins to the Lord and turn away from those sinful actions. In Acts 3:19-21 we read:

Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah appointed for you, that is, Jesus, who must remain in heaven until the time of universal restoration that God announced long ago through his holy prophets.

In the RCA, we need a time of refreshing from the Lord, and I believe those times are coming very soon!

Last year, our interim general secretary, the Rev. Don Poest, brought a proposal to General Synod. Don brought this proposal with hope for the future and sensing the urgency of the moment. He brought it with input from the Council of Synod Executives and with my support and the support of the General Synod Council. That proposal read:

To appoint a 2020 Vision Group to work, in consultation with whatever staff, commissions, councils, agencies, and/or outside consultants the vision group deems necessary, to identify possible scenarios, strategies, and consequences for these future options for the Reformed Church in America:

Staying together  
Radical reconstituting and reorganization  
Graceful separation

As you all know, this proposal was approved by the 2018 General Synod, and the 2020 Vision Team was formed. It includes:

- Charles Contreras, pastor of Faith Church's Munster, Indiana, campus.
- Diane Smith Faubion, an elder at First Reformed Church of Scotia in New York.
- Barbara Felker, pastor of leadership development at Highbridge Community Church in the Bronx, New York.
- Tom Goodhart, pastor of Trinity Reformed Church in Ridgewood, New York.
- Brian Keepers, pastor of Trinity Reformed Church in Orange City, Iowa.
- Kristen Livingston, pastor of congregational care at Ann Arbor Christian Reformed Church in Ann Arbor, Michigan.
- John Messer, regional executive of the Synod of the Great Lakes.
- Christa Mooi, executive director of operations at First Reformed Church in Sioux Center, Iowa.
- Rudy Rubio, co-pastor at Reformed Church of Los Angeles in Lynwood, California.
- Marijke Strong, executive secretary of the Regional Synod of Canada.
- Scott Treadway, pastor of Rancho Community Church in Temecula, California.
- Imos Wu, co-pastor of Bogart Memorial Reformed Church in Bogota, New Jersey.

Don Poest and I serve the team as *ex-officio* members. Jim Herrington, Trisha Taylor, and Ryan Donovan from The Leader's Journey serve as facilitators for the process.

Most of the team is here today. Wherever you are, can you please stand?

Please join me in thanking them for their hard work during this year!

I also want to give a shout out to the churches and ministries where these capable leaders serve. They have invested long hours of meetings in this process—and many, many hours between meetings—and their churches and ministries are giving them the

beautiful opportunity to serve the Lord and the Reformed Church in America on this team.

Please join me also in thanking these wonderful churches!

The Holy Spirit has anointed this team of leaders from across the RCA to see things differently. This past year, this team of faithful and committed leaders have worked very hard in developing different possible scenarios for our future as a denomination.

In this meeting, you, delegates of the 2019 General Synod, representing Jesus and the classes and regions of the RCA, will have the opportunity to offer your feedback to those possible scenarios. I ask you to have honest, graceful, and respectful conversations full of the love of Jesus with one another. I'm sure that some of the scenarios presented will scare you a lot, and others will give you a lot of hope.

This team is working hard to bring a final report next year. It will be disruptive but full of hope. Your feedback this year will be instrumental in the team's work over the next year and in the final report they will bring. This synod has been designed so that you can deeply engage with these scenarios. Please make sure to listen well and to share with honesty and integrity with your brothers and sisters. That will be part of your feedback groups during this meeting. Please remember that we are in this together, we are discerning the voice of the Holy Spirit, and discernment happens in community. I'm a strong believer that the greatest accomplishments in life happen in community.

I must also confess that I'm very excited and humbled to be called by God to serve the Reformed Church in America in this capacity during this time in our history.

Please listen to me well; I'm not contradicting myself. This is one of the most difficult times for us as a denomination, but I'm not afraid or fearful because this is also one of the most exciting and hopeful times of our history.

I strongly believe that God is calling us to trust him and to dream a new dream. God is inviting us to get out of the comfort zone and to move out of the box. The greatest things in life often happen out of the comfort zone. God is inviting us to cast a new vision for the future, to create our own new future, and to take his hand and move with him to the places where he wants to take us.

Let us not fight the future but fight *for* the future. To fight for the future, we need hope—lots of it! We must believe there is a future for the Reformed Church in America worth fighting for. I know that for the church, this is a very difficult thing to do. It is ironic that God has entrusted us with the message to change the world and to heal the nations—and still we miss the point and instead focus on things that get us stuck and paralyzed. I wholeheartedly agree with pastor and author Erwin McManus when he writes:

The church has become an institution that preserves the past and fears the future. It is not an overstatement to say that the church has become more of a

reflection of what we are running from than what we are running to. No wonder we have lost the power to change the world. No wonder the church has lost its magnetism to a world searching for hope. We are seen as the guardians of tradition. The church is known for fighting the future rather than creating the future that humanity desperately needs.<sup>1</sup>

God is inviting us to create a new future for the Reformed Church in America, a future full of hope and great potential, a future focused on what's really important. God is doing something new in us and is allowing this disruptive moment to do something new. Friends, let's choose the future. Let's fight for the future and not against it.

This is indeed a great time to serve the Lord. And I'm happy and full of hope for our future. Today more than ever, the world needs to hear the message of the gospel proclaimed with boldness and passion. We must remove all the roadblocks for mission and focus on what's really important: the proclamation of the gospel.

And what is the gospel? I must ask this question today because it seems that some people have forgotten what the gospel is. The gospel is the story of Jesus, his incarnation, his life and ministry, his death on the cross, his resurrection, his ascension, and his second coming. We live today in between the ascension and the second coming.

Jesus was a well-balanced leader, and we in the Reformed Church in America need the radical balance of Jesus. I'm calling the Reformed Church in America today to the radical balance of seriously engaging in acts of mercy, compassion, and justice, and at the same time, calling people to repentance and to following Jesus in loving obedience, carrying their crosses as faithful disciples.

I believe in Jesus! Jesus is the Lord! We must proclaim the full message of the gospel with boldness to a world that desperately needs to hear the good news. For many people today, in this polarized world, Jesus and his message don't mean anything any longer. The church has become irrelevant.

I believe that God is presenting us with a great opportunity to create a wonderful future for our ministry. As a leader, I strongly believe that we are responsible to create our own future, and that is what God is inviting us to do during this process.

### **Signs of God at work**

In my travels this year, I have seen great signs of God at work in the Reformed Church in America. I have been able to visit many different places and have been able to connect with many people within the RCA, all over the U.S. and Canada.

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<sup>1</sup> Erwin McManus, *The Last Arrow: Save Nothing for the Next Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2017) 139-40.

I have preached in small and large churches. I have been able to attend classis meetings, regional synod meetings, church anniversaries, ordinations, graduations, funerals, baptisms, and all kinds of different meetings in all of the regions of the Reformed Church in America. Through my visits, I have learned that even though the RCA is going through some very difficult times and the future is uncertain, ministry in the RCA is healthy and thriving.

Great things are happening throughout the RCA! I believe this is God telling us that there is a bright, hopeful, and beautiful future for us. Indeed, there is much to celebrate in the life of the RCA.

## A. Transformed & Transforming

We are six years into the 15-year vision of Transformed & Transforming, and God continues to do great things throughout the RCA. The Rev. Dr. Jill Ver Steeg is leading the team charged with this vision, and she and her team are doing fantastic work. Transformed & Transforming has three components: discipleship, leadership, and mission.

The discipleship guiding coalition is formed of a team of people who are passionate about changing lives and communities for greater kingdom impact. This is a team of 15 practitioners in the field of discipleship who help shape the goals of this priority area and the approach to accomplishing them through coaching, webinars, resourcing, writing, teaching, and facilitating. The guiding coalition is working passionately toward the goal of every RCA congregation having a discipleship pathway, process, or environment in place to grow disciples who make disciples who bring greater kingdom impact and deeper transformation, both personally and systemically.

I'm happy to report to you today that:

- Hundreds of RCA leaders increased their knowledge about implementing a disciple-making pathway that's unique to their church. They're connecting with tools like Faithwalking, 3DM, and many others in leadership and learning communities.
- About 100 RCA pastors and/or ministry leaders are involved in discipleship coaching.

In the area of leadership development, the RCA's vision is to raise up servant leaders who develop a courage and competence to lead in the church and the world in a multiplicity of environments and with an openness to equipping and empowering all people to be influencers for Jesus in the world. This leadership vision has a special focus on empowering people who may not have leadership positions, privilege, power, or even access to them, but who have been called and gifted by God to serve boldly. It is a vision that especially is committed to the next generation and developing leaders for the church of the future.

Four initiative teams work within the leadership strategic priority:

- Leadership Development, which focuses on leadership mobilization and development.
- Thriving Leaders, Thriving Churches, which focuses on supporting the spiritual transformation and health of the leadership teams of RCA congregations.
- Women's Transformation and Leadership, which focuses on full inclusion of the gifts and influence of women.
- Next Generation Engagement, which empowers young adults, ministry teams, and congregations to create a culture of intergenerational ministry.

I'm happy to report to you today that:

- Hundreds of leaders in the RCA have learned to implement their own unique leadership development pathways in their congregations through a leadership or learning community.
- 140 congregations in the RCA are engaging or have engaged Churches Learning Change (previously called Ridder Church Renewal).
- Building God's Church Together launched, helping churches create a trusting and healthy ministry environment where men and women can serve together. Several events have taken place in different regional synods of the RCA, and the online platform provides resources for equipping leaders and congregations.
- 19 churches and more than 100 ministry leaders are taking part in our first Growing Young Cohort. This year-long process focused on next generation engagement is offered in partnership with the Fuller Youth Institute.

In the area of mission, we strive to live and love like Jesus. Jesus made it his mission to build God's kingdom on earth. He befriended the marginalized, healed the sick, fought for justice, showed us how to love our neighbors, and shared the good news. Transformed & Transforming mission initiatives equip churches to continue Jesus's mission both near and far, in our neighborhoods and around the world.

Five initiatives work within the mission priority of Transformed & Transforming:

- Local Missional Engagement, which encourages churches to reimagine what mission looks like where they live and build on what God is doing in their church and in their communities.
- Volunteer Engagement, which provides meaningful service opportunities alongside trusted partners.
- Advocacy, which helps churches address matters of injustice like mass incarceration, hunger, poverty, and more.
- Disability Concerns, which equips churches to become places where everybody belongs and everybody serves.
- Church Multiplication, which starts new churches to reach more people with the love of Jesus Christ.

I'm happy to report to you today that:

- Local Missional Engagement has developed resources to help churches address mass incarceration, mental health awareness, the opioid epidemic, and separation of families at the U.S. border.
- In partnership with Global Mission and Next Generation Engagement, Volunteer Engagement will send a pilot group of three churches to Cuba this summer to develop a student leadership model for youth groups there.
- A pilot leadership collaborative began this spring with ministry leaders who want to pursue redemptive, social entrepreneurship practices in connection with ministry. This pilot is in conjunction with the African American Black Council. It builds practical leadership skills for starting nonprofits through which outreach ministries can thrive and be resourced.
- Disability advocates in 90 congregations are helping their churches become places where everybody belongs and everybody serves.
- This spring, a new four-week class on evangelism and incarnational mission was held online. This class provided a beta test for a new learning platform for churches to engage with Transformed & Transforming.

Great things are happening through Transformed & Transforming, and please do not forget to come to the celebration night that will take place on Saturday night. This will be an incredible night of celebration of the faithfulness of God and the impact of Transformed & Transforming in the life and ministry of the RCA. Please don't miss it!

## B. Church Planting

Another area of celebration is church multiplication. As a church planter myself, this is very close to my heart. I have been able to plant several churches and work with a great group of church planters in my ministry career. You will hear from Randy Weener later in this meeting, but I just want to say how excited I am that we are casting a new vision for multiplication and that by 2038, we will plant 1,000 more churches in the RCA.

Some of these will be classic church plants, some of these will be multi-site campuses, some of them will be global church plants, and some will be new models of church plants relevant to the changing landscape of North America and the world.

We have been losing ground for so many years already, and it's time to regain momentum in this important area of ministry. Because church multiplication is so crucial, I have given it a special place in my leadership structure.

I'm excited that some of the newest missionaries going to the mission field will be focusing on church planting in Hungary and the Netherlands, where the RCA is coming alongside multiple partners to help revitalize the European church through church planting.

## C. Global Mission

You will also hear later in this meeting from JP Sundararajan about the RCA's Global Mission efforts, but I just want to highlight a couple of things.

During this year, I have had the opportunity to visit three global mission sites: the Dominican Republic, Bahrain, and India.

In February, I had the opportunity to visit the Dominican Republic. Ten years ago, on June 5, 2009, the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America and the General Synod of the Iglesia Reformada Dominicana (IRD) signed a "Covenant of Partnership" where both denominations agreed to give mutual support as our two churches engage in cooperative ministry to the life of all people by preaching, teaching, and proclaiming the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The primary reason I went there with our director of Global Mission, the Rev. JP Sundararajan, was to evaluate the progress we have made since 2009 when this covenant of partnership was signed. By God's grace, we have made some progress, but there is still much to do in the Dominican Republic to fulfill our commitment to support Iglesia Reformada Dominicana to become a thriving denomination.

Later this fall, JP will return to the Dominican Republic to meet with the leaders of the IRD to flesh out a plan to fulfill our commitment from 2009. He will be joined by the RCA director of church multiplication, the Rev. Dr. Randy Weener, by Global Mission's North American mission supervisor, the Rev. Luis Ruiz, and by the RCA coordinator for Hispanic Ministries, the Rev. Andres Serrano.

In April, I had the opportunity to visit Bahrain and India. In Bahrain, we visited the Al Raja School, the American Mission Hospital, and the English language congregation of the National Evangelical Church. It is amazing to see what God has done in Bahrain since the arrival of our first missionaries in the late 1800s.

It started as a vision of professor John Lansing and two of his students from New Brunswick Theological Seminary, Samuel Zwemer and James Cantine. What was initially called the Arabian Mission is now celebrating more than 100 years of hard, faithful, and dedicated work in the fields of ministry, education, and medical care.

Dr. George Cheriyan is the visionary corporate CEO and chief medical officer of American Mission Hospital. George has a vision to expand the services to many different places in the Island of Bahrain. American Mission Hospital presently has four locations and is now building its fifth location. On our visit, I had the opportunity to dedicate to the Lord the land for the fifth site. The RCA has maintained a very strong relationship with the American Mission Hospital and will continue to do so in the future.

After a week in Bahrain, we went to visit our mission partners in India. We first went to Bangalore to visit with Audio Scripture Ministries, and then we went to visit with Mission

India. We visited a children's Bible club, an adult literacy program, and a four-month-old church plant.

I came back impressed with the work of our missionaries in proclaiming the gospel around the globe. God has done a great work through the efforts of the faithful men and women who responded to God's call in their lives. I want to thank all the RCA churches that have supported and are supporting our missionaries. Thank you, thank you, thank you!

For more than 200 years, RCA Global Mission has impacted people around the world with the message of Jesus. Our past, present, and future missionaries form a great cloud of witnesses of the faithfulness of God and the commitment of the Reformed Church in America to proclaim the gospel to the world.

I know that JP will be inviting you to the special celebration that Global Mission is putting together for next January called Mission 2020. Please plan on being there! We will be meeting in Orlando to celebrate our past and to dream about our future!

#### D. Collaboration with the Christian Reformed Church

The Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) is our closest sister denomination with whom we have a great relationship. Every month, I meet with my dear friend Steve Timmermans to connect and to pray for one another; Steve is the executive director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Here are some of the things in which we are collaborating:

- The creation of the Reformed Partnership for Congregational Renewal, which will make it easier for leaders to choose a renewal process that best fits their congregation.
- Congregational Vitality Pathways is a church health process that has included CRCNA and RCA churches in their learning communities.
- Volunteer Engagement partners with the CRCNA via World Renew Disaster Response Services for domestic disaster response volunteer opportunities.
- Resources about responding to sexual harassment and abuse were developed in partnership with the CRCNA's Safe Church ministry.
- Ministry areas share and adopt practical ideas from each other, like the CRCNA women's Facebook group, which is being created with the RCA women's Facebook group as the model.
- RCA and CRCNA Disability Concerns partner closely, including on a mental health learning community where churches spent a year learning about mental health and how they can better support it.
- The new RCA inter-religious staff person will be working closely with the CRCNA inter-religious task force.

## E. Regional Synods

God's work is also very evident in the regional synods of the RCA.

### Regional Synod of Albany

- Young pastors are nurtured and supported with a first call learning community, a fellowship program, and a retreat for pastors and families at Camp Fowler.
- A Synod Mediation Team is helping people and churches have hard conversations. The team provides training and mediators so that conflict can lead to growth and understanding, not just frustration and anxiety.
- Churches are doing creative new outreach ministries, including sacred dance camp, summer day camp, and Jazz Vespers.

### Regional Synod of Canada

- Regional Synod of Canada learning circles are online groups that learn together and form spiritual community across Canada. The new groups are focused on Conflict as Opportunity for Spiritual Formation, Small Church Ministry, Clergy Mental Health Support Group, and a Women's Leadership Collaborative.
- There is an awesome church planting revival in Ontario Classis. Praise the Lord!
- The RSC board is increasingly diverse in age, gender, ethnicity, and experience.
- There has been an increasing number of workshops and connection events hosted in Canadian churches by RCA staff, and these have been extremely helpful to the churches who received them.
- Great strides have been taken in updating sexual harassment policies and training.
- Several Canadian churches are sponsoring refugee families.
- Partnership is growing with the CRCNA in Canada and other ecumenical partners in order to collaborate in mission.

### Regional Synod of the Far West

- Church plants continue to be started and grow, bringing more people into relationship with Jesus.
- A number of congregations are becoming more multicultural or multiethnic—developing ministries for their changing neighborhoods, hosting ethnic church plants in their facilities, and hiring more diverse staff.
- RCA churches in Arizona are working hard in helping asylum seeker families to relocate in the U.S. The regional synod is helping them in their efforts.
- More than 35 women in Arizona and California took part in one-year She Is Called/Ella Es Llamada leadership collaboratives through Women's Transformation and Leadership. The leadership collaboratives were held in both English and Spanish.

### Regional Synod of the Great Lakes

- Three new church plants are in process, and the region is on track to hit its goal of planting 25 new churches in the Great Lakes region and 25 new churches overseas by 2025.
- There's a growing willingness to discuss hard topics as classis and church leaders engage in hard discussions about the future.
- More than 100 elders and ministers have taken part in emotional maturity processes the region is offering this year.
- Over the past year, 20 churches in the region have grown through the God Dreams vision process and the Church Unique identity and church health process.

### Regional Synod of the Heartland

- Vibrant youth ministries have hundreds of students involved in synod-wide events.
- Multicultural church plants are growing in Houston, Texas, and Storm Lake, Iowa.
- Classis meetings feature learning components around healthy spirituality, church multiplication, elder leadership, and thriving ministries.

### Regional Synod of Mid-America

- Regional staff have developed and led multiple online learning communities in discipleship, church renewal, and revitalization for pastors and elders in the region.
- In learning communities on small church essentials and small church discipleship and mission, leaders learn, discuss, and formulate action steps.
- Several churches in Wisconsin and Illinois Classes are engaged in Faithwalking, and it's catching on. Retreats have grown as neighboring non-RCA churches have also joined and participated in this transformational and missional living process.
- Working together with the Illiana-Florida Classis, the Regional Synod of Mid-America is in the process of forming a new classis called Classis de las Naciones (Classis of the Nations), consisting of existing RCA churches, new adopted congregations, and new church plants in Florida, Georgia, and beyond.

### Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics

- The Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics' leadership is excited to be working with Andy Bossardet and sponsoring an "Encouraging Thriving Congregations" event in the region.
- The synod is excited that the revitalization committee has been revamped and renamed "missional re-engagement committee" and is looking forward to the work that will be done.
- The synod is also excited to see its church multiplication committee busy working with classes to plant new churches and to support the ongoing efforts of the current church plants in the region.

## Regional Synod of New York

- Lay leaders from several New York City churches participated in the Inward/Outward Journey to gain a new vision for what small churches can be. Through visiting churches in Washington, D.C., Baltimore, and New York City, these leaders began to rethink their assumptions about small churches as they saw small churches with very dynamic ministry. The Inward/Outward Journey was led by Rev. Sharon Atkins, Rev. Maudelin Willock, and Earl James, RCA coordinator for Advocacy; the idea grew from a meeting of the African American Black Council.
- Young adults from 30 congregations worshiped together at a youth-led prayer night in New York City. The purpose of this event was to create space for next generation leadership in local mission for their communities, as well as to convene multiple groups of young people under the banner of the RCA.

In every regional synod of the RCA, churches are making a great impact in their communities. For that we rejoice in the Lord!

And last but not least, we have hired a new coordinator for prayer mobilization in the RCA. Jim Harrison was a veteran missionary and accepted the invitation to become our coordinator of prayer mobilization. Thank you, Jim, for saying yes to God's call in your life!

### **Final Requests**

This year, I don't have any specific recommendation that will require an approval from the delegates to General Synod. I just have a few requests.

First, Reformed Church in America, please, please do not drown in the ocean of the status quo. Do not burn out. Move beyond the status quo to the place where God is calling you. Embrace change. Embrace the future.

Second, stay engaged. We are a family, and, as a family, we are dealing with figuring out ministry together in the twenty-first century. The Vision 2020 Team is working hard and praying, and they will bring a final recommendation at the next General Synod. In the meantime, I ask you to stay engaged in the process.

Third, focus on what's important. Keep the main thing the main thing. Proclaim the gospel with boldness and passion. The proclamation of the gospel is the main calling we have received from Jesus. Let that be the main focus of your ministry.

Fourth, keep praying. Today more than ever in our history, we need God's guidance to lead us into the future. God is the only source of our joy and ministry. Let us believe that God has something amazing for our future.

Allow me to bless you today with this passage from Paul's letter to the Romans: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13).

To God be the glory!