

## Remarks to General Synod 2017 by Director of Global Mission Doug Leonard

Proclamation of the gospel is the heart and center of everything we do in RCA Global Mission. We are proclaiming the gospel, to build Christ's church, leading to the redemption of the world.

Our work in proclaiming the gospel to the world began 233 years ago at our General Synod in 1784. Together we approved a plan to send out our first missionaries. Over those years, we have introduced tens of millions of people to Christ. But this was not our work. It was the work of God. When we were obedient to God's Holy Spirit, the church flourished.

Did you know that RCA missionaries helped to plant the first 235 Protestant churches in India? And preaching the gospel always went hand in hand with tangible ways to love our neighbors. We built the medical industries of whole nations. There are diseases that no longer exist in Arabia and India because of our medical missions. We gave educations to youth who went on to serve as leaders of their countries.

And do you know what else was happening in our denomination in 1784? In 1784, we were a denomination still healing from a very serious conflict. We were fighting over whether the center of the church should remain in Amsterdam, or should it be moved to the new world. Scholars call this the "Coetus--Conferentie" conflict.

The conflict got ugly. Half of our churches were on one side and half on the other side. Many of our churches started to leave the denomination over the conflict.

Do you know what brought us together? There were two things:

1. The skillful diplomacy of Jonathan Livingston, who found common ground between the two sides, and then he traveled to Amsterdam and reconciled the sides with the Classis of Amsterdam.
2. Mission

We were made for mission. This is why we exist as a church.

We were made for mission. There are thousands of issues that we could disagree on. And every one of those issues is important. But let's not lose our focus as to why we exist as a church.

We were made for mission. And the story is not over. The Great Commission is still unfolding.

When we began to proclaim the gospel to the nations 233 years ago, we set a goal that every nation on earth would flourish with its own local churches. And here we are today; finally the goal that we had always wanted to see achieved is now in reach.

People of God, let's not miss this. Finally, 233 years later, we now see emerging what we always wanted to see, an indigenous church in nearly every nation on earth; disciples of Jesus Christ, people who are redeemed by the cross of Christ, people who are being sanctified by his Holy Spirit, and working to bring redemption to their societies in ways that we could never imagine. I want to say to this denomination that I love so much: We are almost there. Don't take your eyes off of the goal, not now. Stay with this.

It is not an exaggeration to say that there are more people coming to Christ now in the world than at any point in human history. There are tens of millions of people this year who came to Christ on all six continents.

We are so focused on our own problems in North America that we are missing what is finally happening around the world. We are living through the largest coming to Christ, the greatest great awakening in the history of humanity.

This global movement of growth in the body of Christ urgently needs trained leaders, pastors, church planting support, Bible translation, and Bible and theological training. Now, more than ever before in our 233-year mission history, is the time to be doing global mission.

We are almost there. Don't take your eyes off of the goal, not now. Stay with this.

Our goal today is to bring the knowledge of Christ to the world to nurture faith in his name. Our aim is to see a global sanctification. Billions of people not only coming to Christ, and giving their lives over to his transformative power, but growing in Christ, maturing in Christ, and giving themselves in sacrificial service for the remaking of this world, to the glory of God.

So it all started for us in 1784. But now we need to get ready for the year 2034. In 2034 we will celebrate 250 years of gospel proclamation in the world. That's only 17 years away. We have 17 years in this next chapter of RCA Global Mission to let God use us in bringing about a far-reaching, powerful impact to continue redeeming the world for Christ.

RCA Global Mission is you. It is me. It is all of us. It is every member in every church in the RCA joining together to advance the global mission of Christ's church. Listen to what's coming:

The RCA has about 1,000 churches. Over the next three years RCA Global Mission is committing to planting another 1,000 churches globally, doubling our kingdom impact. In a partnership with Mission India, we will plant 583 churches in the Amritsar District, one in each village in the district. And we will plant at least another 583 churches in the rest of the world, including Brazil, Nicaragua, Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Middle East.

Do you know what happened a few years after 1784, after our denomination had come through that terrible conflict? After Jonathan Livingston and mission brought our churches back together again, that was when the glory days of our denomination began.

We opened colleges together to ensure that Christian inquiry remained part of the academic preparation. We opened our seminaries to prepare our pastors to be evangelists and teachers of the Word. Our churches flourished. We grew from 170 churches to 1,000 churches.

We can be part of the global great awakening that we are living through today. And we can advance it. And when we do, our divisions will heal. And we will thrive again. God is not finished with us. The best days are ahead for the Reformed Church in America.