

A HISTORY OF THE REFORMED BAPTIST NETWORK

The First Ten Years

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Preface

I did not propose to write a history of the Reformed Baptist Network (RBNet). I was asked—and really tasked—to write it. This booklet was written with the blessing and encouragement of several RBNet pastors.

I want to thank those who helped and encouraged me in this process. First, I thank the RBNet Personnel and Finance Committee, which found a way to fund this brief history. Pastor Dustin Battles volunteered his services to give an initial edit to this booklet. His help proved to be extremely helpful. Pastor Jamie Howell kept detailed records of the beginning of RBNet. I am thankful for Mark Chanski, who gave me encouragement after reading the manuscript. Many others encouraged me and some of them are mentioned in this booklet. I thank Paul Smalley for his willingness to serve as the copyeditor. His professional expertise has been invaluable. I am thankful for the encouragement and direction that John Divito gave me as well to shepherd this booklet through the entire publishing process, including finding a brother in Mexico who served as the typographer.

My final thanks go to my wife, Rayna, who was the first to read my several drafts of the manuscript and made helpful suggestions. But more importantly, she encouraged me during a time when I was having health issues, which ended in triple-bypass heart surgery. When I thought I could not continue, she gently persuaded me to finish this booklet.

I have found writing this history of RBNet to be a great delight as I recalled how the Lord worked to bring our network into existence. I value cooperative efforts, and so I rejoice how the Lord has and is using these efforts by united local churches to spread the gospel to many places in the world over these past ten years.

"Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!" (Ps. 115:1, ESV)

Introduction

The history of the Reformed Baptist Network (RBNet) is worth telling because it is the story of a group of churches committed to worldwide evangelism. Though a small organization, the Network has a big heart and an even bigger vision. Its story arises out of a movement called "Reformed Baptist," which from the beginning had missions and evangelism at its center. The larger story of the modern Reformed Baptist movement is for someone else to write. However, as the Reformed Baptists came of age in the twentieth century through many "dangers, toils, and snares," an increasing number of pastors who were committed to reaching the world with the gospel saw the need of cooperative efforts. These pastors were also committed to maintaining a strong theology as expressed in the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith. In this context the Reformed Baptist Network was formed.

The history you read in this short record is a factual account based on records available to all who wish to investigate. The author, however, is not a detached writer who only sees and records the facts. Rather, he is a man who has convictions about missions, cooperation, fellowship, and the independence of the local church. Every effort has been made for objectivity. However, the reader may find at times this account mixed with personal perspectives. The author makes no apology for this approach, as he is confident that the discerning reader will easily be able to distinguish between historical fact and personal belief.

Kenneth Scott Latourette said the following in his foreword to *A History of the Baptists* by Robert Torbet:

> Professor Torbet writes as a Baptist, and as one to whom the Baptist heritage is very precious. However, he has endeavored not to allow his deeply held convictions to distort his view of what actually happened. His book is not intended as a defense of Baptists, or as an argument for them. He has tried to portray them as they really have been and are. He has also sought to place them in their setting in the history of mankind in general and of the Christian church in particular.[1]

The author believes that objectivity is the best case for the Reformed Baptist Network, though he makes no claim to have reached the high standard that Latourette claims for Torbet. The record speaks for itself.

In its history, the Reformed Baptist Network has its defects, sorrows, and regrets. Yet it is with profound gratitude to the Lord that this story is presented as a testimony to God's faithfulness in the effort of the Reformed Baptist Network to fulfill its purpose of seeing the glory of God cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (Hab. 2:14).

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1 Kenneth Scott Latourette, foreword to Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists* (Judson Press, 1950), 7–8.

Chapter 1:

BEGINNINGS—KEY FACTORS AND PASTORS

The history of RBNet began with pastors who were formerly in the Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America (ARBCA), as well as some others, all of whom shared a common desire for an association of churches that focused on missions. Many churches had resigned from ARBCA due to differences regarding an extensive paper on the doctrine of the impassibility of God written by ARBCA's theological committee. Some resigned due to a disagreement with the paper. Others agreed with it, but they did not think this theological difference should be a reason for breaking fellowship. All, however, agreed heartily that God is unchangeable in His being.

As the coordinator of ARBCA, Gordon Taylor was not permitted to express his opinion on the paper. However, privately he agreed with the pastors and churches that questioned the need for the paper to be written as it was. Like others who did not remain in ARBCA, he believed that a paper could have been written that all sides would agree on. In 2015, a year before the vote on the paper, he had submitted his resignation as coordinator, not because of the controversy, but for other, more personal reasons.

In 2015, some of the churches that resigned began to look for an association to join. Although there were some alternatives, none was suitable, due to either a lack of a robust confessional subscription or a perceived organizational lack in serving Reformed Baptist missionaries. Pastors who were formerly in ARBCA, as well as a number who represented churches that had not been part of a national confessional Reformed Baptist association, expressed interest in forming an association that would focus on missions and be robustly confessional, but would allow for minor differences in subscription to the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (LBCF).[2] The pastors who resigned agreed with this perspective, as long as whatever was formed would not simply be reactionary against ARBCA, but would have a positive and missionary focus. Those who separated generally believed that the ones from whom they separated deserved respect and love as brothers. By God's grace, RBNet has been able to maintain that perspective to its tenth anniversary.

The key pastors who sought to form a new Reformed Baptist association were Matt Foreman (Faith Reformed Baptist Church, Media, PA); Doug Van Dorn and Pete Van Dorn (Reformed Baptist Church of Northern Colorado); Mark Chanski (Harbor Reformed Baptist Church, Holland, MI); David Merck, Greg Nichols, Jeff Johnson, Matt Vincent, and Paul Smalley (Grace Immanuel Reformed Baptist Church, Grand Rapids, MI); Jeff Smith (Emmanuel Baptist Church, Coconut Creek, FL); Jamie Howell (Grace Baptist Church, Taylors, SC); and Gordon Taylor, former coordinator of ARBCA.

Each of the men named played a significant role in the formation of the Reformed Baptist Network. Matt Foreman secured the website domain name and led in many other ways. Mark Chanski along with Jeff Smith represented churches that had not been a part of a formal association, yet they desired such. Jamie Howell

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2 Substantial subscription is required for full membership in RBNet and is spelled out on the RBNet website.

provided important input and kept detailed records of initial meetings that preceded the actual formation of RBNet.

All these men spoke to one another, expressing the desire to form a new association. Pastors Doug Van Dorn and Pete Van Dorn suggested a missionary conference and volunteered to host that conference at their church in Boulder, Colorado.

The idea of a missionary conference with the possibility of forming a new organization was a bold move, as it came just a little over a year after the division in ARBCA. Yet it was an idea that rang true to the minds and hearts of churches that were never part of ARBCA. This was illustrated when pastors from two churches, David Merck at Grace Immanuel Reformed Baptist Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Mark Chanski at Harbor Reformed Baptist Church in Holland, Michigan, contacted Gordon Taylor and essentially said, "Gordon, if some new association is to be formed, please let us know, as we would like to be involved." It was very encouraging to see churches which had not been involved in the controversy and were interested in cooperating in missions. These and other pastors were kept in communication.

It became evident that there was a distinct possibility of forming an association that would focus primarily on missions. And that's exactly what happened next.

Chapter 2:

ROCKY MOUNTAIN MISSIONARY CONFERENCE

The increasing desire for a new association resulted in an invitation from the Reformed Baptist Church of Northern Colorado to attend the Rocky Mountain Missionary Conference, November 17–19, 2015. The conference was advertised widely on social media. About 31 churches were represented, with 61 in attendance. The conference included an invitation for interested missionaries and pastors to remain an extra day to discuss forming what would become the Reformed Baptist Network.

The invitation from the Reformed Baptist Church of Northern Colorado advertised the conference as follows:

> Tuesday Nov. 17th and Wednesday Nov. 18th will be filled with speakers including Mark Chanski, Gordon Taylor, Jon Hueni, Sam Masters, Trevor Johnson, and Robert Elliot. The topics will include church planting (home missions), foreign missionaries, and sermons to encourage us in these endeavors. Thursday morning Nov. 19th will be a guided but open-ended discussion, devoted to exploring the future prospects of a network of Reformed Baptist churches for mutual edification and cooperation in home and foreign missions and perhaps other things as well.

This conference set the tone for what would become the Reformed Baptist Network. Each session was either focused on missions or on the type of association that was needed. The opening keynote session was an exposition of Habakkuk 2:14: "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (ESV). Gordon Taylor emphasized that there must be a great vision as to what the Lord can do in the proclamation of the gospel.

A challenge for home missions was given by Bob Selph, who was well-qualified due to his labors in Atlanta, Georgia, among those who were caught in the web of drug and alcohol abuse and poverty.

In another preaching session, Pastor Mark Chanski (now the coordinator of RBNet) pled for a network of Reformed Baptists that would move away from the poor, underperforming, unnecessarily division-riddled reputation that Reformed Baptists have had in the past. He wanted an association that would remain confessionally robust and have open hands and hearts to all in the broader Reformed camp who preached the gospel. He pled that we avoid a fixation on preserving Reformed Baptist traditions like "blue hymnals only" or "hour-long sermons," and instead aim at reaching twenty-first-century souls by "becoming all things to all men, that some might be saved" (cf. 1 Cor. 9:22).

There were many reports from missionaries who attended the conference. In fact, these reports filled most of the time slots. A report on pastoral training by David Merck demonstrated a need to minister to national pastors in various lands. A report on South America by Sam Masters (Seminario Bíblico William Carey, Argentina), Jorge Molina and Obed Rupertus (Iglesia de la Gracia Monte de Luz, Carlos Paz, Argentina), and Jim Adams (Cornerstone Church, Mesa, AZ) was most encouraging. The next day there were more reports and messages. Using modern technology, there were reports from the Middle East, the Far East (closed countries) as well as reports from Europe (led by Pastor John Hueni, Grace Fellowship Church, Bremen, IN).

In the late morning, missionary Sam Masters gave a lecture on missionary principles from Andrew Fuller (1754–1815). This gave an excellent practical balance to the messages that had been given.

The official conference ended on Wednesday evening with a challenging message by Pastor Robert Elliott from the Reformed Baptist Church of Riverside, California.

Those who attended testified that the reports and preaching were all encouraging. These two days also set the stage for serious discussion for establishing an association of churches that would focus on missions.

Chapter 3:
MISSIONARIES ORPHANED

Prior to the Rocky Mountain Missionary Conference, a number of missionaries and national pastors had resigned from ARBCA because they could not sign the theological paper. In some cases, there was a need to help their local churches find sources of support. Before their resignations, many of these missionaries had monthly prayer requests published in ARBCA's "Missionary Prayer Focus." However, upon their resignation from ARBCA, this was no longer possible—not because of a mean spirit but because of ARBCA policy. Many sending or sponsoring churches and interested pastors noted the disappearance of these missionaries from this publication. As a result, pastors and churches agreed to have a "Missionary Prayer Guide" published monthly. Gordon Taylor volunteered to publish and distribute this prayer guide on a monthly basis. The first edition was sent to interested churches and individuals in October 2015. This publication ultimately became the official prayer guide for missionaries endorsed by RBNet. These missionaries were contacted and they willingly and enthusiastically contributed prayer requests on a monthly basis.

In addition to the need to publish missionary prayer requests, sending or sponsoring churches also needed to find a way to channel financial support to these missionaries and national pastors. The sending or sponsoring church quickly communicated with

financial supporters as to how to direct funds. In some cases, the local church began to financially service the missionary; in other cases, the missionary, with the approval and blessing of the sending or sponsoring church, found a missionary agency to handle the financial responsibility for the missionary. Financial responsibility included collection of funds, payment of salary, oversight of fulfilling the legal requirements of the US Internal Revenue Service, or, in the cases of national pastors, the legal requirements of the country where they resided.

These missionaries were "orphaned," but they were quickly "adopted." ARBCA was kind in giving missionaries and churches time to make the transition.

The following missionaries formerly endorsed by ARBCA gave prayer requests in the October 2015 prayer guide. (Note that the prayer guide was done one month before the Rocky Mountain Missionary Conference and thirteen months before the constituting of RBNet). The missionaries listed show the need that existed for the establishment of a cooperative association to focus on missions:

- Olivier and Denise Favre (national pastor; sponsoring church, Grace Fellowship Church, Bremen, IN)
- David and Nicky Vaughn (missionary; sending church, Heritage Reformed Baptist Church, Fayetteville, GA)
- Jorge and Bilma Molina (national pastor; sponsoring church, Cornerstone Church, Mesa, AZ)
- Bob and Cathi Selph (missionary; sending church, Grace Baptist Church, Taylors, SC)
- Michael and Ashley Emadi (missionary; sending church, Heritage Baptist Church, Owensboro, KY)

There were also other recommended missionaries from sister Reformed Baptist churches who were encouraged to send prayer requests. Over time, some of these became missionaries endorsed by RBNet.

- Sam Masters — Cornerstone Church, Mesa, AZ (now endorsed as an associate missionary)
- Trevor Johnson — Faith Reformed Baptist Church, Media, PA
- David Adams, Poiema Publications — Cornerstone Church, Mesa, AZ
- Paul and Trish Snider — Faith Reformed Baptist Church, Media, PA
- Friends in the Middle East and Far East whose names cannot be listed for security reasons

Reformed Baptist pastors were overcome with joy as they reflected what was being done for these missionaries by getting the prayer requests out. It was further evidence that a network needed to be formed that would focus strongly on missions. Not only were future RBNet churches receiving the "Missionary Prayer Guide," but other churches also requested this publication. The time was ripe to form a new association.

Chapter 4:
AN ASSOCIATION NEEDED

At the Rocky Mountain Missionary Conference, there was a strong desire for the Reformed Baptist churches represented to work together for the cause of missions. After the conference and the discussion, the need became even more evident. This was the result of messages preached and missionary reports given. The pastors and missionaries desired support from a united group of churches.

Many pastors and some missionaries remained the next day, Thursday, November 19, for a discussion that proved to be pivotal. Matt Foreman opened the day with a devotional that focused on the purpose of the association. After the devotional, the discussion was led by pastors Pete Van Dorn and Doug Van Dorn.

Three crucial decisions were made. The first decision was that a name for the Network was agreed upon, after some spirited discussion concerning the name "Reformed Baptist," as this name did not always have a good connotation. However, Matt Foreman had been proactive in securing the website (reformedbaptistnetwork.com), so it was unanimously agreed to adopt the name. The desire was to have a Reformed Baptist group of churches and pastors who on the one hand would be robustly confessional, but on the other hand would also be willing to commend and work with other Reformed or sovereign grace associations or networks that had a

vision for worldwide progress of the gospel like the men had who gathered at the Rocky Mountain Missionary Conference. That heartfelt desire has continued to permeate the Reformed Baptist Network. Because of this open heart to cooperate with other groups of Reformed brothers, some have accused the Network of giving up distinctly Reformed Baptist theology as expressed in the LBCF, but this is not the case. RBNet remains firmly committed to the LBCF.

Second, at the same meeting, the host pastors, Pete Van Dorn and Doug Van Dorn, led a discussion urging the men to adopt a statement that would describe the purpose of RBNet. This discussion was critical in the forming of the Network. Many remember Pete and Doug's insistence to create a succinct purpose statement of the new organization. There was careful, thoughtful discussion. All agreed that the primary purpose of the new Network would be focused on missions. Theological education and publishing were very important, but it was acknowledged that there were several options for theological education and good publishing houses already established that local churches could use. After discussion that was bathed in prayer, this purpose statement was unanimously adopted:

> *The purpose of RBNet is to glorify God through fellowship and cooperation in fulfilling the Great Commission to the ends of earth.*

The third decision was to have another meeting in Rincon, Georgia, hosted by Redeemer Baptist Church led by Pastor Nick Kennicott. This meeting was crucial because it is one thing to agree on a purpose statement, but quite another to flesh out the details as to how such a Network would function. Various views existed about how the Reformed Baptist Network should be organized among all who agreed on its purpose.

The question was simple: What would be the best way to care for the "orphaned" missionaries? All the men were committed to the local church as the sending agency for missionaries. This was

non-negotiable. At the same time, all the men were committed to working together, as was agreed in the purpose statement adopted at the Rocky Mountain Missionary Conference. As a result, all realized there needed to be some type of formal association or network to accomplish this goal. This led to a unanimous decision to meet together again in February 2016 to begin hammering out the details of cooperation among churches, that honored the local church, while realizing the value of cooperating together for the cause of proclaiming the gospel.

Consequently, a date and location were set for this meeting. Pastor Nick Kennicott of the Redeemer Church in Rincon, Georgia, invited everyone to that meeting.

Committees were formed to prepare for the meeting in Rincon. First, there was an organizational committee, consisting of Peter Van Dorn, Chris Marley, David Merck, John Divito, and Gordon Taylor (chairman). This committee was given the task of finding out the various models for association that the committed churches desired. The committee was not to present just one model for the organization but rather to find the men and churches that had various ideas and then have these views presented at the meeting in Rincon.

Second, there was a confessional subscription committee, consisting of Nick Kennicott, Robert Elliot, Keith Thompson (chairman), Jon Hueni, Doug Van Dorn, Paul Gordon, and Bob Gonzales. This committee was expected to present a statement for discussion about the various views of subscription for discussion at the Rincon meeting.

Third, the informal steering committee would continue, consisting of Gordon Taylor, Chris Powell, Matt Foreman, and Steve Woodman. This committee coordinated the two committees and made sure that each committee knew what the others were doing. In addition, this committee was responsible for informing all the interested churches and pastors about the progress of each committee and also to make it clear that all were invited to give input into the working of the Network. In other words, the fledging

Network (not yet officially formed) was not going to be the work of a select committee, but rather the consensus of all who would be part of it. In this way, the future RBNet was very different from some groups that have a select committee or committees which work and present to all what they expect to be accepted. The Network continues with this philosophy to this day.

From the conclusion of the Rocky Mountain Missionary Conference to the meeting in Rincon, Georgia, these committees met multiple times by video call to lay the foundation for what would become the Reformed Baptist Network.

Chapter 5:
STRUCTURE

On February 23, 2016, pastors met in Rincon, Georgia, to discuss and determine the type of association that the Network would be. Pastor Jamie Howell (Grace Baptist Church, Taylors, SC) recorded detailed minutes.

The first item of business was discussion about the structure of RBNet. Much preliminary work had been done via online video calls by the organizational committee, and the committee presented four models. This history will only summarize the discussion and then give the final decision that the pastors made. At the outset, all the men agreed that whatever model was adopted, it must be one without a top-heavy bureaucracy. Or to put it another way, every effort was made to assure that the operation of RBNet must come from the churches. What this meant was that no committee could hinder a local church from presenting a proposal to the General Assembly. It also meant that no committee could veto a missionary candidate from being presented to the General Assembly by a full-member church. The autonomy of the local church and the input of the local church must be preserved.

Four men presented four structural models for a network. Each view was listened to with respect and openly discussed. The organizational committee was not a "select committee" determining the structure of RBNet.

Model A

The first model was presented by Pastor Chris Marley of Miller Valley Baptist Church in Prescott, AZ. It represents a confessional association with more organization and structure. This model included a fully paid staff, including a coordinator and a secretary. Members of committees would have two-year term limits, with a minimum of four years of time off before being elegible for reelection. Proposed committees would include the following areas: administrative, membership, financial, and missions. All committees would present recommendations to the assembly for approval.

This structure would include a stated objective to form fraternal relationships with other organizations to maximize cooperation and minimize redundancy (including groups like the OPC, PCA, etc.).

This model would have the association initially use established mission agencies, with the goal of needing less such dependence over time. But the Reformed Baptist Network would constitute as a 501(c)(3) organization to protect assets and allow for military chaplains. This meant that the finances would be handled in a home office.

Missionaries should be members of an RBNet member church, but missionaries who are not members of a member church could be "adopted" by a member church, as long they substantially subscribed to the LBCF and so sponsored in that way by a member church.

The association would also include provision for conflict resolution between churches. If a church were to stray from the LBCF, then it could be voted out of the Network.

Marley gave his evaluation of Model A. The pros would include the most ability to move forward more quickly without the entire group needing to gather, to be more efficient in administrative duties, and to make conferences more encouragement-focused than work focused.

The cons of this model were that there would be greater danger of some people gathering power apart from member churches. Meeker representatives can be drowned out by louder or stronger voices and mechanisms for conflict resolution could be ignored.

Model B

The second model was presented by Pastor Pete Van Dorn of the Reformed Baptist Church of Northern Colorado in Boulder, CO. Pastor Van Dorn pointed out that some in our culture are very wary of corporations. Pete asserted that a corporation is nothing more than a piece of paper—a document created to accomplish a defined set of objectives. It establishes a relationship between a person engaged in some kind of business and the government. The government says that if the business follows certain guidelines, then certain legal benefits will be granted to it. The organization is still made up of the people who belong to that organization. The corporation is not an entity in and of itself—the people are key.

Pastor Van Dorn pointed out that one major benefit of a corporation is that it provides protection from litigation. If one church does something damaging, the offended party could sue all the churches involved in the organization without corporate protection.

The legal status of a 501(c)(3) organization allows it to be tax-exempt on its income, and all contributions to it are also tax-exempt.

Pastor Van Dorn pointed out that organizational documents were needed to set the limits of the association. The constitution would establish RBNet's relationship with the government and the public. Bylaws are necessary to establish the relationship between churches within the organization.

Model C

The third model was presented by Pastor David Merck of Grace Immanuel Reformed Baptist Church in Grand Rapids, MI. Pastor David Merck pointed out that Option C was identical with Option B, but it moved further away from a structured association and provided slightly more structure than Model D. Model C did not include any provision in the constitution for conflict resolution. If the churches hold to the LBCF, there is still some commitment to conflict resolution. No constitutional structure is needed to accomplish this.

One significant difference with Model C is that it was limited only to voluntary staff. This reflects the concern some have regarding the establishment of permanent paid staff. However, there was an acknowledgment that there is room for differences of opinion about paid staff when interpreting the New Testament. Paul was appointed by the churches to take a collection from the churches, deliver it to Jerusalem, and report back (2 Cor. 8:18–19). However, this was temporary, not permanent. If there is a coordinator, how is he held accountable? This seemed to be a main concern.

Model D

The fourth model was presented by Paul Gordon of Grace Reformed Baptist Church in Pine Bush, NY. This model argued that it may be better to start simple and add on as needs arise. So the need is only to determine what is adequate to get the job done. If the simple structure proves not to be efficient, then do adopt a more complex structure. However, Paul Gordon saw Model D as perhaps too loose.

In sum, Model A delegates the greatest amount of responsibility and freedom at the organizational and home office level, whereas Models B, C, and D retain greater levels of responsibility to the churches.

Decision on a Model

The minutes record that ballots were passed out to vote only on two options because, after discussion, it had been agreed to vote on only Models B and C. Model B was selected, but due to a lack of funding, the coordinator would be a voluntary position. Gordon Taylor volunteered to fulfill that position on an unpaid basis.

Three key areas would be explored to lay the groundwork for the new organization. These three committees would work to draft three different parts of what would become the RBNet constitution and bylaws.

A finance committee was formed. Pete Van Dorn was elected as treasurer and given authority to incorporate RBNet and open a

bank account. Churches were encouraged to send contributions as seed money for the new RBNet.

A membership committee was established to determine qualifications for membership in RBNet. It was agreed that for a church to apply for membership, it must send a representative to attend a RBNet General Assembly and also to fill out an application form. Attendance at either of the meetings at Boulder, Colorado, or Rincon, Georgia, would fulfill the attendance requirement for a church to apply for membership in the inaugural General Assembly.

The constitution/policy committee carefully examined the language that should be used for the RBNet constitution. This committee would work hand-in-hand with what was the steering committee to propose the formal structure of the Network.

Chapter 6:
STEERING COMMITTEE

The steering committee originally was an informal committee that included a number of pastors who desired to have a new association. Their first conference call was on August 6, 2015. Matt Foreman, pastor of Faith Reformed Baptist Church in Media, Pennsylvania, hosted the call, which included nineteen pastors and missionaries, though a number of others sent their regrets that they could not join the call. After recognizing a need to help missionaries who had left ARBCA, this group then helped organize the Rocky Mountain Missionary Conference. This committee continued to operate informally as plans progressed. After the meeting in Rincon, Gorgia, this informal committee was the landing place for the work of each of the three committees subsequently formed. The steering committee also assisted Grace Baptist Church in Taylors, South Carolina, as they organized the Founding Conference. It was understood that the steering committee was a temporary committee.

Matt Foreman, who acted as chairman of this committee, explains its development in this way: "Basically, we had an informal organizing committee for the 2015 missions conference (variously called the Communications Committee, the Steering Committee, and the Organizing Committee). After the missions conference,

Nick Kennicott came on the committee as part of Rincon planning. After Rincon, it morphed again into planning for the 2016 inaugural GA."[3]

At the meeting in Rincon, Georgia, Grace Baptist Church in Taylors, South Carolina, had volunteered to host the Founding Conference on November 15–17, 2016. It was expected that Grace Baptist Church would take leadership in organizing the Founding Conference since there was no General Assembly planning committee. The steering committee worked closely with Grace Baptist Church, Taylors, in organizing the Founding Conference.

The leaders of the three committees formed in Rincon helped Grace Baptist Church organize the details of the conference. These committees had met multiple times and reported to the steering committee. This committee would pull everything together and present the results to the churches.

Membership Committee

The membership committee wrote the application for charter members. The application included the submission of the church's constitution and by-laws. All documents submitted by each applying church were made available to all the churches applying as charter members. In this manner, RBNet was careful to maintain transparency and accountability to all the churches. This method proved to be very successful, for the votes by the churches were unanimous.

There were two additional significant areas of membership presented by this committee. One was the category of *associate membership*. This category allowed churches which did not substantially subscribe to the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (as required by RBNet) to agree to a statement of faith based on an updated and modified version of the 1858 Abstract of Principles. Associate membership allows churches to have fellowship with RBNet churches and in some cases to work toward full membership. However, these churches are not allowed to vote, though

3 Personal communication via email, July 14, 2026.

they may contribute to discussion on the General Assembly floor. These churches may also have advisory positions on the standing or ad hoc committees. Although some have suggested that this is a watering down of the confessional position of RBNet, such is not the case. RBNet remains robustly confessional, but having this category shows a gracious spirit.

Another category proposed to the churches and approved was that of *individual membership*. An individual member of RBNet is someone who is in a recognized gospel ministry, such as a pastor who desires the fellowship of RBNet churches. Many of these pastors have not been able to lead their churches into full membership but hope to at some future date. Those in this category must also subscribe to the modified version of the 1858 Abstract of Principles, although many of these individual members do substantially subscribe to the LBCF.

Personnel, Finance, and Structure Committee

This committee shared their portions of the constitution and policy manual for publication by the steering committee. Each of these areas of the constitution and policy manual were carefully studied and written. In fact, many hours of online video calls occupied the time of the pastors who were involved in these discussions. These committees saw no need to "reinvent the wheel" and so relied on what was good and helpful from the ARBCA documents. At the same time, changes were made to fit the philosophy of the new organization.

Constitution/Policy Committee

This committee reviewed the entire constitution and policy manual but was especially focused on mission policy. It proposed five ministry designations for missionaries.

The first was "Missionary," a man ordained and sent with the goal of establishing a local church.

The second was "National Pastor." This is a foreign (non-U.S.) national, pastoring or planting one national church and seeking

financial and spiritual support for a limited time for his ministry labors until the national church is self-supporting.

The third was "Associate Missionary." Associate missionaries are individuals subscribing to the LBCF who are recommended by, but not directly connected to, a full member church and who associate with RBNet for fellowship and counsel.

The fourth was "Support Missionary." Support missionaries are those engaged in ongoing missions work who are not pastors but are doing kingdom work, supporting and encouraging church planting and/or church strengthening. This category allowed for men who were not necessarily elders, but who would be assisting the work of the gospel. One example of this was the eventual endorsement of David Adams, who heads up the Poiema publishing ministry.

The fifth was "Military Chaplain." Chaplains are men who would be officially endorsed by RBNet churches serving actively in military settings.

Additionally, there were at least two other areas that needed to be reported. Chris Powell reported on the development of the website. The steering committee also made a decision in cooperation with the host church about the book table.

The steering committee set deadlines so that the Founding Conference would run smoothly. From the minutes taken by Jamie Howell on August 11, 2016, the following deadlines were set. (I include these to show the care taken from the very beginning of RBNet for a well-organized association.)

Suggested Deadlines:

- August 15–September 2, 2016: Committees meet and go over their section of the documents.
- September 7: Combine all the efforts into one document to be sent to the RBNet leaders and posted on the RBNet website.
- September 7: Have all the application forms on the website.

- October 15: Soft deadline for all applications to be submitted.
- October 17: Nominations Committee selected (possible method—draw church names out of a hat) from the churches that would be charter members.
- November 1: Nominations Committee presents a slate of nominees for the four RBNet committees.
- November 1: Preliminary budget presented to charter member churches.

The steering committee set the standard for the future RBNet to be both centered on the local church and well-organized.

Chapter 7:
RBNET FOUNDING CONFERENCE

The Reformed Baptist Network's Founding Conference was held on November 15–17, 2016, at Grace Baptist Church in Taylors, South Carolina. Host pastors Jamie Howell and Nicholas Alford welcomed all who attended for what they called a "momentous event."

RBNet officially constituted with twenty-six churches signing the charter document on November 15, 2016. The most vivid memory from this conference was seeing a representative from each church go to the front podium and sign the charter document while his picture was taken. A few churches post that document in a prominent place so that all may see it. In addition, there were at least forty visitors from other churches or mission organizations observing the signing of the charter document of what would be known as the Reformed Baptist Network at this first General Assembly. There was great joy among the representatives of charter member churches, and many noticed joy among the observers—a number of whom later became members of RBNet.

Why was there joy? Of course, there is almost always happiness when a new organization is formed by people who believe in its purpose. However, there were at least two other reasons for this joy. First, orphaned missionaries could now be cared for, not only by their local churches but also by the Network, finding unity in

an organization committed to missions. Second, all involved were committed to be robustly confessional and to have a catholic spirit in the best sense, which meant that RBNet wanted to commend wherever possible the good missionary endeavors of Reformed and sovereign grace missions around the world.

One of the first and most important items of business passed was a proposal by Faith Reformed Baptist Church in Media, Pennsylvania, to appoint an ad hoc committee to write a philosophy of ministry statement, expanding on the vision statement of the Reformed Baptist Network. This document would make clear the heart of RBNet. Using the newly adopted constitution and policy manual, a committee was formed and developed what became known as the core values document. This document was adopted at the following General Assembly on November 7, 2017. The explanation of that motion can be seen in the document titled "Reformed Baptist Network Statement of Core Values," available on the RBNet website (reformedbaptistnetwork.com).

A motion was made by Jim Adams to receive all twenty-six applying churches as charter members. The motion was seconded by Chris Powell. The written ballot was unanimous except, curiously, one church which did not vote for itself. RBNet had agreed that each church would get one vote and that there would be no secret ballots. Each ballot had to be signed by a representative of a member church. This was done partly because RBNet wanted to recognize that each church was equal, so that larger churches who could afford to send a larger number of delegates would not have more influence in voting, but also to discourage the possibility of playing politics in the voting.

Both the RBNet constitution and policy manual were adopted by a unanimous voice vote with no discussion. The reasons for this unanimity lie in the way both of these documents were developed. No committee developed the documents apart from the counsel of all the churches that would become charter members. Hence, since all churches had been involved in developing the founding

documents, there was no need for discussion. This showed the unity that existed among the charter member churches.

Two reports were given: one by Pete Van Dorn as interim treasurer and the other by Gordon Taylor as interim coordinator. Here is the record from the minutes:

Report of Interim Treasurer, Pete Van Dorn

Pete presented a balance sheet and income statement. Matt Foreman expressed appreciation for Pete's labors in getting RBNet incorporated and setting up a bank account. Chris Marley made a motion to accept the treasurer's report and John Doorly seconded it. The report was approved by a voice vote.

Report of Interim Coordinator, Gordon Taylor

Gordon reviewed how he became interim coordinator and his activities since then. He expressed appreciation for the assistance of Chris Powell with the website and social media, and for the Taylors church in hosting the General Assembly. He also indicated the need for secretarial help, as well as his desire to make more church visits in the future. Nick Kennicott made a motion to accept the coordinator's report and Steve Graham seconded the motion. The report was approved by a voice vote. The assembly thanked Pete and Gordon with applause.

There were three items of new business. The first item was the adoption of a budget for the following year. Pete Van Dorn, interim treasurer, who became the elected treasurer, explained the difficulty of creating a budget for a new organization. Pete divided the budget into three categories: fixed, variable, and suspendible. This method prevented the Network from ever going into debt. These categories remain until the present day.

The second item was the election of a coordinator. RBNet policy stated that the coordinator must ordinarily be a member of an RBNet church. This was not true of Gordon Taylor. However, the steering committee presented the following motion to the General Assembly, which was passed unanimously:

> Moved that Gordon Taylor be appointed as RBNet Coordinator for 2017 and in accordance with the RBNet Policy Manual 2.5.C that the requirement for full membership in an RBNet church be waived.

The standing committees had been elected, and each gave a brief report. The General Assembly planning committee recommended that the invitation from Grace Immanuel Reformed Baptist Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, be accepted for the 2017 General Assembly. That was unanimously passed.

So ended the first General Assembly of the Reformed Baptist Network. It was our united prayer that the purpose of the Network would be more and more fulfilled: "The purpose of RBNet is to glorify God through fellowship and cooperation in fulfilling the Great Commission to the ends of earth."

Chapter 8:
GROWTH

The Reformed Baptist Network began with twenty-six churches, but the attendance at the General Assembly in 2016 proved that there was wide interest in this new association. The newly elected coordinator made himself available for visits to member churches while encouraging contacts with interested churches as well. Although this was somewhat effective, the greatest promotion came from member churches themselves.

Five churches applied for full membership at the 2017 General Assembly, one church applied for associate membership, and four people for individual membership:

Churches Applying for Membership in RBNet

- Bible Fellowship Church of Greentown, PA
- Heritage Baptist Church, Owensboro, KY
- Heritage Church, Fayetteville, GA
- Iglesia Biblica de la Gracia, Grand Rapids, MI
- Sovereign Grace Bible Church, Worland, WY

Church Applying for Associate Membership in RBNet

- Grace Reformed Baptist Church of Mebane, NC

Individuals Applying for Membership in RBNet

- Dustin Battles
- Diego Lopes
- Michael Poirier
- Gordon Taylor

In addition, about twenty-seven churches were represented as observers at the 2017 General Assembly. Of these, nine would later join as full member churches.

Even more exciting was the vote in 2017 for endorsed missionaries. The minutes read as follows: "Vote on applying missionaries and indigenous pastors. Ten missionaries applying for endorsed status, three national pastors applying for endorsed status, and three missionaries applying for associate status were referenced. All were accepted by written ballot." It is worthy of notice that in addition to the ten, there were another three missionaries who had not applied in 2016 approved for endorsement. The purpose of RBNet was being realized!

Coordinator Taylor had requested secretarial help at the 2016 General Assembly. At the 2017 General Assembly, Riley Abu, member of the Covenant Baptist Church in Toronto, Canada, was hired as the new administrative assistant. Riley served for several years. After Riley's resignation, in God's kind providence, Taylor became acquainted with Pastor Bryan Bice from Faith Baptist Church of Sterling, Illinois. When Pastor Bice asked the coordinator if he had any prayer requests, he mentioned the need for a new administrative assistant. Pastor Bice told of the desire of his wife, Chris, to be involved in ministry. So, Chris Bice along with two other candidates were considered for the position. The other two women had to withdraw for personal reasons, with the result that Chris Bice

was selected. As the network grew, this position of administrative assistant became more and more critical to the Network. Mrs. Bice has served the Network with sacrificial excellence.

In 2018, the Network saw another five churches added, plus five more individual members. The growth, which continued year after year, required more administrative work. So, in 2018 a decision was also made to have three different job descriptions for the three areas needed for a growing network: administrative, bookkeeping, and communications. This proved to be a very wise decision, as today those three areas are serviced by different individuals. Today, John Divito serves part-time as the Network communications and content editor and has done much to promote the Network through various social media channels.

In 2018, Gordon Taylor announced his retirement, to be effective at the 2020 General Assembly. He expressed a desire to continue in a support role. As a result, the personnel and finance committee began a search for a replacement. This resulted in the election of Mark Chanski as RBNet coordinator in 2020. The baton was passed in that "virtual" General Assembly, which was broadcast online due to COVID-19, from Faith Baptist Church of Sterling, where Bryon Bice is pastor and his wife Chris serves as administrative assistant.

When Gordon Taylor retired in 2020, RBNet had grown from twenty-six churches to forty-two churches, with three more churches applying. Interest in RBNet continued to grow as indicated by excellent attendance at the General Assemblies.

In 2020, the transition of the coordinator position became official when Mark Chanski received a unanimous vote. Chanski took on this role with great enthusiasm and with a focus on building RBNet by seeing more churches added.

Coordinator Chanski immediately began to promote RBNet, and under the good hand of our Lord, the Network grew to about eighty churches as of 2026. Records show that in 2021, five new churches were added; in 2022, twelve new churches, ten individual members (these sometimes represent potential new churches), one

chaplain, and one national pastor; in 2023, seven new churches, one associate member church, five individual members, and three new missionaries; in 2024, eleven new churches, six individual members, one missionary, and one chaplain; in 2025, ten new member churches, one associate member church, and five individual members. Along the way, two churches have resigned. But the record shows steady and even rapid growth.

Along with the growth of member churches, the Network has become financially stronger. Also, the number of endorsed missionaries continues to increase. As of 2026, there are twenty-seven endorsed gospel laborers, including missionaries, national pastors, associate missionaries, chaplains, support missionaries, and two emeritus missionaries.

During this period of rapid growth, robust confessional conviction was maintained, which characterized the beginning of RBNet. This was done by careful interviews of new churches and thorough reporting to all the churches before a new church was voted on. Although the membership committee is not a gatekeeper, the committee is free to advise a church if it holds some views that the committee believes may be unacceptable to all the churches and that would not fit with a robust view of our Second London Baptist Confession.

One of the great blessings of the growth of the network is not only to see the support of more endorsed missionaries, but also increased financial support from the churches. In 2025, the Network's income increased to over $300,000. This has resulted in the ability to fully support the coordinator.

Growth is important, but even more important is that the purpose of RBNet along with the core values (explained in the next chapter) be maintained. We give thanks to our God that this has occurred.

Chapter 9:
CORE VALUES MAINTAINED

The heart of the Reformed Baptist Network is its core values. As the core values document itself states, "Organizational unity and healthy fellowship require a balanced and prioritized focus." This is a "statement of our identity to the wider kingdom, and a witness to the watching world."[4]

This statement's genesis came about as the result of a motion by Faith Reformed Baptist Church in Media, Pennsylvania. The following motion was passed after spirited discussion, with only four dissenting votes:

> That the Network churches appoint an Ad Hoc Committee to write a Philosophy of Ministry statement, expanding on the Vision Statement of the Reformed Baptist Network, to be presented for approval and adoption by the Network (if possible by the 2017 GA).

An ad hoc committee was selected following the procedure found in the RBNet documents. This committee was composed of Matt Foreman (chairman), Jim Adams, Nicolas Alford, Jon

4 "The Reformed Baptist Network Statement of Core Values" (2017), reformedbaptistnetwork.com.

Hueni, Jeffery Smith, and Gordon Taylor (member *ex officio*). At the 2017 General Assembly, "there was a voice vote to commend this statement as a statement of the Reformed Baptist Network, whatever the title eventually is, with the matter of the title to possibly be revisited in the future." (There had been discussion regarding the title. Ultimately the title "Statement of Core Values" was adopted.)

The Network did not require churches to subscribe to this document, but rather to understand that the "Statement of Core Values" did express the very heart of the Network.

These core values are critical for the Network, as they express in writing the desire of the churches to maintain not only a strong doctrinal center but also a spirit of love and cooperation wherever possible.

The first core value is for RBNet to maintain her strong "theological center." This means, as the document states, to be "robustly confessional" with Christ-centered humility. The core values express these desires in such a way that those looking on RBNet from the outside will see a network of churches that focuses on Christ but also has a heart for all who preach the gospel while remaining staunchly committed to the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith. It is our conviction that if we understand and love our confession, we need not be constantly worried about putting fences up that "protect" the confession. Yes, the network must be ever watchful that error does not creep in, but the Network will not need to create documents to add to the confession.

However, RBNet has, in the case of the Christian Sabbath (LBCF 22.8) clarified the various nuances of member churches in interpreting some of the details of acceptable practice on the Lord's Day. This document written by the membership committee is now available on the RBNet website.

The Network has been able to resist drift by carefully examining the theological position of each church that applies for membership. When there seems to be a difference, the church is either advised that a particular view may cause a negative vote on

the General Assembly floor, or the membership committee may give a careful report to all the churches. It is always the representatives of the churches meeting in General Assembly that make the final decision. This approach has enabled RBNet to remain robustly confessional.

The second core value is "a gracious manner." The Reformed Baptist Network seeks to carry out our activities in a manner marked by Christlike love, gospel unity, and biblical reconciliation. Though RBNet cannot claim to do this perfectly, there has been an effort to express love, not just to those who agree with us in every point, but to have a love for all the family of God. RBNet coordinator Mark Chanski in his May 2026 article in the *RBNet Monthly* waxes eloquent as to why he loves RBNet:

> I love this association of churches. Ten years ago, when I signed my name in Taylors, SC, to the covenant of RBNet, I'd been a Reformed Baptist for 35 years. I'd seen a lot. I'd grown weary of a Spirit-quenching tendency in churches to drift toward unnecessary controversy, disputes, criticisms, contentions, feuds, and divisions. I ached for a communion of churches that embodied both earnest zeal for truth and gracious love for one another. Nearly a decade later, I'm thankful to report that I found it!

And that is the testimony of many who have been in the Reformed Baptist movement for many years.

This "gracious manner" is also rooted in gospel unity. RBNet stays true to the gospel in the spirit of love, even when there are disagreements. Resolving conflict is perhaps the hardest grace to exercise. Conflict is not always resolved, but effort must always be made to resolve it.

The third core value, "an earnest mission," means fulfilling the purpose of RBNet in taking the gospel to the nations. RBNet unashamedly holds to the doctrines of grace, including a conviction that only those who are elected by God's grace and redeemed by the blood of Jesus will be saved. However, we reject

hyper-Calvinism, which questions the sincere, free offer of the gospel. RBNet believes that the sincere offer of the gospel is rooted in God's common love for all mankind. The "Statement of Core Values" quotes Ezekiel 33:11 to affirm that God has "no pleasure in the death of wicked," as John Calvin also affirmed. Therefore, the churches affirm that all men are invited to Christ and no one will be cast out who comes to Christ.

These core values are central to the Reformed Baptist Network. They must be protected, for if they are not, RBNet will lose its way. If grace and love do not surround the convictions of theology, we will descend into conflict and lose our love for one another and for a lost and dying world.

Mark Chanski has expressed very well what distinguishes RBNet from what history has shown to be largely a record of division and conflict in the Reformed Baptist movement. Therefore, RBNet must always remind herself of these values if she is to continue realizing her goal of reaching the world for Christ.

Chapter 10:
THE FUTURE

This chapter moves from objective history to what may be called realistic hopes for the future of RBNet. I believe this is legitimate in a historical account, since it is rooted in the hope that all that has been true in the first ten years of RBNet will continue and improve as the Lord blesses.

As I look forward to the future, let me offer some suggestions for our network to consider in the years ahead. Some of these goals can be realized almost immediately, while others may take years. But it seems to the author that all can be realized within our Network.

First, RBNet must remain centered on the local church while remaining united in challenging all member churches to raise up more missionaries. As noted previously, member churches are currently sending or sponsoring some twenty-seven gospel laborers. That is good, but why not make it the goal to sponsor and send on average at least one gospel laborer for every one of our member churches? May we follow in the footsteps of our Baptist forefather William Carey when he proclaimed that by faith in God's promises (Isa. 54:2), we should "expect great things" and "attempt great things for God."[5]

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5 Cited in "Narrative of the First Establishment of This Society," in *Periodical Accounts Relative to a Society Formed Among the Particular Baptists for*

Second, prayer in the local church must be emphasized for all RBNet gospel laborers in every member church. These prayers should include fervent petitions for not only the endorsed gospel laborers, but also for unreached people groups. The author remembers once asking all the endorsed missionaries if they could use help on their particular field of labor. One missionary responded with the challenge to reach people groups that as yet had no one preaching the gospel to them. The vision of RBNet member churches must include earnest prayer for the unreached of the world. Along with that, it would be good to keep church members informed about the work of each endorsed gospel laborer. Yes, as the number grows this can be a challenge. However, each church could include prayer for one gospel laborer each week.

Third, RBNet needs to maintain adequate staff and mobilize Network resources to support our local churches and their endorsed gospel laborers. At present, in the opinion of the author, too many endorsed missionaries are relying on the services of various missionary agencies. It is not that these agencies are unhelpful, but RBNet should consider taking on more of these responsibilities as we are able to do so. If this means hiring more staff, the churches could agree to the additional funding needed.

I would also like to see each gospel laborer regularly visited for ongoing support and encouragement, with the blessing and approval of the sending or sponsoring church, and then reporting to all the churches the work that the Holy Spirit is doing there. Additionally, when the local church sends someone to encourage a gospel laborer, the one who is sent should report back in such a way that will encourage all the churches. But if a local church is not able to send one of her pastors, deacons, or church members, then she could consider accepting an offer from RBNet to send a trusted and recognized person to visit and then report to all the

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Propagating the Gospel Among the Heathen, no. 1 (London, 1800): 3. Carey preached this sermon on May 31, 1792.

churches. The vision of the Network includes a report given to all the churches at the General Assembly via personal visit or by electronic means at least once every two or three years. We should continue emphasizing this practice in the years ahead.

Fourth, RBNet is growing at a rapid rate. This can make it difficult for churches and pastors to be acquainted with all the member churches. It would be helpful for RBNet to consider having regional fellowship gatherings. These gatherings could emphasize the purpose of RBNet, highlight missionaries sent out by churches in that region, and have reports along with prayer for each church attending. They should give adequate time for true fellowship and for friendships to be deepened. The vision of RBNet recognizes that friendship and prayer will more quickly promote the purpose of RBNet churches working together.

Fifth, RBNet must pray for the moral purity of its leaders and pastors. Over the years, all too many Reformed Baptist men have had moral failures. Each leader must constantly be reminded to watch his own soul (1 Tim. 4:16).

Sixth, RBNet churches should never give up the hope for worldwide revival, such as happened in the eighteenth century with George Whitefield, John and Charles Wesley, Howell Harris, and others. When the Lord sends revival, thousands are ushered into the kingdom in the mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In a short time, the Holy Spirit can do a great work in answer to the prayers of the saints. Until then, we labor on with expectation and hope.

For these goals to be realized, RBNet will benefit from having leaders who have had years of pastoral experience, who have a proven track record of zeal for the cause of Christ in missions, and who are hardworking men who love people, love the local church, and love the Network. The Network must be very careful in raising up the next coordinator and other staff personnel. Those in leadership set the tone and in many ways determine the future of the great cause of reaching the world for Christ. RBNet must remain true to our core values: our theological center, gracious manner, and earnest mission.

And finally, every church, pastor, and office-bearer in RBNet member churches as well as all gospel laborers endorsed by the Network must always remember its purpose "to glorify God through fellowship and cooperation in fulfilling the Great Commission to the ends of the earth."

Appendix:
A TRIBUTE TO GORDON TAYLOR

Mark Chanski

Gordon Taylor, our first coordinator from 2016 to 2020, is a prince of a man of God, a providential windfall to RBNet, without whom our association of churches would arguably never have been born, or successfully nursed into toddlerhood! He possesses that golden trifecta of graces every wise army of saints craves to find in its captain—humility, humility, and humility. As his successor, I have counted it a great privilege to sit at Gordon's feet and learn his craft of leadership, while Gordon washed my feet by serving me, as Gordon's Master so humbly did for him.

There stands tall in the courtyard of Old Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, a statue of Nathan Hale (1755–1776), the patriot Revolutionary War captain who was executed by the British on September 22, 1776, while on an espionage mission as an agent for George Washington. While standing on the gallows, it is said that he thundered, "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country."[6]

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6 Nathan Hale, quoted in Maria Campbell, *Revolutionary Services and Civil Life of General William Hull* (New York, 1848), 38. Hull was a friend of Hale and colleague in the American Continental Army.

Gordon has labored long for a yet greater cause—Christ and His kingdom. Surely our Lord Jesus, our greater than Washington, is worthy! And we will be forever thankful. There are no plans for erecting a statue, but we trust the memory of Gordon's service will stand long in our minds and hearts. And we will remember his bride, Rayna, there too, ever at her post by his side.

Gordon has been our valiant captain. Together we serve a gracious heavenly Father who spared not his Son, making Henry Martyn say, "I feel pressed in spirit to do something for God. . . . I have hitherto lived with too little purpose, more like a clod than a servant of God; now let me burn out for God."[7]

And we serve a wonderful Savior about whom John Flavel asked, "Did he stand as a pillar of brass, with unbroken patience, and steadfast resolution, under such troubles as never met in the like height upon any mere creature, till death beat the last breath out of his nostrils? And shall I shrink for a trifle?"[8]

If that's how He served us, then it's our duty and privilege to so serve Him. Remember, He sent us on a mission as His witnesses to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth, to all nations, to fetch countless tongues to sing His praise.

Half a decade ago, David Vaughn and Olivier Favre, sitting at their computers in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower, met with a few RBNet pastors over an online video call to discuss the prospects of starting up a French-speaking network of churches in Europe. They mused on the great difficulty of assembling a network of churches who could remain united in a world so full of destructive division and proud prima donnas. Jeff Smith from Coconut Creek, Florida, chimed in by sounding a crucial note: "The quality of your network depends on the quality of the men, the pastors, and the leaders who comprise it."

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7 Henry Martyn, journal entry, May 17, 1806, in *Journals and Letters of the Rev. Henry Martyn*, ed. S. Wilberforce, 2 vols. (London, 1837), 1:447.

8 John Flavel, *The Fountain of Life*, in *The Whole Works of the Rev. Mr. John Flavel*, 6 vols. (London, 1820), 1:270.

Jeff was right about us too. If we are worldly men, our Network will experience infighting, wither, and collapse. But if we are spiritual men, constrained by a love for Christ, characterized by the golden trifecta of humility, humility, and humility, the prospects of RBNet, gathered in the shadow of the cross, are bright and hopeful.

Let's follow our older brother Gordon in his humility to lead us into the next decade and beyond, further up and further in.

Gordon Taylor was the founding coordinator of the Reformed Baptist Network. He received his B.A. from Cedarville University in Speech and Pre-Seminary Bible in 1966. He received his M.Div. from Grand Rapids Baptist Theological Seminary in 1969. He was the pastor of two churches: first at Calvary Baptist Church in Greene, Iowa, from 1969 to 1975, then at Sycamore Baptist Church near East Moline, Illinois, for thirty-three years from 1975 to 2008. While pastor at Sycamore Baptist Church, he led the church to adopt the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith. In 2008, Gordon was called to be the coordinator of a Reformed Baptist association and served for seven years until retiring in 2015. After he retired, Gordon helped form the Reformed Baptist Network, and he served as the first coordinator for four years. Presently, he serves in a support role for RBNet. Gordon has been married to Rayna for sixty years, and they have four married children, fifteen grandchildren, and one great-grandchild.

REFORMED BAPTIST NETWORK

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