Pensions and Insurance

I. Introduction

The Christian Reformed Church in North America maintains employee benefit programs that provide retirement, health, life, and disability benefits for employees of the denomination in its ministries, agencies, local churches, and other CRC organizations.

CEB Services is the third-party administrator for the Ministers Pension Plan and the denominational 403(b)(9) Retirement Plan.

The Pension Fund was established in its current form by Synod 1939, with significant revisions to the plan adopted in 1969 (*Acts of Synod 1939*, pp. 21-22; *Acts of Synod 1969*, pp. 46-48) and later synods as well. The fund operates under a mandate to "maintain a Pension Fund and a Relief Fund from which emeritated ministers, widows, and orphans of ministers shall receive aid" in accordance with synodical regulations. This is in keeping with the expectation that the churches "provide honorably" for the support of retired ministers and qualifying dependents (Church Order, Art. 18-b; see *Agenda for Synod 1939*, Part II, p. 94).

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

The Ministers Pension Plan and the benefit insurance provisions of the CRCNA are an extension of our commitment to Servant Leadership, in which we aim to equip leaders so that they can be prepared in their roles of growing and developing the CRCNA's churches and ministries. We acknowledge that taking care of those who serve the CRCNA, by making provisions for their health and well-being and by providing a foundation for their retirement needs, allows them to focus their efforts on the callings entrusted to them.

III. Connecting with churches: *Our Journey* (Ministry Plan)

Although the pension and benefits programs are not directly tied to our Ministry Plan, they take into account the diverse needs of our employees and their dependents, recognizing that caring for one is part of caring for the whole. The plans described here are practical and tangible services and benefits offered on behalf of CRCNA pastors and staff.

IV. Board matters

The CRCNA ministers pension plans, special-assistance funds, and 403(b)(9) plans are governed by the U.S. Pension Trustees and the Canadian Pension Trustees. These boards meet several times per year, usually in joint sessions. Separate meetings of the boards are held as needed. U.S. Pension Trustees for 2025-2026 are Lloyd Bierma, Luke Kloosterman, Darrel Raih, Drew Sweetman (chair), and Alan Van Dyke. Canadian Pension Trustees for 2025-2026 are Janet Baird, Daryl DeKlerk (chair), Hessel Kielstra, Jack Vanden Pol, and Dick Vreugdenhil.

Lloyd Bierma will be concluding service on the U.S. Pension Trustees board June 30, 2026. A nominee will be presented in the Agenda Supplement.

In keeping with the instruction of synod (*Acts of Synod 2025*, pp. 675-76), the pension trustee boards reviewed their rubrics for board membership and forwarded the information to the Office of General Secretary.

V. Benefit-program activities

A. Ministers pension plans

The ministers pension plans are defined-benefit plans. Benefits paid by the plans are defined by formula, and the required funding of the plans is determined by actuarial calculations. The primary features of the plans include four benefit groups, as follows:

- Retirement benefits commencing at age 66, or early retirement benefits in a reduced amount beginning at age 55.
- Long-term disability benefits provided through an insurance company (to all full-time, active participants who have furnished the information concerning compensation and housing as required by the insurance carrier).
- Survivors' benefits paid to a surviving spouse if death of a participant occurs while in active service.
- Orphans' benefits paid to a participant's orphaned children up to age 18, or to age 21 if in school.

The following is a summary of participant counts as of December 31, 2025, for each plan and in total. Participants having an interest in both plans (the result of having served churches in both the United States and Canada) appear in the column where they have residence.

	United States	*Canada*	*Total*
Active ministers	561	227	788
Ministers receiving benefit payments	671	171	842
Spouses and dependents	180	56	236
Withdrawn participants with vested benefits	142	44	186
Total	1,554	498	2,052

Independent actuarial firms are employed to prepare valuations of the plans. These actuarial valuations furnish the information needed to determine church and participant assessment amounts. Both plans require a valuation every three years. The valuation dated December 31, 2025, is under way and will be summarized in the Pensions and Insurance Supplement to the agenda for synod. Information regarding church and participant assessment amounts will be presented later in this report.

1. Portfolio balances and performance

Plan assets are invested in diversified portfolios under the management of professional investment-management firms. These firms are required to adhere to the denomination's investment guidelines, and their performance is measured against established benchmarks and regularly reviewed by the trustees.

The plans' actuaries have informed us that as of the date of the plans' last valuation (scheduled at a minimum of every three years), on a going concern basis, the actuarial liability totaled approximately $139.1 million for the U.S. plan (as of Dec. 31, 2022) and approximately $53.8 million for the Canadian plan (as of Dec. 31, 2022). These amounts reflect the present value of the plans' future obligations to all participants including active, disabled, and retired pastors, widows, and dependents. The valuation data for December 31, 2025, will be included in the Pensions and Insurance Supplement to the agenda for synod.

Market value of the portfolios is summarized as follows:

	December 31, 2025	*December 31, 2024*
United States (U.S. $)	$132,086,038	$125,556,000
Canada (Can. $)	98,186,885	93,586,000

Dividends, interest, and appreciation in the value of the plans' holdings along with contributions to the plans provide a significant portion of the resources needed to meet the plans' obligations to the active participants and to fund payments to retirees and beneficiaries.

2. Plan review

The pension plan has undergone several changes since separate plans for the United States and Canada were established in 1983. While the basic defined-benefit form of the plan has not been altered, changes were made to benefits provided by the plan, to clarify how the plan is administered, and to improve the protocols used to obtain funds needed to pay costs.

Synod 2024 affirmed that the pension plans were created with values that have shaped and guided them (1) to enable ministers to serve in Canada and U.S. while maintaining consistent retirement benefits; (2) to mitigate the impact of serving a smaller congregation; and (3) to honor the covenant of the denomination to care for pastors with long-term disability protection and life insurance (*Acts of Synod 2024*, p. 811). With that in mind, the pension trustees are exploring broader retirement benefit options that may include a blend of defined contribution plans along with the defined benefit plan(s). The trustees are in the process of exploration and research, with the assistance of plan consultants to develop recommendations. This will include discussion and input from U.S. and Canadian pastors, including bivocational and recently ordained pastors. In addition, the trustees are working on providing more information and education to pastors and churches about the current defined-benefit pension plan and the defined-contribution plan that are available to them, as well as about the importance of building retirement savings through these plans. These tasks are currently in process, and the trustees intend to have recommendations for submission to Synod 2026.

3. Funding

All organized churches are plan sponsors and thus are expected to pay church assessments determined by an amount per active professing member age 18 and older or, if greater, the direct costs of their first or only pastor's participation in the plan. The amount of the assessment for 2026 will be added to the supplemental agenda for synod. The current assessment rate is $37.20 per member in both Canada and the United States, and direct costs are set at $7,704 for both countries. These amounts are collected by means of monthly billings to each organized church, based on reported membership statistics.

All emerging churches and other denominational ministries that employ a minister as a missionary, professor, teacher, or in any other capacity, including organizations that employ endorsed chaplains (with the exception of chaplains serving in the military who are not yet entitled to receive any military pension benefits) are required to pay the annual cost of participation in the plan. All pension assessments, however determined, are billed monthly, and the grant of credited service for pastors is contingent on timely payment of amounts billed.

B. Employees' retirement plans

The employees' retirement plans are defined-contribution plans covering most employees of participating denominational agencies and ministries who are not ordained as ministers of the Word. In the United States, contributions are paid into the two available defined-contribution plans by participating denominational agencies and ministries in an amount up to 6 percent of compensation. An additional employer contribution of up to 4 percent of compensation is made to match employee contributions of a similar amount.

In Canada, contributions of up to 9 percent are paid to the plan by participating employers. In Canada, there are no contributions made to the plan relative to matching employee contributions. In these defined-contribution plans, participants may make additional contributions up to the limits determined by federal or provincial regulation. Participants receive periodic statements indicating the dollar amount credited to their accounts, the value of their accounts, and the vested percentage.

Individual participants direct the investment of their account balances among several investment alternatives, including fixed-income and equity funds. The investment alternatives are currently managed for U.S. participants by Empower Retirement and Envoy Financial, while Great-West Trust serves as custodian of the plan's assets. For Canadian participants, Sun Life Financial Group manages and serves as custodian of the plan's assets.

As of December 31, 2025, the balances in these plans totaled approximately $47,437,400 in the United States and $6,665,554 in Canada. As of that date, there were 325 participants in the U.S. plans and 118 in the Canadian plan, categorized as follows:

	United States	*Canada*
Active	190	100
Inactive	135	18

C. Nonretirement employee benefit programs

There has been some lack of clarity and some tension in the management of nonretirement employee benefit programs, since, over the past few years, the Canadian and U.S. ministry offices have come to recognize that they have fiduciary responsibilities as direct employers. Benefits-program reporting falls within operational reporting to the respective ministry boards.

Consolidated Group Insurance (CGI) is a denominational plan that offers health, dental, and life coverage in Canada to ministers and employees of local congregations and denominational agencies and ministries. Currently there are 311 participants in the program. The most significant categories of participants include 214 pastors and employees of local churches, 97 employees of denominational ministries and agencies, and no retirees. The plan in Canada is a fully insured plan with coverage purchased through a major health-insurance provider and is supplemental to health benefits available through government health programs.

In the United States, the denomination offers health, dental, and life coverage to ministers and employees of local congregations and denominational agencies and ministries. Currently there are 321 participants in the program. The most significant categories of participants include 121 pastors and employees of local churches, 111 employees of denominational ministries and agencies, and 89 retirees. The plans are provided by the Reformed Benefits Association (RBA) through a trust established to fund benefits and expenses of the plan. RBA was established by the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA and the Board of Benefit Services of the Reformed Church in America to provide nonretirement benefit programs for both denominations.

Premiums charged by the plan in Canada are set by the insurance carrier. The premiums for the U.S. plan are set by RBA based on overall expectations of claims and administrative expenses for the coming year.

Due to the lack of clarity concerning the management of the insurance programs in our current binational structures, the pension trustees are evaluating whether it is still appropriate to include RBA and CGI under their official mandate, as is currently the case (*Acts of Synod 1995*, p. 668). Further updates will be provided in the Pensions and Insurance Supplement.

D. Financial disclosures

Audited or reviewed financial statements of the retirement plans are made available each year to the treasurer of each classis with the request that they be made available to any interested party (see crcna.org/welcome/governance/financial-statements). In addition, summary financial statements are included in the *Agenda for Synod* each year (as an appendix to the Council of Delegates report). Individualized statements are furnished to active members of the ministers pension plans and the employees' retirement plans.

E. Addition of pastors in churches newly affiliating with the CRCNA
Recent conversations with a number of pastors and churches exiting the Reformed Church in America and considering membership in the CRCNA have included inquiries about fitting together the pensions of pastors in such a transition. The RCA has worked with a defined-contribution pension system, which is fundamentally different from the CRCNA's defined-benefit pension plans. Careful assessments are being made to equitably and wisely incorporate the pension needs of pastors who may decide to enter the CRCNA.

VI. Oversight of retirement plans for unordained CRC employees
In 1951, in response to requests from the CRC's Board of World Missions, synod created a retirement program for unordained missions employees, a program later expanded to include all employees of CRCNA agencies (*Acts of Synod 1951*, pp. 69, 308-15; *Acts of Synod 1964*, pp. 21, 184-87). For many years this retirement program was overseen by its own committee, and that responsibility was transferred to the Ministers Pension Committee in 1992 (*Acts of Synod 1992*, p. 685). Although functional management of these plans has largely been taken over by the CRCNA's Human Resources staff in Canada and the United States, both plans formally report to the Pension Fund boards today. As provisions for retirement benefits have become an expected part of standard employment practices, it makes sense to restructure the oversight of these benefits plans so that the pension fund boards no longer have this responsibility.

The preferred structure is for the U.S. Employee Savings Plan (ESP) to serve the U.S. CRCNA (including ReFrame Ministries) employees and for the Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP) in Canada to serve the employees in Canada. World Renew employees' participation would be determined in consultation with the respective national boards of that organization. These changes would allow the plan better to reflect the CRCNA's workforce needs, compensation strategy, and benefits philosophy.

Restructuring the ESP and the RRSP under CRCNA governance will improve fiduciary alignment, enhance employee outcomes, and provide greater flexibility to manage and evolve the plan in support of the CRCNA's mission and workforce.

VII. Recommendations
A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to members of the Canadian Pension Trustees, the U.S. Pension Trustees, the director of partnership administration, and the executive director of CEB Services when insurance matters and matters pertaining to insurance and retirement plans for ministers and employees are discussed.

B. That synod, by consenting to this report, will have designated up to 100 percent of a minister's early or normal retirement pension or disability pension for 2026 as housing allowance for United States income-tax purposes (IRS Ruling 1.107-1), but only to the extent that the pension is used to rent or provide a home.

C. That synod, by consenting to this report, will have designated up to 100 percent of an ordained pastor's distributions from their CRC 403(b)(9) Retirement Income Plan in 2026 as housing allowance for United States income-tax purposes (IRS Ruling 1.107-1), but only to the extent that those funds are used to rent or provide a home.

D. That synod transfer oversight and administration of the retirement plans for unordained employees to the respective national ministry organizations, and authorize the Office of General Secretary to make any necessary changes to the regulations of the Ministers Pension Plan mandates to implement these decisions.

Grounds:

1. Pension boards are primarily structured to oversee defined-benefit plans, not participant-directed defined-contribution plans such as the U.S. Employee Savings Plan and the Registered Retirement Savings Plan in Canada. The current structure has limited the CRCNA's ability to implement plan improvements and adapt to employee needs.
2. Transitioning governance to the national ministry organizations would allow for more timely plan enhancements, stronger fiduciary oversight, and improved alignment with regulatory requirements.
3. This change would bring our accountability structures into formal alignment with our current practices and eliminate confusion about reporting and authorization of changes to the retirement programs.
4. This request recognizes synod's previous decisions regarding retirement plans for unordained employees of the CRCNA (*Acts of Synod 1951*, p. 69; *Acts of Synod 1964*, p. 21; *Acts of Synod 1992*, p. 685).

E. That synod by way of the ballot appoint one new member to a three-year term on the U.S. Pension Trustees beginning July 1, 2026.

F. That synod thank Lloyd Bierma for his time of dedicated service with the Ministers Pension Plan.

Pensions and Insurance
Roberta Vriesema, director of partnership administration