



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**CONTACT: Latricia Stockard**  
**(616)233-3552**  
[lstockard@visitgrandrapids.org](mailto:lstockard@visitgrandrapids.org)

**GRAND RAPIDS/KENT COUNTY CVB LANDS NATION'S LARGEST CONFERENCE  
OF RELIGIOUS MEETING PLANNERS**  
***CVB Combines Resources to Attract Convention to West Michigan Region***

***Grand Rapids, Michigan (February 16, 2006)*** – The Grand Rapids/Kent County Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) today announced it landed the most coveted convention in the religious market – the **Religious Conference Management Association (RCMA) 2009 World Conference and Exposition**. RCMA, an international, interfaith organization, represents more than 3,000 meeting professionals responsible for planning over 16,000 religious conventions and meetings that attract 14.2 million people annually.

“We were extremely impressed by what Grand Rapids has to offer, including its rich religious heritage,” said RCMA Executive Director DeWayne Woodring. “The combined resources of the CVB, convention center, area hotels and the region’s faith community were key factors in our decision-making process. Additionally, the ability to access meeting facilities, lodging and restaurants through a skywalk system is very attractive amenity for a January convention.”

More than 1,400 meeting planners and exhibitors are expected to attend the annual event January 26-30, 2009, resulting in 4,700 room nights and over \$1.3 million in direct spending.

- MORE -

## **PAGE TWO –RCMA**

Touting Grand Rapids as an ideal destination for RCMA's conference proved successful in the CVB's first attempt to host the organization. Grand Rapids competed against four other cities vying for the business, including Memphis, TN, San Antonio, Hartford, CT, and Hampton, VA. Both Hartford and Hampton had previously bid on this conference three and four times, respectively. It has been more than 20 years since RCMA held its conference and exposition in Michigan. In 1984, Detroit hosted RCMA's first visit to the state.

"This is quite a coup for our community. The ability to bring RCMA to Grand Rapids signifies we have arrived as a player in the convention market," said CVB President Steve Wilson. "The individuals who attend this convention plan conferences all over the world. This single convention has the potential to generate hundreds of new bookings. The potential economic value could easily exceed \$20 million."

The CVB identified religious organizations as a key target market and dedicates a sales representative to pursue opportunities in this area. Since 2000, Grand Rapids has hosted 61 religious organizations; a few of the largest include Wesleyan Church's World Headquarters and Youth Department, Missionary Church, Inc. and United Pentecostal Church – Michigan Youth Congress. To date, 15 other organizations have been booked through 2015 and 20 others are currently considering proposals.

With nearly 3,400 members, RCMA is the only ecumenical organization composed exclusively of religious meeting planners and those who provide services within this field. The association attracts religious meeting planners representing nearly 1,000 denominations and religious organizations, along with representatives of leading hotels, convention bureaus, conference centers, airlines and service companies.

###