



## **EXTERNAL SCAN**

### **CRCNA Strategic Planning Task Group**

**Fall 2012**

**Prepared by:**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **US Population Growing in Size and Becoming Increasingly Hispanic:** US population continues to grow, from 180 million in 1960 to 308.7 million in 2010, to over 438 million by 2050. Currently, 92% of the growth is accounted for by minorities. The 50 million Hispanics in 2010 were double that of 1990. White population was 67% in 2005 and will become a minority at 47% by 2050 while Hispanic will be 29%, Black 13%, and Asian 9%. The population is growing disproportionately older, especially the white population.
- **Canada Population Growing in Size and Becoming Increasingly Asian and African:** Canada's population grew substantially following WWII to 34 million in 2010 and is projected to be over 40 million in 2050. Immigration increased after the 1960s but has recently changed composition from European (3 in 4 in 1960s) to Asian (currently 60% newcomers) and African (currently 10.5% newcomers). Over 20% population now belong to a visible minority group, with immigration growth soon becoming the only source of net growth as the white population continues to disproportionately age.
- **Changing Values in Marriage and Parenthood:** Marriage in the US has declined among 30-44 year olds from 84% in 1970 to only 60% in 2007. Millennials (age 18-29) value being a good parent (52%) to having a successful marriage (30%), a change from 42% and 35% for 1997 Gen X. Only 22% of Millennials are currently married compared to 30% of Gen X, 40% of Boomers, and 50% Silent Gen at same age. There are more out of wedlock births among Millennials—51% compared to Gen X 39% in 1997, with children born to unwed mothers up from 5% in 1960 to 41% in 2008. Currently divorced or separated increased from 5% in 1960 to 14% in 2008. Only 63% of Millennials had married parents, compared to 76% for Gen X.
- **Declining Middle Class and Median Income and Rise of Minority Poverty:** Median household income was lower in 2011 than in 1989, with highest median income for Asians followed by White, Hispanic, and Black. Median net worth declined from \$152,950 in 2006 to \$93,150 in 2010. Upper-income households aggregate of total household wealth grew from 29% in 1970 to 46% in 2010, while middle-income households declined from 62% to 45%. Poverty rates returned to 15% of population in 2010 after significant declines in the 1990s. Those in “deep poverty” among the poor increased to 44%, up 5% in the 2000s, with this group being disproportionately larger among Blacks and Hispanics.
- **Decline of Identification with Christianity in US:** The % of Americans identifying with Christianity declined from 91% in 1948 to 77% in 2008. The most significant increase of “others” was among those not identifying with any religion, from 2% in 1948 to 12% in 2008. Large mainline denominations declined from 26 million in 1968 to around 18 million in 2004, while large evangelical denominations increased from just over 15 million in 1968

to around 23 million in 2004. While 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of persons raised Protestant remain so, about 1/3 have switched to another Protestant denomination. About 50% of mainline church members are now age 50 and older while the general population is only 40% age 50 and older. Christians identifying with being “independent” Protestant have doubled to 18.2%. Independent and nondenominational churches are now the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest faith group with 12 million adherents (after Roman Catholic and Denominational Protestant).

- **Decline of Identification with Christianity in Canada:** After 1960, Canadians remained “believers” but rapidly declined as “belongers” with 80% today agreeing that you don’t need to go to church to be a good Christian. Well over 75% of evangelical churches are now plateaued or in decline. Churches that downplay their distinctiveness tend to be struggling the most in terms of declining membership.
- **Characteristics of Congregations which Are Growing in the US:** Growing congregations tend to be: started more recently, located in suburban/urban communities especially in the South, associated with more conservative faith traditions, focus on spiritual vitality, demonstrate capacity to change, are similar to others nearby, offer more than one worship service, are innovative in worship, involve children in worship, involve members in reaching out to others, focus on family and parenting issues, and offer group experiences for growth.
- **The Crucial Issue of Identity as a Congregation or Denomination:** The biggest issue facing US denominations today relates to identity. This has in recent decades been eroded for many denominations by: postmodern forces that promote diversity and choice, broader societal issues which are contested which enter church life, and the changing demographics of the population. Those structures which are more participatory and relational appear to have better been able to respond to cultivating shared identity in the midst of these changes.
- **Denominations and Congregations:** Denominations are increasingly realizing that their own viability and future is tied directly to the vitality of their congregations. A shift is underway where the old pattern of “from the center to the edge” is being replaced by “from the edges to those who govern.” This is taking place even as revenues to national structures are dramatically declining, which is leading to significant organizational down-sizing and restructuring. This focus on structure continues even in the face of increasing evidence that restructuring alone is not sufficient to address the systemic issues that are in play.
- **Changing Role and Character of Leadership Formation and Theological Education:** Seminaries today are less tightly related to their historic denominations, persons now attending seminaries are less religiously formed, and diversity among students is increasing—gender, ethnicity, and faith traditions. Congregations and parachurch organizations are increasingly developing church-based training programs, leading to

increased non-degree leaders being certified and placed into ministry. Formation processes are increasingly focusing on mentoring, relationships, and attention to ministry practices.

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# **INTERNAL SCAN**

## **CRCNA Strategic Planning Task Group**

**Fall 2012**

**Prepared by:**

**Members of Strategic Planning Task Group (SPTG)**

**Assisted by:**

**Alan J. Roxburgh and Craig Van Gelder**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Increase of Congregations but Continued Decline Membership, Congregational Size, and Weekly Attendance:** The period 2000 to 2012 saw an increase in the number of congregations from 982 to 1099 (117), but membership declined from 276,376 to 251,727 (24,649), with most congregations shrinking in size and with weekly attendance decreasing from 264 to 209. While there was an initial increase in growth by evangelism, the trend has been downward since 2005 despite the increase in the number of congregations. Attendance at a 2<sup>nd</sup> service has steadily declined, in most cases to less than 25%, with only 37% of the ministries listing a weekly morning and evening worship service throughout the year.
- **Classes Increasingly Feeling Stuck and Unable to Address Systemic Issues:** Classes increasingly are struggling to be invigorated, connected, and missionally focused, while continuing to do their required business of governance. The extensive work of the Classical Renewal Ministry Team between the early 1990s and mid 2000s led to some creative ministry and change, but this has waned in recent years. The Ministry Clusters initiated by CRHM in the past few years now function alongside classes in many areas, but have mixed patterns regarding how they relate to and/or inter-relate with classes.
- **Increasing Disconnects within the Denomination:** Organizations throughout the church (congregations, classes, and denominational agencies and ministries), generally speaking, appear to have operated largely in silos and now have a sense of “coming apart” from each other. Changing or improving our structures does not appear to have resolved this problem, while patterns of new church development tend to increase a sense of disconnectedness. Many congregations are displaying increasing patterns of what is described as “congregationalism.”
- **Structure in Relation to Governance Remains as a Challenge to Be Addressed:** CRC Church order dates back to the Synod of Dordt in 1618, which was adopted by the CRC at its inception. The basic structure remains largely unchanged, though revisions are not uncommon and have tended to increase in recent decades. The key issue is that Church order delegates to Synod the authority to govern denominational ministries. Since the early 1970s at least 15 Synods have introduced structural changes at the denominational level. To add complexity to the issue, the CRCNA is a bi-national church and is accordingly faced with nationalistic sensitivities and rivalries, not to mention legal and corporate issues.
- **Ministry Shares Facing Challenges and Denominational Loyalty Continuing to Decline:** The CRCNA covenants together to do ministry using the practice of Ministry Shares, with about 80% supporting denominational ministries. Ministry Share per member requests have steadily increased over the last 20 years, while the percentage received has declined from 72% in 2001 to 62% in 2011 (for annual total of \$25 million), reflecting the declining loyalty to the denomination in recent surveys. For more than 35 years there has

been a strong emphasis on cultivating planned giving with more than \$350 million being developed, with much of this likely to be given as bequest gifts between 2020 through 2040.

- **Increase of Networks and Networking:** A wide breadth of connections function within the agencies, institutions, and offices of the CRCNA, with lots of potential for leveraging these networks/connections to increase effective ministry. The Ministry Leadership Council (MLC) approves any partnership entered into by any agency, institution, or office of the CRCNA. The key challenge is how to develop an effective matrix to leverage the most promising networks for ministry growth in the CRC and the communities it serves.
- **Increasing Loss of the Next Generation:** Substantial data point to an increasing loss of denominational youth. Between half and two thirds of all students identifying as Christian at the start of college, lose their faith by graduation, though this is less for Christian colleges. Decline in attendance at Christian schools is disproportionately high compared to the denomination's decline. Millennials (born between (1982-1992) indicate a stronger interest in spirituality and less interest in institutions, and a stronger sense of family than Xers. Evidence points to a growing disconnect of CRC programming reaching the Millennials who disagree with their parents and the church about important issues: global issues of social justice and an intentional lifestyle.
- **Cultural Diversity Remains a Significant Challenge:** Inconsistent and inaccurate terminology surrounds the issue of cultural and ethnic diversity in CRC history, where there has been a long struggle with its own practices of racism. Ethnic minorities have led the way in identifying racism and its effects, and denominational leadership have recognized the shortcomings of several past approaches. Theological foundations for working toward cultural diversity are well articulated in two key CRC documents, but many are not aware of them (*Learning to Count to One* and *God's Diverse and Unified Family*). There are few data sources and no centralized office charged with tracking how the denomination has progressed on issues of cultural diversity. Various ministries, initiatives, and task forces have been created to address the growing multiculturalism in the church with some being successful and others ineffective. CRC institutions have been encouraged by Synod to address issues of cultural diversity but few have structures in place or dedicate resources for the task.
- **Leadership Formation Processes Not Keeping Pace with Denominational and Societal Changes:** Ethnic diversity is lacking at the very top levels of denominational leadership. There is a marked shift towards more holistic training of leaders that incorporates not only theory but also spiritual/character formation, and practical leadership skills. Online delivery methods of leadership training are also becoming increasingly popular. The younger generation shows a much higher involvement of women in leadership training, mostly within alternative formation processes. This has not translated into women taking the traditional path of clergy leadership training at CTS. There is an overall growth in ethnic diversity among incoming leadership, but, while Asian-American CTS students have increased steadily over the last seven years, Hispanic and African-American student numbers have not. An increase in ethnic diversity is evident among the participants of various LDNs.



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# **INTERVIEW REPORT**

## **CRCNA Strategic Planning Task Force**

**Fall 2012**

**Prepared by:**

**Alan J Roxburgh & Craig Van Gelder**

### **CRCNA**

- **A denomination in flux, in a period of transition that does not seem, any longer, amenable to technical, institutional, organizational 'fixes'...**
- **Confronting a multi-cultural North America whose challenge looms large for its identity and future.**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This section provides a summary report of the responses of thirty interviewees from a sampling of the CRCNA. It shows a denomination in flux, in a period of transition that does not seem, any longer, amenable to technical, institutional, organizational ‘fixes’; the CRCNA is a church facing a multi-cultural North America that presents major challenges for its identity and future.

### Questions 1&2:

**How, if in any way, are you presently involved in life and ministry of CRC?  
How, if in any different way, have you been involved in the past?**

The CRC has been and continues to be an overwhelmingly positive experience for people. People recognize that this church is working hard to figure out what it means to be live in a massively changing cultural context in which the multicultural realities are now the norm. This positive experience is particularly the case for those in local church and on-the-ground ministry. Regional and national responses were more tempered describing themselves as frustrated and concerned about an ongoing lack of forward movement. Woman in ministry have found it difficult. Those from racial-ethnic diversity have had a difficult experience in becoming part of denomination overwhelmingly from one ethnic tradition. They have a sense of disconnect.

### Question 3: Appreciate most about the CRC a) historically? b) currently?

- Stewarding a rich, foundational theological, Reformed tradition.
- The language of covenantal, creedal, confessional.
- A comprehensive, cohesive worldview.
- Traditionally, produced stability and dependability resulting in basic confidence in identity.
- Education and learning from kindergarten to graduate school.
- Commitment to intellectual and academic engagement with the culture.
- A spiritual leadership shaped to know God.
- Holistic view of Scripture.
- High view of Biblical preaching.
- An immigrant tradition that was willing to take risks living into its convictions in day-to-day life.
- Readiness to adjust and change when confronted with fresh challenges,
- Social justice, care for the other and evangelism.
- ‘Family’ and long term relationships have given people a sense of identity and belonging.

### Question 4: Describe an occasion when you felt CRC was really “at its best.”

- Collage of memories of past characterized by cohesion, stability and common experience.

- When people stepped outside norms into mission.
- Before the CRC was restructured to a centralized, administratively centered denomination.
- When others from outside Dutch culture were invited into the church.
- When willing to address tough issues.
- Convictions about Scripture, education, preaching and spiritual life.
- Organizations, such as Faith Alive and CTS.
- Confront and adapt itself to changing socio-cultural realities.
- Efforts to reconnect with the RCA.

**Question 5: Describe an occasion when you felt CRC was “at its worst.”**

- Growing dis-ease, confusion, disconnect, anxiety related re: the national church.
- Something afoot, a malaise, that people can't yet name clearly.
- Organizational, structural solutions, while important, no longer sufficient.
- In a time of critical transition the very strength of the denomination (i.e., structural, organizational, administrative solutions shaped by strategical plans and clear goals) are defaults that are now its weakness.
- Existent processes and frameworks no longer diagnosing what needs to be done.
- Increasing number of “Article 17s”
- People leaving the CRCNA presenting a feeling it has lost direction, going downhill, and that it has loss focus on how to engage what is happening at the local level—with the disconnect between these two realities being relatively new.
- Synodical (Belhar) indicates a church failing to listen its ‘multi-cultural’ voices.

**Question 6: To what extent do you feel that you are aware of the significant changes/challenges CRC is going through at the present time? What would you identify as the most significant changes and challenges at present? Why?**

National/regional leadership, ‘very’ aware of challenges and changes; those in local contexts were far less aware of these challenges but very aware that change was afoot for local churches.

- ‘Traditional’ churches a dying model competing for a dwindling ‘Dutch’ demographic.
- Majority of local churches have plateaued or in decline.
- New church plants seem to not have much connection to CRC identity.
- Large churches growing but less and less supportive of denominational life.
- Churches have to break out of ‘family’ systems to connect with changed neighborhoods.

- Churches don't know how to do this and sense little support from denominational systems.
- Identity dramatically shifting---a shared loyalty is no longer operative and a shared future is no longer part of the expectations for many.
- Cohesion and connectedness between local and national dissipating and fragmenting.
- Reluctance to name the sobering realities facing the church.
- Current state of denomination is not being communicated by the right people.
- Loss of clarity around any compelling vision or direction for the denomination.
- 'Identity' crisis wherein the CRC no longer knows what it is.
- Emphasis is still on finding technical fixes for the structures of organization.
- Loyalty is waning as complex economic, social and religious demands erode the covenant between people and church.
- A functional 'congregationalism'.
- Grand Rapids and "2850" are symbols of a system now remote from the local; irrelevant in terms of the issues facing local churches.
- Relationships between local, regional and national no longer clear.
- Denomination in period of transition and does not seem amenable to technical, institutional, organizational 'fixes'.
- Challenge of a multi-cultural North America looms large. CRNA working hard to address this but it remains a major, unresolved challenge for the church.
- People ready to engage the question of cultural diversity but the majority culture unaware of what's at stake or how to go about addressing it.
- Existing structures for addressing diversity and race not working.

**Question 7: How well is the CRC handling this period of transition? How might it approach things differently or what might it do better?**

The 'not well' predominated. A recognition CRCNA has been trying hard but a strong sense the basic approach is entrenched in methods, models and frameworks ill-suited to the transitional challenges. Leaders are now facing an environment 'out of their control' and can't be managed by existing skills and methods. The question of the long term survivability has to be addressed. There is a reflexivity in the system that defaults back to organizational, structure and institutional solutions to current challenges. There is a blindness within the membership to its own cultural narratives relative to the multicultural and multiethnic challenges. There is urgency around this sense of a growing gap between GR and the churches. Local churches feel a disconnect.

**Question 8: What do you think the future role of denominational agencies and specialized ministries should be as the CRC continues to undergo change in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?**

Responses were often made in the context of thinking about local churches. Viewing the denomination as resource agency makes less and less sense and doesn't get at questions about the identity and role of national and regional in a radically changed context. There was this recurring theme of needing to pay much more attention to what is going on in local contexts. Membership decline and significant loss of youth make local churches feel adrift and unsupported by agencies etc.

The role of agencies directed toward local churches is expressed in terms of how to effectively provide congregations with the imagination and skills to be a missionary people in their own contexts. Agencies are doing too many things in too diffuse a way and, at time, in competition with one another. There are questions about eliminating most specialized ministries. In their present forms agencies need to be changed. Decentralization was underlying many comments. There is a movement of thinking away from national organizations to imagining regionally-based structures focused on mission in local settings. World Renew, WM and OSJ were mentioned as organizations with experience in assisting churches to address their changing contexts. Re-joining with RCA was mentioned.

**Question 9: What might be the future role of related CRC institutions (colleges, schools, not-for-profit ministries, etc.) as the denomination continues to undergo change in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?**

- Need for a reassessment of the existing relationships.
- Cohesion developed in past become a deeply embedded way of life (wherein the majority of people within the denomination went to Christian day schools then to Calvin College and, if appropriate, so Calvin Seminary) that no longer reflects a multi-cultural, diverse context.
- Most responses were directed to CC or CTS.
- Little said about the day-school system (did not have a direct question on this point).
- Calvin College should be an independent school.
- CTS viewed as critical to the future of CRNA.
- CTS not forming leaders with competencies to assist local churches.
- CTS needs to be providing much more leadership in forming a multi-cultural church.

**Question 10: Your "hopes and dreams" for CRC over the next 10/50 years?**

- A church broken out of a monoculture to embrace a multi-cultural, diversely ethnic identity.
- Congregations missionally engaged with their radically changing neighborhoods.
- A new kind of leadership. Merger with RCA.

**Question 11a: Greatest opportunities currently before the local churches of the CRCNA?**

- How to retool and re-imagine church in such a dramatically changed social context. Future is local and multi-ethnic rather than attracting a monoculture.
- Engaging the next generation which is leaving the church in growing numbers.
- 'Church' less and less essential to many Christians. Growing and troublesome disconnect between local churches and growing numbers of Christians.
- Shaping an ecumenical table in a post christian and post denominational society.

**Question 11b: Most pressing needs of the local churches in the CRCNA at the present time?**

- For system to listen to what is happening in local congregations.
- Attractional, monocultural congregations neither working nor sustainable.
- Translate mission and evangelism into engagements with changing communities.
- Renewed vision for being the church in the local.
- A different kind of clergy.

**Question 12: How well has CRCNA done in equipping and assisting existing congregations be more effective in ministering in their local communities?**

The overall responses were 'not well'. There's a recognition the denomination has been making efforts to address the needs of existing congregations but these tend to remain top-down and 'program' driven. The 'product' of seminary education is equipped to manage and maintain an existing culture but not address the adaptive leadership challenges of congregations.

**Question 13: How well as the CRCNA done in planting new congregations in recent decades? What needs to be done to most effectively improve this dimension of church life?**

Responses revealed a tentativeness and degree of unawareness. Some mentioned church planting initiatives as a sign of the denomination's openness to experimenting. It shows the denomination working hard at learning how to navigate changed environments. However, people want differing models of leadership and church formation, especially for multicultural contexts. There is a concern that the primary model for church planting and their identified leaders remains that of white Euro-Americans which is not a sustainable model into the future?

**Question 14: Classes**

There is little clarity about what is happening to classes and an even greater lack of clarity in terms of what to do about Classes into the future. Classes are viewed as deliberative bodies focused on policy and involving the internal workings of the denomination. They are struggling identity in a context that less and less values the importance of these operations. Classes need to shift their purpose from management and regulatory agency to being a mission-agency working with local churches and Regions.

**Question 15: Synod?**

Most responses addressed the ‘pressing needs’ of Synod, some the ‘opportunities’ and few the ‘resources’ question. Numbers of responders had not thought about Synod. Synod needs to provide a visionary leadership. There needs to be a better way for being Synod and finding that approach is a pressing need. Synod fails to engage key issues, such as identity, future, and diversity. The Belhar debate was viewed as marginalizing diversity and minority groups. A metaphor brought this into focus for some: how to move Synod from a ‘floor’ event to a ‘meal table’.

**Question 16: In view of rapidly changing demographics, how well has the CRCNA done in reflecting and responding to an increasingly multicultural church and society?**

- This question produced many animated responses.
- Great appreciation for God’s Diverse and Unified People.
- CRCNA has been trying hard.
- Priorities and policies point in the right direction.
- Lack of substantive forward movement.
- Progress thwarted by the defaults of a larger mono-cultural tradition.
- Congregations not yet at place of embracing a multicultural context as core to their future.
- Still framed by sense that their internal mono-cultural community doesn’t need to change.

**Question 17: How well has the CRCNA done in reaching, keeping, and involving the next generation of its youth and young leaders?**

Overall, interviewees are clear that the church is not doing well in this area. There is a common sense that CRC is now losing its young people/young adults at a very high rate. There is anxiety about this reality and the common sense that no one knows what to do about it.