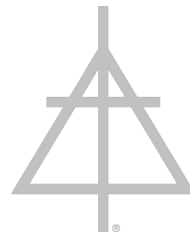


# *Strengthening Your Faith Formation Culture:*

Practices that Support Spiritual  
Growth in Congregations



Christian Reformed Church  
**Faith Formation  
Ministries**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Our congregations are like gardens, and each of us is like a plant growing there to bear fruit. Most gardens have healthy and unhealthy conditions for growth; in congregations we call this the “culture.” Just as a gardener seeks to maximize the healthy conditions and minimize the unhealthy conditions, so we are called to tend the cultures of our congregations. Our calling is to be congregations that embody the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ in all that we are and do.

Faith Formation Ministries’ *Strengthening Your Faith Formation Culture* cohort is seeking twenty Christian Reformed congregations to participate in a 12-15 month cohort designed to grow stronger, grace-shaped faith formation cultures within their congregations.

Participating congregations will:

- **Identify and Assess** the health of their cultures and identify the practices that are shaping this health.
- **Discern** which practices are best suited for strengthening their culture.
- **Experiment** with two or three steps to strengthen their trajectory.

To assist you in this process, Faith Formation Ministries will provide the necessary coaching, tools, and resources throughout the duration of the project. Details of what Faith Formation Ministries will provide, and expectations of cohort congregations, are listed in this [covenant](#). Learn more about our work with congregations by watching this [seven-minute video](#).

Some practices that can be considered for these experimental steps include:

- Steps to strengthen the Intergenerational church
- Working with the Building Blocks of Faith
- Enhancing leadership development for all ages
- Creating opportunities to strengthen faith storytelling practices among all ages
- Building capacity to deepen the diversity of faith journeys

- Refreshing the practice of the sacraments
- Strengthen the practice of spiritual disciplines

## **COHORT TIMELINE**

July 1 - Oct. 1, 2016	Congregations are invited to apply.
October 15, 2016	Application deadline
October 16- November 1, 2016	Twenty congregations are accepted, assigned a coach, and notified.
Nov. 15, 2016	The first conversation(s) has taken place between the coach and congregational team, and a plan for ongoing conversations has been put in place.
Jan. 20, 2017	Tools have been used to describe the congregational culture and the practices which shape it and possible project steps have been brainstormed.
Jan. 26-28, 2017	Official project launch at the worship symposium in Grand Rapids.
March 15, 2017	Experimental steps to strengthen the culture have been developed and are being carried out.
June 15, 2017	Initial assessment and reflection on these experimental steps guided by general benchmarks; foundation prepared for summer discernment for the second half of the project.
Sept. 1, 2017	The experiments continue with refined and clarified continued steps.
Dec. 15, 2017	Assessment, reflection, very rough vision and strategy for next 5 years.
Jan. 15, 2018	Full cohort celebration, "first fruits feast"

## HOW DOES A CONGREGATION DISCERN WHETHER THIS PROCESS IS RIGHT FOR THEM?

Here are some questions to help you think through your congregation's potential involvement in this cohort:

1. This project focuses on the congregation's faith formation culture, that is, the character of the spirit, longings, openness, and commitment with which you as a community invite "Christ to be formed in us" (Gal. 4.19). What specific words and phrases might you use to describe your faith formation culture? To what extent do these words and phrases indicate a readiness to enter into this project?

Questions that may serve to prepare the soil for these questions: What are your dreams and longings for your congregation? What strengths do you have to support working towards these dreams? What are the barriers to achieving these dreams?

2. Do you have passionate, committed, creative leaders who would form a strong project team and project team leader(s)?
3. Is your council and ministry staff committed to provide what is necessary for this project, including input, encouragement and finances as needed?
4. Is your congregation ready to take risks that have been guided by prayerful reflection?
5. Are you able to send a minimum of two people to the worship symposium?
6. Experiments **always** include failures. Are you able to learn from our failures and persevere through them, as well as share them with our FFM coach and other cohort congregations?

## DO YOU HAVE MORE QUESTIONS?

[This document](#) goes deeper into what it means to be part of a cohort seeking to grow a congregation's faith formation culture. Or, contact Lesli van Milligen ([lvanmilligen@crcna.org](mailto:lvanmilligen@crcna.org)) or Shannon Jammal-Hollems ([shollemans@crcna.org](mailto:shollemans@crcna.org)), coordinators of the 2016-2017 Cohort.