

Resonate Global Mission Supplement: Ten-year Strategic Plan for Church Planting in the CRCNA

I. Mandate and background

“We cannot stay where we are.” This was the overwhelming sentiment at Synod 2025 on church planting and our denomination’s future.

After decades of membership decline in the CRCNA, Synod 2025 had a passionate conversation about the future of our denomination. Something needs to change. A renewed sense of mission. Unity around a denominational identity. A vision and strategy for growth.

While the language was not used, delegates were collectively naming the reality that the CRCNA is in the midst of an inflection point. What is an inflection point? In short, a time of significant change.

We have weathered a lot together over the past many years. We long to see the narrative about the CRCNA shift. We named our growing desire for God to bring renewal and to see a renewed passion for church planting continue to grow in our denomination.

This passionate conversation led Synod 2025 to make this decision in response to a floor motion (*Acts of Synod 2025*, p. 709):

Instruct the Office of General Secretary to coordinate with agencies and the classes to develop a vision, plan, strategy, and financial proposal for church planting for the CRCNA for the next decade. This plan should specify the number of churches we aspire to plant, the strategy necessary to raise up leaders for this movement, and the resources necessary to carry out this plan (specifically financial but also otherwise). This plan should contemplate and propose how we as a denomination will secure the resources necessary to carry out this plan. The general secretary shall publish and set this plan before the churches by the time of next year’s synod.

The following report is the response to this request.

II. Methodology

Before we continue, we want to share a brief summary about the methodology used to develop this report and the work done by the more than 20 people involved in its creation. First, Resonate Global Mission engaged in extensive consultation to develop an initial strategic-planning framework for this project. We consulted with staff from our denominational agencies, members of the COD from all of our CRCNA classes, members of our denominational leadership team, and agency and institutional leaders who make up our Ministries Leadership Council in order to discern that the following areas would be critical for our long-term strategic work to grow our church planting efforts:

- an intentional foundation of prayer and fasting

- a plan to multiply disciples and leaders in every congregation and classis
- strengthening our support for diaspora and diverse church planting leaders
- identifying clear roles and responsibilities between denominational agencies, CRCNA classes, and supporting churches to provide strong support and collaboration for church planters
- a robust and intentional strategy to engage churches nearing the end of their life cycle
- a plan to deepen connections with the global church and international church planting
- a sustainable financial plan to fund church planting

We assembled work groups in each of these seven areas, composed of leaders from across North America who have expertise and passion in these areas. These groups received direction on critical outcomes to accomplish and had four to five months to complete their work. Each of these groups produced a report of their findings, which have helped to shape this report and its recommendations.

A denomination-wide gathering called the Multiply Conference, led collaboratively by leaders from Classis Southeast U.S. and Resonate Global Mission, took place in late 2025 and provided additional opportunities for leaders from over 100 congregations and 38 classes to engage with these elements of the strategic-planning framework.

As the seven work groups carried out their research, they provided classis leaders of the COD, the shepherding team, and denominational agency staff with updates, noting additional opportunities to engage.

After each of the work groups completed their reports, leaders and key representatives from each group, alongside other denominational staff, gathered for two days in Chicago on April 13-14, 2026. This gathering was facilitated by Catapult, a consultant group that specializes in strategic planning. Our time together in Chicago helped us distill what we learned from each group and to prioritize and shape the strategic plan in this report.

III. *Why plant churches? Starting with the gospel*

Before we talk about vision and strategy, we need to clarify the reason for this plan. *Why plant churches?* As with all things in the Christian life, we must begin our practice and our thinking with the gospel. We must start with the good news, the main events of the biblical story centered on Jesus:

- Jesus' life
- Jesus' death
- Jesus' resurrection
- Jesus' ascension and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost

What is the meaning of these events? What is at the heart of the gospel? It is the good news that God is acting to bring the kingdom of God into the

midst of history! Jesus' own words at the beginning of Mark's gospel declare: "The time has come. . . . The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15).

The kingdom of God—this is the biblical image that describes nothing less than God's redemptive purposes for the whole of creation: the renewal of all things and all of life from the power and effects of sin.

This gospel is centered on King Jesus.

And this gospel is meant to be embodied by a community of people commissioned and sent by the risen Jesus to make disciples of all nations as they are being transformed by the Holy Spirit to bear witness to this good news with the entirety of their lives.

We long to see this good news saturate every community and every crack and crevice of society. In obedience to our commission from the risen Jesus (Matt. 28:18-20), we are committed to work tirelessly toward this end until King Jesus returns and makes all things well.

What would this kind of gospel saturation look like? It would become a reality when every woman, man, and child has repeated opportunities to encounter someone whose life has been transformed by the gospel and to see the gospel on display in a local community that embodies it in a holistic way.

At its very heart, church planting is the planting of this gospel and the forming of new worshiping communities that announce, demonstrate, and embody this good news together as they put it on display.

These new communities are called to bear witness to this good news: the kingdom of God has come! The renewal of the whole creation from the power and effects of sin is now present—in Jesus and by the presence and power of the Spirit! These new communities take up their place in the biblical story as they participate in God's mission to renew all things under the lordship of Jesus Christ—in their local neighborhoods and cities and to the ends of the earth. These are new communities in whom and through whom God will accomplish his purposes for the whole world, new communities that are blessed to be a blessing, new communities planted "for the sake of the world."

With King Jesus at the center, these communities are set in the midst of a growing variety of contexts and cultures in which they bear witness to the kingdom of God. They invite people to experience the healing and transformative power of the gospel. They invite all people to find their place in this story of God's purposes for the whole world and to join in making disciples of all nations.

IV. "Project Antioch" —Laying a foundation of prayer

As the biblical story unfolds in Acts 13, it is apparent that prayer and fasting play an essential role in the life and mission of the church. As we see in this text, it was in the context of worship, prayer, and fasting that God's call

came to the leaders in Antioch. Through concerted and intentional times of worship, prayer, and fasting, the church received guidance from the Holy Spirit for mission—particularly the sending out of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:1-3). After receiving guidance, the church continued in worship, prayer, and fasting, followed by the laying on of hands and the sending out of those commissioned (Paul and Barnabas). Acts 13 shows that prayer is a catalyst for mission and the launching of new works of evangelism, including the work of church planting.

Inspired by this text, we are calling this “Project Antioch”—in which we recognize the importance of laying an intentional foundation of prayer and fasting for this CRCNA church planting strategic plan.

Throughout the history of the church, extraordinary prayer and fasting have been an integral part of God’s people uniting together for renewed passion for God’s mission. As we seek to catalyze the CRCNA for renewal and for growing our church planting efforts for the next decade and beyond, we believe it is critical to have a clear plan to embed prayer and fasting as an integral part of our shared long-term strategy. We believe it is critical to continue to catalyze and connect a growing movement of prayer in the CRCNA.

Therefore we recommend the following to Synod 2026:

1. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary to work with each of the CRCNA classes to accomplish the following:
 - a. Encourage each classis to identify and activate a prayer coordinator for their classis.
 - b. Develop ways to connect, equip, and encourage these prayer coordinators so that they might lead their classis into regular, intentional times of prayer and fasting for God to multiply disciples, leaders, and churches in our classes. These times of prayer and fasting should also include prayer support for church plants in the region and for parent churches supporting church plants in the region.
 - c. Invite each of our CRCNA classes to report back to Synod 2027 with an update on their intentional prayer and fasting strategy for their classis.
2. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary to take responsibility for identifying, curating, and publishing resources that will support the efforts of congregations and classes in the area of prayer and fasting.
3. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary to take responsibility to discern, plan, and publish opportunities for CRCNA congregations and members to gather corporately together for prayer: online, larger in-person retreats and prayer gatherings, and smaller, in-person regional gatherings.

V. Strategic plan summary

If we could imagine what might be possible if we pursued a shared vision for church planting together, what might we see? What kind of big-picture, rallying cry for our congregations, classes, denominational agencies, and staff might connect all of us to a larger purpose where church planting became a denominational priority? What might a preferred picture of our future look like? Here is our aspirational ten-year vision:

By 2036, the CRCNA will become a multiplying denomination where every classis mobilizes their churches to participate in God's mission by making disciples, developing leaders, and planting churches across North America.

How can we get there? Ten years is a long time from now. To help us know that we are making progress toward this vision and to clarify what we need to do in order to get there, we need "vision with teeth" for the next five years, followed by a strategic "reset" for the five years after that. The focus for these first five years will be to build the foundation, to gain clarity on ownership for the five core strategies that make up this strategic plan, and to test and learn from pilot projects to discover what works and is scalable. It will be primarily in the second five years that we anticipate seeing exponential growth as these core strategies scale and multiply across our denomination.

For the first five years, we need vision that includes indicators of success. We need something that is specific and time-bound. We need a measurable slice of this vision that will give us strategic focus. We need something that will stretch us toward our ten-year vision while at the same time being achievable and reasonable for us to go after together. As the visionary-leadership consultant Michael Hyatt has put it, "Vision must be big enough to stretch people but not so gigantic that it feels absurd."

What could provide this kind of strategic focus for the next five years? We believe an aspirational vision to plant 150 new worshiping communities across North America by 2031 will hit that sweet spot of stretching us without feeling unreasonable.

To put this into a strategy statement for the next five years, we offer the following:

If every classis in the CRCNA has a sustainable church multiplication pathway in place that helps local churches make disciples, develop leaders, equip planters, and plant new churches, **then** 150 new worshiping communities will be established across the U.S. and Canada by 2031.

Notice the logic: "If every classis in the CRCNA has a sustainable church multiplication pathway in place that helps churches make disciples, develop leaders, equip planters, and plant new churches . . ." This will be our strategic focus for the next five years—to work toward a future where this

“if” becomes true. And “if” this becomes true, we believe it is “then” possible for 150 new worshiping communities to be planted by 2031.

How are we going to get there in five years? We will need to prioritize the following five strategic areas:

- Discipleship multiplication
- Leadership development
- Church planting pathways
- Legacy pathway
- Funding and capacity development

In the remainder of this section of the report, we want to lay out why these five areas are critical for our denominational church planting strategy, share insights from work done over this past year, and introduce critical three-year milestones for each of these areas.

A. Discipleship multiplication

If we are going to see growth in church planting in the CRCNA, it is essential that we work to develop a denomination-wide culture of disciple-making. The church of Jesus Christ is most faithful to its identity when it is making disciples and reproducing itself. Without disciple-making we will wither, but with the intentional multiplication of disciples, the church is able to thrive.

The decline in membership that many denominations experience, including the CRCNA, is at a deeper level a decline in discipleship. Discipleship is not an optional program of the church but the very essence of the Christian life. We have been sent to the ends of the earth and commissioned by Jesus to “make disciples of all nations” as we go (Matt. 28:19), until King Jesus returns.

As the working group tasked with exploring this topic pointed out, there are principles that we can identify from Jesus’ own pattern of disciple-making in the New Testament. As the group summarizes here, we see in Jesus’ pattern the following principles at work:

- Disciple-making begins with intentional relationships. It requires believers who are willing to invest deeply in a small number of others.
- Discipleship grows most powerfully through shared life.
- Disciple-making therefore cannot be reduced to the transfer of information. It involves the formation of lives shaped by Christ and is both Word-centered and a lifelong journey of step-by-step sanctification.
- True disciple-making always depends on the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.
- Disciples often learn more from watching mature believers live out their faith than from listening to formal instruction. Discipleship is often caught before it is taught.
- Growth occurs when disciples are trusted with meaningful responsibility.

- Disciple-making includes coaching, encouragement, and accountability.
- The final test of disciple-making is not knowledge but multiplication; disciples make other disciples.

As the working group discovered, there is a current pattern of weak or inconsistent practices and commitments to discipleship across CRCNA congregations and classes. Disciple-making is not broadly embedded in congregational life at present. This needs to change.

An intentional plan for disciple-making in every congregation and every classis will be required for us to see the kind of multiplication we long to see. It is imperative that every congregation and classis have a defined process and support system to help its members become competent in disciple multiplication.

Following the principles summarized above, we will need to establish clear, shared definitions of what it means and what it looks like to be a disciple of Jesus Christ and to make other disciples. We will need to develop denominational metrics on disciple-making as well as a method to collect and report those metrics for shared encouragement and mutual accountability between classes.

We will need to build together principles for disciple-making that can be shared across our classes and congregations and adapted to the unique contextual realities that each community is facing. Particular emphasis needs to be placed upon learning from the global church as disciple-making movements multiply across the globe and as the church, particularly in the global south and east, becomes stronger. Particular efforts also need to be made to resource and learn from the growing ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity of churches in our denomination.

We will need to shift from clergy-driven to every-member disciple-making, renewing our practices of the priesthood of all believers. For disciple multiplication to flourish, a paradigm shift must occur. While pastors must lead and model disciple-making within their congregations, the majority of disciple-making must occur through the laity. When ordinary believers learn to walk alongside others in the way of Christ—reading Scripture together, praying together, obeying the Word together, and sharing the gospel together as they live on mission together—the church begins to function not merely as an institution but as a multiplying movement. We are all engaged in the call to make disciples in the places and among the people with whom we work, live, and play.

Discipleship is essential to this entire strategic plan. Without it, church planting remains limited and unsustainable.

Where do we need to be in three years to make progress toward our five-year strategic focus? Here is what needs to be true in three years:

The CRCNA has developed clear discipleship principles for the denomination that can be contextualized across different church settings, and 20 percent of classes are piloting this effort and have seen “two generations of reproduction” (i.e., disciples who have made disciples who have made disciples).

Strategically, we will need to develop denominational discipleship principles that are able to be contextualized across different church settings. We will need at least 20 percent of classes identified and engaged as beta groups for pastor training. We will need to codify our learning from these classes and to share this vision and learning with other classes for integration across our entire denomination and remaining classes.

Therefore we recommend the following to Synod 2026:

1. That synod affirm that disciple-making lies at the heart of the church’s identity and mission and is essential to this entire strategic plan. Synod therefore calls every congregation, classis, and denominational ministry to prioritize the multiplication of disciples who make disciples, consistent with the biblical pattern reflected in Matthew 28:18–20 and 2 Timothy 2:2.
2. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary, in collaboration with Thrive and Resonate, along with additional leaders in discipleship in the broader CRC family, to accomplish the following toward the three-year milestone:
 - a. Update the *Our Journey* ministry plan to ensure it addresses disciple-making in its four milestones.
 - b. Implement denominational discipleship principles that can be contextualized across different church settings, including diaspora and culturally diverse communities. Particular attention should be given to learning from discipleship movements in the global church and from opportunities through Resonate Global Mission to connect more deeply with international church planting movements and the global church.
 - c. Identify and engage at least 20 percent of current CRCNA classes as beta groups for pastor training in these discipleship principles.
 - d. Gather learning and feedback from these groups, begin to codify the learning, and share the learning and vision with remaining CRCNA classes for rollout and implementation.
 - e. Develop tools capable of assessing the following disciple-making activity metrics across CRCNA congregations, collecting the data, and reporting it annually to future synods for the duration of this ten-year plan, beginning with Synod 2027:
 - the percentage of CRCNA members intentionally discipling others

- the percentage of CRCNA members equipped for disciple-making
- the percentage of CRCNA pastors engaged in relational disciple-making

B. Leadership development

Developing leaders is mission critical for the future of our denomination. Without leaders, church planting will not be able to scale and grow in the CRCNA. This will need to include a broad vision to develop young adult leaders, informal leaders serving in a variety of ministries, and more formal licensed and ordained leaders. All of these types of leaders will be required to plant and lead new worshiping communities.

As the working group tasked with developing this area discovered, there are significant leadership gaps in our denomination at the present time. Across North America many denominations are discovering that their traditional leadership pipelines are no longer sufficient. For generations, the path to pastoral leadership often followed a relatively predictable pattern: individuals sensed a call to ministry, left their local context to attend seminary, and later returned to serve churches. While this pathway continues to serve the church well in many cases, it has also become increasingly difficult for many potential leaders to pursue. Financial barriers, geographic limitations, family responsibilities, and vocational commitments often prevent gifted leaders from leaving their communities to pursue residential theological education.

At the same time, many congregations have unintentionally weakened their own leadership pipelines by failing to identify and mentor emerging leaders early in their development. The result is a growing leadership gap.

In order to fill this gap, we will need to recover a high level of intentionality to develop leaders. This will require us to establish a clear, shared definition of what we mean by “leader.” As in the case of disciple-making, with leadership development we will need to build together pathways for leadership development in each of our congregations and classes. We will also need to develop denominational metrics on leadership development as well as a method to collect and report those metrics for shared encouragement and mutual accountability between classes.

We will need staffing resources to help provide guidance to classes, and we will need support to help each of them develop leadership development goals and practices. We see the need to collect these goals from each class and to compile them into a future report for a future synod. We see the need to track progress toward these goals on at least an annual basis. We see the need to help connect classes with training resources and leadership development pathways. Partnerships between our classes, congregations, and Calvin Theological Seminary will be critical to these efforts. The recently developed Empower Program through Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS) may prove to be particularly effective to develop future leaders who

remain in their ministry contexts as they develop and demonstrate ministry competencies in critical areas. Other distance-learning programs are also available through CTS.

Specific attention must be given to resourcing and supporting the growing number of leaders from diaspora communities across North America and leaders from a growing diversity of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Future church planting growth in the CRCNA has the potential to be significantly driven by leaders from these communities. However, current systems are not built to support them effectively.

Significant gaps identified for leaders from these communities have been identified and must be overcome as we move into the future. Many leaders experience isolation and systemic barriers. The following are some of the most critical issues identified by one of our working groups:

- Financial and long-term support challenges—Many church planters experience ongoing financial pressure, often needing bivocational work, which limits ministry time and can affect both family life and pastoral well-being.
- Bivocational/covocational work—Some church planters choose bivocational work as a mission strategy, while others do it out of financial need.
- Neglecting 1.5- and second-generation immigrants—Leaders who come from immigrant backgrounds but were raised in North America often experience a sense of being between cultures.
- Training for churches that are planting and those that are being planted—When both communities are equipped and aligned, partnerships are stronger, expectations are clear, and both can find solutions that work for them.
- Assessments and internship opportunities—Some non-Anglo church planters are uncertain about available pathways for assessments and ministry internships.
- Strategic commitment—Church planters often need continued encouragement and guidance beyond the initial launch phase.
- Accessible discipleship resources and materials in different languages—Many discipleship and training materials are primarily available in English.
- Recognizing the diversity within diaspora communities—Diaspora ministry includes an extremely wide range of nationalities, ethnicities, cultures, and subcultures.

We have a major growth opportunity before us if we are able to build holistic, culturally responsive support systems and strengthen coaching, partnerships, and contextualized training for the development of leaders from diaspora and culturally diverse communities in our midst.

As with our discipleship efforts, there is also a massive opportunity before us for deeper engagement with the global church to embrace mutuality,

partnership, and shared learning. These global partnerships have real potential to catalyze our own leadership renewal in the CRCNA, particularly as we connect with and learn from the global church in the area of church planting.

Where do we need to be in three years to make progress toward our five-year strategic focus? Here is what needs to be true in three years:

Every classis, supported and resourced by denominational agencies, has a clear and contextual leadership development pathway with identified ownership, aligned resources, and an active team guiding the process.

If we are going to see this become a reality, we will need our denominational agencies to provide clear guidance, tools, and resources for leadership development to our classis leadership bodies. We will need every classis to identify a leadership development team with clear ownership for the leadership development pathway. We will need every classis to produce a clear and contextual leadership development pathway, as well as an aspirational goal of how many leaders they aim to develop in the next five to ten years.

Therefore we recommend the following to Synod 2026:

1. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary, in collaboration with the Candidacy Committee, Calvin Theological Seminary, Thrive, and Resonate, to ensure that every classis is supported and resourced to develop a clear and contextual leadership development pathway with identified ownership, aligned resources, and an active team guiding the process. This should include the following:
 - a. Provide clear guidance, tools, and resources for leadership development that can be made available to every CRCNA classis. Connect classes with these leadership development resources and work to ensure that they are accessible to all leaders, including those from diaspora and culturally diverse communities.
 - b. Identify a leadership development team (e.g., Classis Ministerial Leadership Team [CMLT]) in each classis with clear ownership for the leadership development pathway in their classis.
 - c. Within the next year, resource and encourage every classis so that they are able to complete the following and report back to Synod 2027:
 - 1) Assess opportunities for leadership development within their congregations.
 - 2) Consider strategies for strengthening disciple-making cultures in the churches of the classis.
 - 3) Identify mentoring and training environments for emerging leaders within the classis.

- 4) Determine how many leaders each classis believes God may enable it to develop within the next decade. Once all classes have reported, the combined total of these commitments will become the CRCNA's denominational leadership multiplication goal.
- 5) Describe how the classis plans to address the gaps identified by the diaspora and diversity working group's report, as noted above in the summary.
- d. Track progress toward these classis goals and provide annual reports to synod, for the duration of this ten-year plan and beginning with Synod 2027.
2. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary to develop a plan to address the following challenges raised by the growing number of leaders from diaspora and diverse communities and report back to Synod 2027:
 - a. Assist classes to improve language accessibility and translation in classis meetings.
 - b. Clarify the role and participation of church planters in classis.
 - c. Provide clear and accessible credentialing pathways for diaspora leaders, ensuring that the credentialing processes are clearly explained and easily accessible for leaders coming from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
 - d. Provide ecclesiastical and cultural orientation for new leaders within the CRCNA to assist church planters entering the CRCNA who are unfamiliar with denominational structures, postures, and expectations.
 - e. Provide accessible resources in multiple languages to help strengthen leadership development and discipleship within multi-cultural congregations.
3. That synod instruct the Candidacy Committee, in partnership with Calvin Theological Seminary and Resonate Global Mission, to create an agreed-upon "Church Planting Commissioned Pastor Certificate" program with the potential to earn seminary credits (to encourage further learning that may lead to a master of divinity degree toward ordination as a minister of the Word). Most importantly, though, start by developing a set of unified subjects that apply specifically to church planters. As it exists right now, the commissioned pastor certificate is very broad and not area/focus specific, so it would be helpful to have one for church planters, one for ministry associates, one for chaplains, and so on. This way, church planters would learn what is relevant and important and necessary for church planters to learn, such as fundraising and other subjects that pertain to church planting work.
4. That synod encourage congregations and classes to strengthen leadership pipelines through mentoring, theological education, and ministry

formation. Special attention should be given to expanding leadership development pathways that allow emerging leaders to remain embedded within their ministry contexts. Synod would therefore affirm the importance of the following:

- mentoring relationships within local churches
 - classis-based leadership development environments
 - church planting residencies and leadership cohorts
 - competency-based theological education and distance programs such as those offered at CTS
5. That synod commend to the churches of the CRCNA the opportunities for leadership development and formation available by partnering with Resonate Global Mission to connect more deeply with international church planting movements and the global church.

C. Church planting pathways

Church planting effectiveness can be hindered by unclear and overlapping partner roles. This is one of the core insights from the working group tasked with clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the various partners necessary to support a strong denominational ecosystem of support for church planting.

At times in our current reality, there is confusion and lack of clarity about what it takes from local churches, classes, and denominational agencies to support church planting in the CRCNA. Two common failures need to be addressed: (1) the failure of neglect where there is no clear local ownership for church planting pathways and (2) the failure of overloading too many expectations on local and regional partners for church planting to succeed.

We need to clarify and simplify roles and responsibilities for all of the partners that are needed along the church planting pathway for our church plants to be resourced and supported well. Resonate Global Mission has done good work this past year to clarify best practices and principles that can serve local partners to do this well. We commend Resonate's expertise to all of our classes, churches, and agencies.

Local partnership teams are vital to gather and align all of the local partners around the shared goal of supporting a church plant and seeing it flourish. What is a "local partnership team"? A team that includes at least one representative from each of the following: the church plant's supporting churches, classis, Resonate Global Mission, and other local supportive ministry partners and agencies. This team provides collaborative oversight, prayer, life-giving encouragement, and helpful accountability for the church plant.

Given the denomination's dramatic growth in cultural diversity, as well as leaders planting among a variety of diaspora communities, it will be just as vital to identify and build a team of "Barnabas Advocates" in each of our classes that can bridge and support church plants locally, with all of the resourcing and support coming from the region and through denominational

agencies. What is a “Barnabas Advocate”? Just as Barnabas advocated for and encouraged the apostle Paul, removing barriers and helping him succeed in Jesus’ mission (Acts 9:27; 11:25-26; 12:25-14:28), the Barnabas Advocate is a local leader invested in church planting who will help bridge new planters into the culture of the classis and the denomination, connect to resources, cheer on the church planter and church planting in the classis, and be part of a larger regional group of advocates, who can best be the local conduit for—and feedback into—Resonate’s church planting training and resources. The Barnabas Advocate is defined by their function, not necessarily by any particular role. For example, they may be a local pastor, classis leader, retired pastor, or someone else with this passion.

Church planting strategists embedded in each classis will provide even more lift to this strategic plan and could play a critical role in helping classes develop and implement a strategic church planting pathway for the congregations in their classis.

If we are going to achieve our five-year aspirational outcome, we will need to identify classes that are willing and able to collaborate with Resonate Global Mission to design a contextualized church planting pathway, clarify the core components of the pathway for their context, and begin to identify potential leaders, advocates, and support roles that are needed to begin piloting a church-planting pathway for their classis.

Where do we need to be in three years to make progress toward our five-year strategic focus? Here is what needs to be true in three years:

Forty percent of CRCNA classes have an active church planting pathway with identified ownership, equipped leaders, supporting churches, and at least two church planters moving through assessment, coaching, and preparation.

We believe that 40 percent is a meaningful proportion of our classes that would be willing over the next three years to be actively engaged as pilot sites, helping to test a pathway, train leaders, surface obstacles, and generate learning that can shape a broader rollout across all classes.

For this to become true in three years, we need church planting strategists to be identified by 40 percent of our classes and gathered into a team of strategists who can be resourced and supported in their roles. We will need 40 percent of our classes to be willing to have their church planting strategist collaborate with Resonate Global Mission to develop and implement a church planting pathway that is owned and operated by the classis. We will need each of these classes participating as pilot sites to set an aspirational goal of identifying and beginning to work with at least two church planters/teams over the next three years.

Therefore we recommend the following to Synod 2026:

1. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary, in collaboration with Resonate Global Mission, to accomplish the following toward the three-year milestone:

- a. Work with all CRCNA classes to identify a “Barnabas Advocate,” as described in this report, for each classis and to connect that person to Resonate Global Mission for equipping, connection to other “Barnabas Advocates,” and support.
 - b. Work with all CRCNA classes to identify a church planting strategist, with a goal of identifying one in at least 40 percent of CRCNA classes. This church planting strategist, once identified, should be connected to Resonate Global Mission for equipping, support, and collaboration.
2. That synod commend the work of Resonate Global Mission to partner with churches and classes of the CRCNA. Resonate’s partnership agreement framework provides clear roles and responsibilities, along with best practices, for collaborative partnership to support CRCNA church plants.
 3. That synod commend the work of Resonate Global Mission to help churches, classes, and agencies of the CRCNA to discover helpful ways in which our church planting pathways can learn from and be connected to what God is doing in the global church today in the area of church planting.

D. Legacy pathway

If we are going to lean into a future of multiplication and church planting together as a denomination, we need to face honestly the reality of decline and contraction within our denomination. One of our working groups did some research to develop a snapshot of some of our current realities. Here are some things they discovered about the CRCNA at present:

- Between 2015-2025, 169 congregations have disbanded and closed their ministries. During that same period, 94 churches were planted, for a net loss of 75 congregations.
- Between 2020-2025, 604 congregations are experiencing a measurable decline in membership (over 10% decline). During that same period, 60 congregations are experiencing more significant decline (over 25% decline).
- Currently 97 congregations have fewer than 45 professing members.
- Currently 23 percent of declining congregations are without a lead pastor.

A significant and growing number of congregations in the CRCNA are at or nearing what can begin to feel like the end of their life cycle as a congregation. Membership decline reaches a point where the long-term sustainability and viability of the ministry comes into question. This is a painfully difficult time for a congregation. Many congregations facing this reality feel added burdens of grief and shame. It becomes increasingly difficult to make decisions about the future. Many congregations facing such realities find it difficult to renew their outward mission focus. Congregations need

help to recover a sense that their final chapter of ministry can be outwardly significant for the sake of the gospel.

When churches end their ministries, classes are often the recipients of significant funds generated by the closure of churches, but sometimes organizations outside the CRC are the primary beneficiaries. Further, within many classes, the vision and opportunity for planting new churches does not match the availability of funds. Some classes have significant funds in reserve but little vision and opportunity to plant. Those funds sit and wait for a rainy day. Other classes have significant vision and opportunity to plant but few funds. Presently there is no consistent way for classes in these mismatched situations to identify each other and work together.

It is our conviction that end-of-life-cycle churches are not a problem to be managed but a legacy to be stewarded. A church that closes its doors can still open new ones—if the denomination is equipped, coordinated, and committed to making that possible.

Unfortunately, added to these realities is the fact that there is currently a lack of clear pathways for legacy-making decisions. We need to move toward an intentionally sequenced, broad pathway that incorporates distinct tracks for congregations to take, including the following:

- Triage—an initial step to determine a congregation’s likely trajectory and appropriate pathway
- Palliative care—to accompany congregations through a dignified, missional closure
- Active treatment—to bring intensive renewal engagement for viable candidates
- Lifestyle change—to provide ongoing support for congregations requiring modest adjustment and monitoring

There is a need to assess current denominational efforts and capacity in an effort to develop a renewed and strong legacy pathway for the future. This pathway can provide the strategic direction and support necessary for congregations to consider replanting, merging, or transferring assets to new church plants. If we are going to see the long-term vision for church planting realized in the CRCNA, we will need to find a way to normalize church planting as the preferred legacy outcome for churches that reach the end of their current life cycle.

Alongside these opportunities are challenges of some historic realities as well. It has long seemed that the Center for Church Renewal (CCR), an independent Reformed organization serving CRCNA churches near the end of their life cycle, and CRC agencies could complement each other in serving Christian Reformed congregations. Resonate, Thrive, and CCR have all provided support for churches at the end of their life cycle. All have a stated interest in renewal and new church development. Unfortunately, the history of working alongside each other has been complicated and unsatisfying. A future with one pathway and one set of resources led by Thrive

would be preferred. For this to be possible, some attention will need to be given to address past hurts as experienced by all groups.

The recommendations from the working group that looked into this aspect of the strategic plan are comprehensive and describe the need for establishing denominational metrics, increasing staffing and coaching capacity, improving resource effectiveness, establishing a Church Planting Legacy fund, and exploring a preferred future with one pathway led by Thrive. We commend this work to the COD and to the leadership of Thrive to assist in reviewing the current Crossroads Discernment process and in building a stronger legacy pathway in the CRCNA for churches nearing the end of their life cycle.

Where do we need to be in three years with this priority in order to make progress toward our five-year strategic focus? Here is what needs to be true in three years:

Every classis has access to an endorsed process and trained facilitators to help congregations facing decline to discern renewal, multiplication, or faithful legacy decisions.

This objective will require Thrive to develop a shared and unified renewal and legacy pathway for CRCNA congregations. We will need to identify, train, endorse, and match facilitators to each classis that needs these facilitators to accompany declining congregations in their classis. We will need every classis to have access to a Thrive endorsed facilitator who will be able to guide them through the legacy pathway.

Therefore we recommend the following to Synod 2026:

1. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary to develop a denominational network of regional facilitators to support the discernment process for churches that fit the criteria found in Church Order Supplement, Article 38-d, and that have a sustained membership decline of more than 10 percent over the past five years, in order to provide a coordinated response for helping such churches discern whether God may be leading to renewal, closure, or other kingdom-focused options, and to report to synod annually over the next ten years on the progress of this initiative.
2. That synod instruct the COD to commission an assessment of Thrive's Crossroads Discernment Process examining staffing capacity, completion rates, quality of legacy decisions made by participating congregations, adequacy of triage and pastoral care components, and the degree to which church planting is featured as a legacy priority; and present a report to Synod 2027 indicating ways to support and encourage smaller, declining congregations to look for God's presence and leading in their situations.
3. That synod direct the Office of General Secretary to develop clear, accessible guidance for end-of-life-cycle congregations on how to designate financial and physical assets for church planting legacy purposes, and to

provide agency support for classes to redistribute such funds according to opportunities for church planting.

E. Funding and capacity development

The current reality within the CRCNA is that the funding model is far too fragmented and insufficient to support the kind of growth in church planting that we aspire to over the next ten years. As the working group tasked with exploring this aspect of the strategic plan discovered, there is a lack of clarity and consistency across funding sources and no unified strategy across churches, classes, and denominational agencies to sufficiently fund the support needed for church planting growth. In order to scale church planting in the future, system-wide financial alignment is necessary, not just more giving.

We need to move toward an integrated, shared funding model across all of our classes and congregations. We need to establish classis-level church planting funds in order to support local and regional church planting efforts. We need to clarify the financial commitments necessary for church planting to succeed. This will include funding commitments from supporting congregations, regional funding from classes, denominational funding to support the staffing and infrastructure necessary to support classes and congregations, and increased capacity among church planters to engage in effective fundraising efforts.

The current state of the CRCNA ministry-share program is another factor that needs to be addressed. While broader engagement with this program is vital to provide the financial foundation for denominational support services for churches and church planters, additional avenues to raise funds dedicated to support church planting infrastructure are necessary in order to secure the funding necessary to scale church planting growth in the CRCNA.

Where do we need to be in three years with this priority in order to make progress toward our five-year strategic focus? Here is what needs to be true in three years:

The CRCNA has established the funding, staffing, and volunteer support structure needed to sustain the planter pathway, with a church planting fund, clear staffing roles, and a sequenced capacity plan across denominational, classis, and local church levels.

We will need a denominationally aligned funding and capacity plan to be approved, including denominational and classical church planting funds, a denominational staffing structure, and a classis volunteer support model. We will need each classis to have identified the key volunteer roles needed to support the planter pathway, as well as denominational staffing roles defined and aligned with these volunteer classis roles. A critical next step in this strategic plan implementation is to clarify the full support structure needed for the planter pathway, including denominational staff roles and classis volunteer roles.

Therefore we recommend the following to Synod 2026:

1. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary to encourage all classes, in partnership with Resonate Global Mission, to ensure that the following is in place for all future church plants:
 - a. Every parent church and classis partner has created a partnership agreement that clearly defines financial expectations for the church(es), classis, and planter(s) involved in a church plant.
 - b. Every church planter has developed a personal funding plan that defines the pathway they will take to meet the church plant's defined financial needs.
 - c. Each classis is encouraged to clearly define the terms of support it is able to give to church plants annually and to make recommendations for each congregation in their body for the support of church planting locally.
 - d. Each classis has established a "Church Plant Fund" to be managed by the local classis or has collaborated with neighboring classes to create a regional fund for the purpose of supporting church planting in their region. This fund could also serve as the holding place for estate and major gifts for church planting in the classis/region.
2. That the CRCNA, via Resonate Global Mission, increase our catalytic support services for church plants through ministry shares, and, as needed, an annual giving campaign that will allow Resonate to increase support for church planters across the continent. In specific, we recommend the following:
 - a. That every organized CRCNA congregation commit to giving to the ministry share program as prescribed annually by synod. This will provide the financial foundation for these catalytic support services for church planters.
 - b. That every CRCNA church plant and emerging (unorganized) congregation commit an annual gift to the ministry share program. This will establish a healthy foundational financial commitment to our covenantal denominational partnership.

VI. Conclusion: What needs to be true in one year?

As we conclude this summary describing our strategic vision, we look ahead to the next twelve months. In our present moment, we do not have clear ownership for each stage of the church planting journey that is so critical to this strategic plan. Who will own each step of the church plant journey, from discipleship multiplication to leadership development to equipping planters to launching, resourcing, and multiplying church plants?

We also do not have the staffing structure and capacity, nor the committed funding, to support the implementation of this strategic plan. Without these, this strategic plan will struggle to be implemented and executed. So we must ask a critical question: "What is one primary objective that must be

true by Synod 2027 but is not true today, yet is so critical that achieving it would make a massive difference in this strategic plan?”

Within twelve months, the CRCNA will have designed and aligned an ideal church plant journey, with clear ownership across denominational agencies, classes, and congregations for each stage from disciple to leader to church planter to launch, along with a funding plan to support implementation.

For this denomination-wide strategic plan to succeed, this clarity is needed. And for the next ten years we need this plan to be a central part of every synod as we learn, grow, and multiply together.¹

Therefore we recommend the following to Synod 2026:

1. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary to design and align an ideal church plant journey, with clear ownership for each stage from disciple to leader to church planter to launch, along with an agreed staffing structure and committed funding plan to support implementation.
2. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary to provide an annual update on progress achieved in this strategic plan on an annual basis for the next ten years. Particular focus for the next five years, at Synods 2027-2031, should be on progress made toward the three-year milestones for each of the strategic categories identified in this report and the five-year aspirational outcome described in this report.

VII. Recommendations

This report’s recommendations to synod are gathered here from the various sections within, as noted:

Laying a foundation of prayer and fasting (section IV)

- A. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary to work with each of the CRCNA classes to accomplish the following:
 1. Encourage each classis to identify and activate a prayer coordinator for their classis.
 2. Develop ways to connect, equip, and encourage these prayer coordinators so that they might lead their classis into regular, intentional times of prayer and fasting for God to multiply disciples, leaders, and churches in our classes. These times of prayer and fasting should also include prayer support for church plants in the region and for parent churches supporting church plants in the region.

¹To make clear what is assumed throughout this strategic plan: it is CRCNA churches that we desire to plant together. Given our CRCNA theology and polity, this will require that *all* of us work together in strong collaboration and with clear ownership of the various steps involved in the church planting journey.

3. Invite each of our CRCNA classes to report back to Synod 2027 with an update on their intentional prayer and fasting strategy for their classis.
- B. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary to take responsibility for identifying, curating, and publishing resources that will support the efforts of congregations and classes in the area of prayer and fasting.
- C. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary to take responsibility to discern, plan, and publish opportunities for CRCNA congregations and members to gather corporately together for prayer: online, larger in-person retreats and prayer gatherings, and smaller, in-person regional gatherings.

Discipleship multiplication (section V, A)

- D. That synod affirm that disciple-making lies at the heart of the church's identity and mission and is essential to this entire strategic plan. Synod therefore calls every congregation, classis, and denominational ministry to prioritize the multiplication of disciples who make disciples, consistent with the biblical pattern reflected in Matthew 28:18–20 and 2 Timothy 2:2.
- E. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary, in collaboration with Thrive and Resonate, along with additional leaders in discipleship in the broader CRC family, to accomplish the following toward the three-year milestone:
 1. Update the *Our Journey* ministry plan to ensure it addresses disciple-making in its four milestones.
 2. Implement denominational discipleship principles that can be contextualized across different church settings, including diaspora and culturally diverse communities. Particular attention should be given to learning from discipleship movements in the global church and from opportunities through Resonate Global Mission to connect more deeply with international church planting movements and the global church.
 3. Identify and engage at least 20 percent of current CRCNA classes as beta groups for pastor training in these discipleship principles.
 4. Gather learning and feedback from these groups, begin to codify the learning, and share the learning and vision with remaining CRCNA classes for rollout and implementation.
 5. Develop tools capable of assessing the following disciple-making activity metrics across CRCNA congregations, collecting the data, and reporting it annually to future synods for the duration of this ten-year plan, beginning with Synod 2027:
 - the percentage of CRCNA members intentionally discipling others

- the percentage of CRCNA members equipped for disciple-making
- the percentage of CRCNA pastors engaged in relational disciple-making

Leadership development (section V, B)

- F. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary, in collaboration with the Candidacy Committee, Calvin Theological Seminary, Thrive, and Resonate, to ensure that every classis is supported and resourced to develop a clear and contextual leadership development pathway with identified ownership, aligned resources, and an active team guiding the process. This should include the following:
1. Provide clear guidance, tools, and resources for leadership development that can be made available to every CRCNA classis. Connect classes with these leadership development resources and work to ensure that they are accessible to all leaders, including those from diaspora and culturally diverse communities.
 2. Identify a leadership development team (e.g., Classis Ministerial Leadership Team [CMLT]) in each classis with clear ownership for the leadership development pathway in their classis.
 3. Within the next year, resource and encourage every classis so that they are able to complete the following and report back to Synod 2027:
 - a. Assess opportunities for leadership development within their congregations.
 - b. Consider strategies for strengthening disciple-making cultures in the churches of the classis.
 - c. Identify mentoring and training environments for emerging leaders within the classis.
 - d. Determine how many leaders each classis believes God may enable it to develop within the next decade. Once all classes have reported, the combined total of these commitments will become the CRCNA's denominational leadership multiplication goal.
 - e. Describe how the classis plans to address the gaps identified by the diaspora and diversity working group's report, as noted above in the summary.
 4. Track progress toward these classis goals and provide annual reports to synod, for the duration of this ten-year plan and beginning with Synod 2027.
- G. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary to develop a plan to address the following challenges raised by the growing number of leaders from diaspora and diverse communities and report back to Synod 2027:

1. Assist classes to improve language accessibility and translation in classis meetings.
 2. Clarify the role and participation of church planters in classis.
 3. Provide clear and accessible credentialing pathways for diaspora leaders, ensuring that the credentialing processes are clearly explained and easily accessible for leaders coming from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
 4. Provide ecclesiastical and cultural orientation for new leaders within the CRCNA to assist church planters entering the CRCNA who are unfamiliar with denominational structures, postures, and expectations.
 5. Provide accessible resources in multiple languages to help strengthen leadership development and discipleship within multicultural congregations.
- H. That synod instruct the Candidacy Committee, in partnership with Calvin Theological Seminary and Resonate Global Mission, to create an agreed-upon “Church Planting Commissioned Pastor Certificate” program with the potential to earn seminary credits (to encourage further learning that may lead to a master of divinity degree toward ordination as a minister of the Word). Most importantly, though, start by developing a set of unified subjects that apply specifically to church planters. As it exists right now, the commissioned pastor certificate is very broad and not area/focus specific, so it would be helpful to have one for church planters, one for ministry associates, one for chaplains, and so on. This way, church planters would learn what is relevant and important and necessary for church planters to learn, such as fundraising and other subjects that pertain to church planting work.
- I. That synod encourage congregations and classes to strengthen leadership pipelines through mentoring, theological education, and ministry formation. Special attention should be given to expanding leadership development pathways that allow emerging leaders to remain embedded within their ministry contexts. Synod would therefore affirm the importance of the following:
- mentoring relationships within local churches
 - classis-based leadership development environments
 - church planting residencies and leadership cohorts
 - competency-based theological education and distance programs such as those offered at CTS
- J. That synod commend to the churches of the CRCNA the opportunities for leadership development and formation available by partnering with Resonate Global Mission to connect more deeply with international church planting movements and the global church.

Church planting pathways (section V, C)

- K. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary, in collaboration with Resonate Global Mission, to accomplish the following toward the three-year milestone:
 - 1. Work with all CRCNA classes to identify a “Barnabas Advocate,” as described in this report, for each classis and to connect that person to Resonate Global Mission for equipping, connection to other “Barnabas Advocates,” and support.
 - 2. Work with all CRCNA classes to identify a church planting strategist, with a goal of identifying one in at least 40 percent of CRCNA classes. This church planting strategist, once identified, should be connected to Resonate Global Mission for equipping, support, and collaboration.
- L. That synod commend the work of Resonate Global Mission to partner with churches and classes of the CRCNA. Resonate’s partnership agreement framework provides clear roles and responsibilities, along with best practices, for collaborative partnership to support CRCNA church plants.
- M. That synod commend the work of Resonate Global Mission to help churches, classes, and agencies of the CRCNA to discover helpful ways in which our church planting pathways can learn from and be connected to what God is doing in the global church today in the area of church planting.

Legacy pathway (section V, D)

- N. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary to develop a denominational network of regional facilitators to support the discernment process for churches that fit the criteria found in Church Order Supplement, Article 38-d, and that have a sustained membership decline of more than 10 percent over the past five years, in order to provide a coordinated response for helping such churches discern whether God may be leading to renewal, closure, or other kingdom-focused options, and to report to synod annually over the next ten years on the progress of this initiative.
- O. That synod instruct the COD to commission an assessment of Thrive’s Crossroads Discernment Process examining staffing capacity, completion rates, quality of legacy decisions made by participating congregations, adequacy of triage and pastoral care components, and the degree to which church planting is featured as a legacy priority; and present a report to Synod 2027 indicating ways to support and encourage smaller, declining congregations to look for God’s presence and leading in their situations.
- P. That synod direct the Office of General Secretary to develop clear, accessible guidance for end-of-life-cycle congregations on how to designate financial and physical assets for church planting legacy purposes, and to

provide agency support for classes to redistribute such funds according to opportunities for church planting.

Funding and capacity development (section V, E)

- Q. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary to encourage all classes, in partnership with Resonate Global Mission, to ensure that the following is in place for all future church plants:
1. Every parent church and classis partner has created a partnership agreement that clearly defines financial expectations for the church(es), classis, and planter(s) involved in a church plant.
 2. Every church planter has developed a personal funding plan that defines the pathway they will take to meet the church plant's defined financial needs.
 3. Each classis is encouraged to clearly define the terms of support it is able to give to church plants annually and to make recommendations for each congregation in their body for the support of church planting locally.
 4. Each classis has established a "Church Plant Fund" to be managed by the local classis or has collaborated with neighboring classes to create a regional fund for the purpose of supporting church planting in their region. This fund could also serve as the holding place for estate and major gifts for church planting in the classis/region.
- R. That the CRCNA, via Resonate Global Mission, increase our catalytic support services for church plants through ministry shares, and, as needed, an annual giving campaign that will allow Resonate to increase support for church planters across the continent. In specific, we recommend the following:
1. That every organized CRCNA congregation commit to giving to the ministry share program as prescribed annually by synod. This will provide the financial foundation for these catalytic support services for church planters.
 2. That every CRCNA church plant and emerging (unorganized) congregation commit an annual gift to the ministry share program. This will establish a healthy foundational financial commitment to our covenantal denominational partnership.

Looking ahead to the next twelve months (section VI)

- S. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary to design and align an ideal church plant journey, with clear ownership for each stage from disciple to leader to church planter to launch, along with an agreed staffing structure and committed funding plan to support implementation.
- T. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary to provide an annual update on progress achieved in this strategic plan on an annual basis for the next ten years. Particular focus for the next five years, at Synods

2027-2031, should be on progress made toward the three-year milestones for each of the strategic categories identified in this report and the five-year aspirational outcome described in this report.

Resonate Global Mission
Tim Sheridan, director of church planting