

Christian Reformed Church in Cuba

The Christian Reformed Church in Cuba began its work in 1943 with the celebration of its first cult by the missionary Bessie Vander Valk in Jagüey Grande, Matanzas.

In these almost 8 decades, the Work of the Christian Reformed Church has spread in five provinces of Cuba: Havana, Matanzas, Cienfuegos, Villa Clara and Sancti Spiritus.

The vision of our Church in Cuba is to extend the Kingdom of God in our country by reaching families with the message of the gospel, and thus announce and testify the gospel of salvation to every creature, guaranteeing discipleship to those who profess faith in Jesus Christ.

In the midst of the many obstacles that the Church in Cuba faces for its development, growth and extension, it continues forward with the grace of God.

Today we have 1,650 members in 36 congregations. Our churches and missions are served by 34 brothers, including pastors and missionaries. At the same time, we developed a program of Prayer Cells that are attended by 32 leaders. In addition to our membership, we work with 3,000 people related to the Church who are socially supported.

The Church in Cuba has 11 soup kitchens, 14 lavatines, 2 Grandparents' Homes and a small Home for the Elderly. Together with all this social help, the Gospel is also delivered.

The Church is going through very difficult times, because all the political, economic and social changes that the Cuban system has implemented have affected the projection of the Cuban Church too much, to the point that on occasions the Church has been suffocated by laws and regulations that the Cuban government, in the midst of Covid'19, has implemented. But God has NEVER broken his promise and NOTHING against the Church has prevailed. We have received the continuous support of our brothers in North America, and with this, each member has been supported with food and essential resources, as well as special aid to pastoral families. The Church in Cuba feels very accompanied by our foreign brothers, and in the midst of their many trials we know that prayers for us are present.

The Christian Reformed Church in Cuba has different national ministries at its headquarters: Diakonia, Christian Education, Music and Evangelism. These ministries are in charge of influencing the local Churches for their growth, this being their main focus.

We develop self-support programs for projects. We have a group of enterprising women, a mechanical workshop, an organic farm and a farm. These programs support local church projects.

We will continue working so that the Christian Reformed Church in Cuba continues to grow and spread throughout our country. We yearn to one day arrive in the East of Cuba and in each province of the country. In the city of Havana, work is being done to achieve 15 missions. 4 of them have already been achieved.

Since our main need is to extend and grow the Christian Reformed Church in Cuba in the next 5 years under the grace, power and care of God, we plan to extend to the entire center of the country, initially reaching the cities of Santa Clara, Ciego de Ávila and Camagüey; and in a second moment to reach Mayabeque, Artemisa, Pinar del Río and Isla de la Juventud, as well as being able to reach the East of the country.

In God we will do feats.

5Those who sow with tears will reap with joy.

6He who carries the precious seed will walk and weep;

But he will come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves.

Psalm 126:5-6

Shalom

Rev. Yordanys Diaz Arteaga

President

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I am here to bring you very warm greetings and blessings from the Dutch Reformed Church in the Netherlands (Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerk). I am doing this together with my brother Rinze IJbema, from the Reformed Churches liberated (Gereformeerde Kerk vrijgemaakt). And I am very happy that we can be here together, as our two denominations, that share a past with some brokenness, will be merging back into one denomination next year: the Dutch Reformed Churches (Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken).

This new denomination has approximately 140.000 members, which makes us the third largest denomination behind the Roman Catholic Church and the main stream Dutch Protestant Church (PKN). Through the country there are 350 churches, served by approximately 350 pastors.

We have a theological university, which used to be in Kampen for many, many years (TU Kampen), but is moving to Utrecht. More in the center of the Netherlands, a city with a large university and a rich tradition of theological training. We hope that contacts between our theological university and Calvin Theological Seminary can continue, and even further be developed and improved. And I would also like to mention our mission organization, the Verre Naasten. Active in sharing the faith worldwide, where they often meet fellow Christians from Raise Up Global Ministries. Good to know and strengthen each other where possible.

As Christians and churches in the Netherlands we are placed in a nowadays very secular country. Last year polls showed that for the first time in history less than 50% of the people felt a connection to whatever religion at all. And less than 10% will somehow attend a Christian church regularly. This definitely challenges us all how to live out the Gospel in such a often difficult environment.

As a denomination we are very similar to the CRC as far as we can see it. Similar in the faith we share, the tradition and history from where we come and the way we experience and live it out in the 21st century. Similar in the distinctions between churches, as in some more traditional, other more contemporary; some rural, others in the cities; some small and sometimes struggling to keep on going, other thriving and growing. Also very similar in the issues we run into with each other. How do we read and interpret scripture,

what are the hermeneutical principles we want to use, and how does that work out? The Reformed Churches liberated recently decided to open up the offices to ordination for women, something the Netherlands Reformed Churches had decided on the beginning of this century.

We experience a great value in our sister church relationship with the CRC. Besides encouraging each other and sharing the joy of the Gospel, it is a good way to learn. We have taken notice of many documents you have produced. We for example looked at your church order when we working out our new one for our new denomination. And we will definitely look at your report on sexuality as discussions on these topics are very much the same in the Netherlands as they are here.

Of course there is much more to say and tell. But time at this stand is limited. We hope to meet many of you these days, have fellowship and share experiences.

Know that the churches in the Netherlands are praying for you. This as you discuss cheerful topics, but also sensitive and possibly divisive ones. Let's always go back and in everything hold on to our Lord Jesus Christ. He who tough in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant. Jesus gave everything he had – all glory and honor – to save us. Lets live and work with that mind among ourselves. Counting the other in humility more significant than ourselves. Knowing our complete dependency on Jesus, trusting the Holy Spirit will guide us, loving God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength.

May the peace and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your during this Synod – and may he bless you with his love and kindness every day of your life!

Yours in Christ,

Mark Rietkerk and Rinze IJbema

(members of the NGK Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad)

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Report from the FJKM/CJCM to the CRC Synod

I am pleased to address this Report to this august assembly and very thankful to the CRC Synod for inviting us to attend this 2022 Synod meeting in Grand Rapids. To God be the glory.

The **Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar** (FJKM or CJCM in English) was formed in 1968, bringing together congregations that had grown from the mission work of three international religious bodies: the London Missionary Society, the Paris Missionary Society and the Friends' Foreign Mission Association.

The FJKM is subjected to the Word of God and confesses that It is the only foundation of its doctrine reflected in the Reformed Creeds such as the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed.

The vision of the FJKM is to make the country still Christian in the year 2118. Therefore we are very much involved in church planting and equipping people for evangelism. Training student pastors for the ministry of the Word is also one of the major priorities of the FJKM and we have just launched the on-line "theology for all" through the FJKM Reformed Ravelojaona University.

The Task and Activities of the Church are Worship, teaching the Word of God, administering the Sacrament of Baptism and Holy Communion, Mission/Evangelization/casting out demons/healing the sick, Church Schools, witnessing Jesus Christ in the community/country through social work.

The liturgy of the Church is Calvinistic.

The FJKM has one theological seminary which delivers a Master of Divinity diploma. I would like to mention that one of the first PhD graduate from Calvin Seminary is from the FJKM. And we wish that our relationship regarding theological training will continue again.

The lack of minister of the Word has obliged the FJKM to train laity for theology, and those who have accomplished training can be appointed as lay preachers who can lead congregations with limited tenure.

The FJKM is committed to the poverty alleviation program and assist the population in the southern part of the island to face the cyclic drought that brings famine to million people.

The FJKM Church government is Reformed. The Church is organized into Parish, Regional Synod, and (National Council) General Synod.

FJKM's highest policy-making body is the General Synod. The General Synod meets once every four years and elects the National Council which deals with any ecclesiastical matter in between two General Synod meetings.

The National Council has two permanent discipline committees: one is for the laity and one is for ordained ministers.

We are: in communion with the Roman Catholic, the Lutheran, and the Episcopal Church through the Christian Council in Madagascar; in partnership with the PC(USA), the PROK, the PCK.

The FJKM is also a full time member of the WCC, WCRC, CWM, CEVAA, AACC.

The FJKM has played a great role in the political and social life of the country since its beginning in 1968.

We believe that being in ecumenical relation with the CRC will widen our understanding of the catholicity of the church. We hope that the CRC and the FJKM will be in communion and work hand in hand to make disciples of all nations.

Respectfully submitted by Lala Rasendrasasina, member of FJKM National Council, former President of FJKM.

Antananarivo, May 2022.

Report from the RCA to the CRC Synod

Brothers and sisters, greetings in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ. I am Laura Osborne, coordinator for interreligious relations for the Reformed Church in America. It is my privilege to work closely with leaders from the Christian Reformed Church in North America as we seek to build peace and understanding between people of different faiths.

The RCA General Synod is happening in Pella, Iowa, this week, and I bring greetings to you from general secretary Eddy Alemán, from the General Synod, and from your friends and family in the Reformed Church in America. We hold you in our prayers.

In recent years, we have experienced much of what you're facing at your synod this week: a general secretary transition, restructuring denominational staff and services, budget cuts, a church that is as divided as our North American society.

Four years ago, when Eddy Alemán was coming on as general secretary, the interim general secretary, Don Poest, boldly named the depth of division within the RCA and admitted it wasn't something we could solve. He called for a Vision 2020 Team to explore options for the future, including separation, restructuring, and staying together.

After thousands of hours of research and discernment over three years, that team recommended a combination of those three options. Their report was due to be considered at General Synod 2020, which was delayed three times because of the pandemic. We finally gathered last October. That synod was surprisingly civil, even joyous at times.

The point of the Vision 2020 Team work was not to decide once and for all where the RCA stood on sexuality. Indeed, our October General Synod did not change anything about the RCA's historic stance of sexuality, that marriage is between a man and a woman, and that all people are welcome in the church and deserve pastoral care. General Synod did not change anything about the RCA's polity, either; the Vision 2020 Team and the General Synod both affirmed that the authority to ordain and oversee pastors lies with the classis.

After careful discernment and deliberation, General Synod called for a restructuring of the RCA, anticipating a smaller denomination moving forward. They also clarified an exit path for churches and pastors who want to find a different denominational home; the desire was for a "mutually generous separation." Since October, we have seen a number of churches follow that path for generous separation, with others in process.

These are hard things; you know firsthand how hard they are. Courageous and honest conversations are hard. Admitting things we wish were different is hard. Disagreeing respectfully is hard. The loss of each other is particularly hard—pastors who went to seminary together and have supported each other for years are now serving in different denominations. Churches that had worked together closely are experiencing a break in that relationship. There are very real losses for people who leave. There are very real losses for people who stay. There is pain and hurt within congregations as they make decisions about the future, which are rarely, if ever, unanimous.

It has been a challenging season for the RCA, a season with much cause for lament. However, a few months on the other side of our big decision-making synod, let me share some hope with you.

Division does not mean God has abandoned us. Disagreeing does not mean God's Spirit has left us.

Even through the painful farewells and the beginning of our restructuring work, God is surprising us. A vision for a multicultural, multiracial RCA is emerging and gaining speed. God is bringing us people from around the world who are drawn to Reformed theology and RCA polity, and who are exploring what it would look like to join or work with the RCA.

Church planting around the world is also growing rapidly—both through the efforts of RCA Global Mission and through the work of RCA classes with connections in Latin and South America and a passion for sharing the gospel there.

Yes, the RCA's future looks very different from its recent past—and God is shaping our denomination in this time of upheaval and change. We are watching attentively and with expectation for the work of the Holy Spirit, so we may continue to join that work.

Please pray for us. We are grateful to the Christian Reformed Church in North America for the many ways in which we partner together, both denominationally and as congregations, for the good of God's kingdom.

**FRATERNAL GREETINGS DURING THE CRCNA – SYNOD MEETING
TO BE HELD FROM 9TH – 16TH JUNE 2022
GRAND RAPIDS - MICHIGAN**

**A REPORT
ABOUT THE REFORMED CHURCH IN ZAMBIA**

The Moderator and the entire Synod, we want to express our profound appreciation for inviting us to be part of this CRCNA Synod meeting. We are greatly humbled by this gesture and may the Almighty God bless you.

On behalf of the Reformed Church in Zambia and my colleague Rev. Dr. William Zulu – the General Secretary, we bring greetings and best wishes to this Synod meeting. We wish this meeting success in all deliberations and resolutions. May the presence of the Holy Spirit be felt throughout the meeting. In my message to this CRCNA Synod meeting, I have a few things to share about the Reformed Church in Zambia.

1. Origin and growth of RCZ

RCZ was founded as a church in Zambia by Dutch Reformed Church missionaries in 1899. Despite being founded among Ngoni -speaking people in the Eastern Province, the church has spread right across Zambia and has become one of the prominent churches in the country.

2. Autonomy of the RCZ

RCZ is an autonomous church though a member of the wider Reformed Churches across the globe. As it was founded by the works of the Dutch Reformed Church missionaries, in 1916 it was established as a Council of Congregations by the DRC. This young church in Zambia originally desired to form the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) with churches in Malawi and Mozambique, but the Orange Free State Synod rejected this idea. Instead, in 1943 it became the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) of the Orange Free State in Northern Rhodesia came into existence. The name changed to African Reformed Church (ARC) in 1957. Thereafter, the Church became autonomous in 1966 as a Synod of its own and the name changed to Reformed Church in Zambia. The church has grown from strength to strength as has a bright future as demonstrated by the Youth involvement in Church activities.

3. RCZ Theory of Change

RCZ operates within the framework of a 5 years Strategic Plan whose **Vision is** *‘To reflect the life of the Triune God in Society’* and her **Mission is** *‘To Honour the Triune God by faithful worship, equipping the saints, Celebrating of sacraments and Works of service. The goal RCZ* is to contribute to human development through holy living, excellence and servanthood to the glory of God). The belief of the church in pursuing this goal is have enhancement spirituality, strengthened families, enhanced human development, a stable church financially, a visible church through her deeds and a well governed church that addresses all cross-cutting issues.

4 The RCZ today and its impact

Since RCZ became an autonomous church in 1966, it has grown from 20,000 members to more than 1,000 000. It has 17 presbyteries and 200 congregations that take up the responsibility of ministering the Word in congregations, preaching points and prayer houses.

5. Specialized ministries

In order for the Church to have impact across the country, it has taken a holistic approach to human development as such preaches the gospel for salvation and also addresses social and economic challenges among the citizenry. In view of this, the church has established specialized ministries that include: Youth, Men, Women, Diaconal, Reformed Open Community Schools, Education, Lay training, Theological training, Health, Skills training and Savings ministry.

6 Ecumenical relationships

The RCZ enjoys cordial relationships with many ecumenical bodies, globally and locally. RCZ a member of Council of Churches in Zambia (CCZ), Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia (EFZ) and many other Para church organizations. On an international level, the RCZ is a member of the World Council of Churches (WCC), World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) and All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC).

7. Challenges

Like many other churches in Africa and the world at large, RCZ faces many challenges that range from financial sustainability, contextual relevancy, and maintaining a credible and

relevant Reformed identity while competing with growing independent and neo-Pentecostal and charismatic churches. The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the economic position of the church such that many programmes and vital activities have stalled. In addition, spiritual formation of her members through discipleship programs to ground them in the biblical teaching is also a huge challenge and such members are not stable on the church doctrine.

The economic and other highlighted challenges have enlightened the church to start challenges thinking how best the church can be sustained in the current context. Plans have been initiated to embark seriously on Agriculture for the economic sustainability of the church by investing in Aquaculture, Rice and Avocado growing. We also need a vigorous discipleship program to enhance spirituality among members of the church. These ventures will require finances and machinery to be embarked upon.

Therefore, I am appealing to you brothers, sisters and organizations to partner with us in advancing the Kingdom of God in Sab Sahara Africa through the highlighted ventures. We are so grateful to the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) whom we have worked with for over 20 years in Zambia promoting community development. CRCNA should also consider supporting RCZ in Church Development.

I thank you.

Contact

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