



Gather Boston | Report

Introduction

An overture about membership decline led Synod 2023 to talk openly about the membership challenges our churches are facing. In response, synod instructed the Office of General Secretary “to develop a comprehensive unified strategy and plan to arrest and reverse the trend of decline and bring about a positive trend of membership growth to our denomination,” and to “work with the Council of Delegates, each agency, and churches and classes to continually update this plan and to report its progress regarding this plan to synod annually until such time as synod decides that this issue has been satisfactorily addressed.” *Acts of Synod 2023*, pp. 975-976.

From these assignments and that discussion, the idea for Gather was born. Gather was a series of events in 2024 and 2025 that were intended to inspire, encourage and bring together CRC leaders from across North America. Thanks to the contributions of generous donors, these events were held at 10 locations across the United States and Canada, with all costs for participation fully funded.

At each event, approximately five classes came together to celebrate how God is moving in our communities and our churches. Together, participants prayed, worshiped, shared stories and challenges, and discerned where God is leading us in our mission.

These events encouraged and assisted CRC congregations in their renewal. Stories that were shared and lessons that were learned at each event were captured so that a comprehensive report could be written. From these learnings, some clear next steps were established.

As the report below demonstrates, God has blessed us with gifting and calling, and he has a vision for our mission and our future.

Gather Event Details

Gather Boston was held Monday to Wednesday, October 7-9, 2024 at The Royal Sonesta on the Charles River in Boston.

Sixty-one (61) participants from Classes Atlantic Northeast, Eastern Canada, Lakota, Georgetown, and Holland came together to discern and celebrate how God is moving in our communities and churches.

Description of the Event

The purpose of Gather was to engage in spiritual discernment with church leaders. The event was structured around the Emmaus Road story found in Luke 24:13-35. With scripture as our guide, participants acknowledged our expectations and desires to God, testified to the redemptive work of Jesus through storytelling, aligned ourselves with God and his mission, and were empowered in our witness of God's renewing work.

The Gather event was designed using a dialogue education pedagogy (engaging in interactive, collaborative learning through dialog) with an emphasis on discernment rather than making decisions. Curiosity for what God is doing in the local congregations of the Christian Reformed Church framed the experience. The process created space for the contribution of every attendee regardless of the size of one's church, the role they held, or whether or not they were ordained.

Those who attended were assigned to a table of 6-8 participants plus two staff facilitators. The groups were intentionally diverse, composed of participants from each of the classes in attendance, as well as diverse in gender and ethnic composition. Small group exercises followed a rhythm of prayer, reading scripture, personal reflection, small group sharing, categorizing the contributions of everyone in the group, and posting the work of their small group on the wall to share with the whole group.

The goals that were set and accomplished for the initiative included: encountering God through the text, prayer, worship, and fellowship; naming unmet expectations about our church, its ministries, and its impact; telling and hearing stories of God at work; identifying themes of how God is at work in CRC churches; celebrating our common desire to follow Jesus together; and preparing to share these stories with people in our congregations and communities.

Disappointments and Unmet Expectations

Over the course of the life of a congregation, dreams, hopes, and expectations emerge about the future for the church, its ministry, and its impact in the community. After reflecting on Luke 24:18-24, participants shared hopes and expectations that they have had for their congregation that have gone unmet.

The following is a summary of the disappointments shared by participants. Several primary disappointments appear to be commonly experienced by churches across different locations:

Congregation members have expressed a variety of disappointments and unfulfilled hopes, often revolving around growth, internal dynamics, leadership, and community engagement.

Through the facilitated process, participants shared the following disappointments:

Membership and Generational Growth

- The church has not reached its desired attendance.

- There is a significant concern that many families and individuals did not return to church following the pandemic, or only come occasionally, leading to a feeling that people no longer need one another or feel the need to contribute their gifts.
- Hopes for the church to be a catalyst for welcoming younger families have not been met.
- There has been a loss of younger committed members.
- The church has struggled to attract and retain youth and young adults, with many leaving after college or not staying active, and a noticeable gap in middle and high school student engagement.
- There is disappointment regarding the lack of numerical growth overall.
- Small group ministry has not grown or borne fruit as hoped.

Internal Church Culture and Discipleship

- A sense that not everyone shares the same vision for participation.
- A lingering feeling of "pull yourself up by your own boot straps" on some issues.
- New members often become overly sensitive and leave or come infrequently, raising questions about how they are being "fed" and can grow.
- Members have a hard time with change, leading to "worship wars," with some resisting change and others feeling there isn't enough change.
- Hopes that the church would be guided more emphatically by Christ's example and scripture in shaping its cultural mores have not been met.
- The church did not always demonstrate interpersonal maturity during the pandemic, resulting in "underperforming discipleship."
- The slowness of making changes is frustrating.
- The church lost members due to differing opinions on human sexuality.
- Concern exists that some people might be "left behind" in efforts to move forward in unity.
- Fellowship together could be better, as expectations are low.
- Congregation members are "not often well-versed in being able to explain our personal faith."
- An observation that the church is still investing where there are diminishing returns by trying to "keep everyone happy."
- A desire to move beyond being just a "cool" hipster church.
- Difficulty in letting go of doing things *for* others and accepting that others can give back through serving *together*.
- Organizational gridlock exists between a previous season of ministry and imagining a new one.
- There is little to no comprehensive church vision/mission.
- Unstable finances lead to internal "warring."
- The church needs to be more unified and supportive internally.
- There is resistance to vision around ministries and overall vision.
- There's a significant concern about a "consumerism mentality" within the congregation.
- Congregation members express that "what breaks God's heart, doesn't always break ours," and that fear and judgment prevent walking alongside people in distress.

Leadership and Staffing

- Pastors need more rest.
- A desire for a different preacher once a month or a more shared/collaborative teaching environment from the pulpit.
- Difficulty finding individuals to serve as elders and deacons, citing a lack of commitment.
- Concerns about leadership challenges, including not addressing "elephants in the room," low ecclesiology, ignoring church order, and a lack of training and confessional awareness for elders and deacons.
- Leadership can remain concentrated in a core group, instead of being shared amongst the congregation.
- There is a lack of adaptive leadership, human resources, and staffing support.
- Hopes for more staff have not been met, as they are still waiting.
- A desire for a united and equipped staff with clear direction.
- The Council is resistant to working on a long-term, sustained ministerial pattern and organization.
- There are difficulties in getting volunteers and finding passionate, steadfast people for volunteer positions.
- An age demographic that doesn't want to take on leadership roles.
- Challenges in identifying appropriate volunteer or staff leaders for ministries.

Community Engagement and Outreach

- Churches have struggled with how to respond to the present political environment. Despite a desire for unity, reactions that please some members often alienate others.
- There has been a lack of deepened connections to the neighborhood/parish, and those relationships have not developed as hoped.
- Obstacles have slowed progress towards planting a Hispanic church.
- The disappointment of a church plant separating due to theological differences.
- Much of what the church does is categorized as "Drive By" ministry, lacking meaningful engagement.
- Few churches see the benefit of partnering with others. Congregations struggle to work together, and sometimes feel that other churches are working *against* them instead of with them.
- Outreach/mission efforts are often scattered, individualized, and underengaged or overlooked, with excitement at launch but a lack of follow-through.
- Difficulty getting neighbors across the "threshold" into the church.
- The church does not have a unified sense of reaching out to the community.
- An "elitist core has developed and been somewhat destructive to the ministry of outreach."
- The church has not developed or embraced more intentional outreach "strategies" or plans.
- A lack of passion or even desire for justice, and a struggle to be a safe and welcoming place to learn, discuss, advocate, and act for justice.
- Concerns about adequately meeting the needs of the homeless.

Prayer Confessing Our Foolishness and Slowness to Believe

Hopes and expectations for our churches are often influenced by our personal attitudes, preferences, and assumptions. After reading Luke 24:25-29, participants reflected on their own assumptions about how God would act in the way they preferred, or in a way that they could predict, or in a way that was comfortable, or in a way that preserved something they cared about. Participants wrote responses to the question, "About what attitudes, expectations, or assumptions for your church, its ministry, and its impact in the community might Jesus say "how foolish you are?" or "how slow to believe?"

The following prayer was composed from the descriptions of misplaced expectations and assumptions offered by the participants. Similar to the response of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (verse 29), participants were invited to respond by asking Jesus to, in his mercy, stay with us in spite of our foolishness and slowness to believe.

Prayer

Merciful God,

We come before you today, acknowledging our foolishness and slowness to believe in your boundless wisdom and power. We confess that too often, we have operated under the assumption that our church's apparent "success" was solely due to our own doing, a manifestation of pride rather than your divine work. We have been slow to believe every word in the Bible and have often allowed skepticism about the church's direction to overshadow our trust in your redemptive purposes.

Forgive us, Lord, for placing our hope in programs and in our own ministry efforts, forgetting that you alone can change hearts and minds. We confess that we sometimes believe we can change "hearts of stone to hearts of flesh" by ourselves, and that transformation happens through the work of our hands rather than the work of your Holy Spirit. We admit that we have tried to control outcomes with formulated processes, becoming impatient when our role is simply to plant or water the seed, not to control its growth.

We have been foolish in our misplaced expectations regarding serving you, often making it about pleasing others rather than genuine devotion from the heart. We wrongly assumed that our way of doing ministry or engaging the community was the only way and that others understood our vision in the same manner. We've been slow to recognize that you are always at work and that ministry, at its core, is your work, not ours.

Lord, we confess our worry and lack of trust, even when faced with your clear evidence of who you are. We have been slow to believe that you are making all things new, in your time, and that you will provide all that we need to meet the tremendous needs in our community. We acknowledge our failure to appreciate that you can use hardship to grow us in faith and trust. We have been hesitant to embrace the truth that ministry involves suffering.

Help us to release control, trusting that things will not fall apart without our constant management. Grant us the wisdom to recognize that you can do things without our help and

that your hand alone makes things happen. May we grow in understanding that you are in control, literally, and that your Spirit will guide and direct the trajectory of our church.

In your grace, open our hearts to believe more fully, to trust your timing, and to rest and take joy in you. May we come to understand that your personal power and promise are actively at work in our lives, our bodies, our families, our churches, and our world.

Lord in your mercy, stay with us.

Amen.

Stories of God's Work in Our Churches

Luke 24:28-35 records the disciples recognizing Jesus in their midst and returning to Jerusalem telling the good news of his resurrection. Gather participants were asked, "How have you seen Jesus present and at work in your church or community?"

The following synthesizes insights from Gather detailing personal accounts of God's work within local church communities. The common thread throughout these narratives is the tangible impact of faith on individuals, relationships, and the wider community. The reports highlight diverse expressions of God's work, ranging from personal transformation and spiritual growth to active community engagement and outreach.

Key Themes and Most Important Truths:

The stories told by Gather participants reveal several overarching themes that underscore the presence and activity of God within their churches:

Exponential Growth and Expansion

A recurring theme is the significant growth observed across various churches, both in numbers and in spiritual depth. This growth is often attributed to intentional outreach, renewed focus on discipleship, and a welcoming atmosphere.

Numerical Growth & Membership: Many churches report a substantial increase in attendance and membership. Examples include:

- "20+ babies in the last 18 months."
- "15 youth coming to a membership class which could lead to baptism and/or Proclamation of Faith."
- "Baptisms and Professions of Faith. From maybe 1-2 per year to now 10-20."
- "500% increase in youth & young adult attendance, more importantly growing deeper."
- "From near closure 15 years ago to a worshipping community of 1,200 in 5 services in 3 locations."
- "For the 1st time in 100 years the congregation is growing exponentially."
- "Doubled in size. Now have children + youth! Now have Cadets + GEMS!"
- "We had 40 guests on Back to Church Sunday! Many continue to come!"
- "Almost every week there are new people in church on Sunday."

Youth and Young Adult Engagement: A particular emphasis is placed on the flourishing of youth and young adult ministries, indicating successful intergenerational engagement and leadership development.

- "Joyful support of Christian education for 250 kids in our congregation under the age of 18."
- "New youth group volunteer leaders who created an excitement in which unchurched youth were invited and in turn have taken great interest in experiencing the love of Christ in the church."
- "Once our youth graduate from grade 12, many come back as Sr. Leaders to come back and help w/ youth groups. Still feel like they belong and have a place where they can grow and be loved and also serve."
- "Raising up young leaders."
- "150 student leaders serving the [local college] community: 600 attending worship on Sunday nights; 500 in student-led life groups, weekly; 250 to serve across the U.S. and internationally on Spring Break; students bringing their gifts into local churches."
- "A new ministry for young adults, and the right leaders stepped forward to lead it."
- "Young people stepping up in leadership."

Diversity and Inclusivity: Churches are becoming more representative of their communities, embracing diverse backgrounds and fostering a welcoming environment for all.

- "We have become FAR more diverse. We reflect our community better!"
- "The growing in our diversity (13-15 different nationalities represented, 5 different languages in every worship)."
- "Infusion of youth/young families via Spanish congregation."
- "Many new people from different nationalities: Chinese, Nigeria, the Congo + more."
- "The beautiful thing is that they are primarily from other ethnic backgrounds (India, Nigeria, South Sudan, Burundi, Kenya, South Korea...) so they are changing the 'face' of the congregation."
- "Planting a church with glorious diversity, evangelism, and incredible numerous (100 in 3 yrs) and spiritual growth! Only two families had a CRC background."
- "God is just sending them to us."

Deepening Faith and Spiritual Transformation

Beyond numerical growth, the sources frequently highlight profound personal and communal spiritual development, including conversions, renewed devotion, and a deeper understanding of faith.

Conversions and Professions of Faith: Numerous accounts detail individuals coming to faith, often after years of disconnect or from non-Christian backgrounds.

- "Several young adults/adults have gone from coming to church to wanting a deeper walk w/ Christ."
- "A middle school student coming to know Jesus + professing faith b/c of his grandparent's relationship to him + Jesus."

- "4 teenagers became friends, 2 invited to church + youth group. Parents became friends + recently all of them joined church."
- "Young people growing in their passion for the Lord, and the increase in baptisms and Professions of Faith."
- "Coming to faith - young man (Muslim) after coming to Easter services. He later made his confession of faith. Later baptized."
- "A man from Jordan visited our church on Easter morning + got baptized 2 months later."
- "My mother became a Christian after an idolatrous cult and now she is sharing the gospel."
- "The whole family ended up making profession of faith together after so much time spent in the word."
- "8 people take Jesus into their hearts. Just when we felt that there was no growth."

Renewed Devotion and Discipleship: Many individuals are deepening their spiritual practices and committing to a more intentional walk with Christ.

- "Recently recognized they didn't have devotional lives, should be giving their [time, treasure, and talents] to Jesus."
- "Both of my teenage children have started being inquisitive about faith and scripture. One wants to talk/read together several times a week and the other wants to ask questions + have discussion about living out our faith."
- "Growing love for God's Word & recognition of the Shepherd's Voice. The clear proclamation of the Word has shaped our Community. (Expositional Preaching through Books of the Bible)."
- "Eagerness for spiritual formation through faith practices/experiences."
- "Deepening in Christian Community."
- "People are being disciplined into the faith."
- "My transition from corporate banking into full-time ministry. Dark night of the soul. New identity in Christ. Discerning the call to ministry. The clarity of calling. The gift of service."

Transformative Encounters: Powerful spiritual experiences are leading to significant life changes and a strong sense of God's presence.

- "Last year at a weekend retreat, the Spirit of God took control of our worship service. It was a sacred and special moment. Lives were changed. People were healed. Christ was present."
- "The transformative power of Jesus in death to life stories, like this one from March of 2024 on a campus ministry spring break service trip."
- "Consistent experience of our hearts burning as God opens His scripture to us. Transformative encounters faithful to scripture and formative for God's people and fruitful in our lives."
- "Every time we step out in faith to what we think he is calling us to, he encourages us - he beckons us really - just keep coming, just keep listening, just keep obeying. And each time our faith is built a little bit more that we serve an active + living God who uses us to fulfill his purposes in His Kingdom. The veil, as they say, between heaven and earth gets thinner. And things happen on earth as they are in heaven."

Community Engagement and Compassionate Outreach

Churches are actively engaging with their local and global communities, demonstrating Christ's love through practical acts of service, social justice, and intentional relationship-building.

Local Community Service: Many churches are deeply involved in addressing immediate community needs.

- "Our church participated in the Growing Young cohort, and developed a mission statement to reflect the values of Scripture. We intentionally developed a mentoring culture that encouraged people of all ages to discover their gifts and serve within the church."
- "After a flood in our town everyone was impacted in some way. We came together as a community and went to each home, church, school, and business on a prayer walk and cared for those in grief."
- "The church offers a Soccer Camp 4 Christ outreach camp for a week every summer. That shares the gospel through teaching soccer skills and modeling Christlike behaviour."
- "Our communities' flooding has brought our church and community together in powerful ways. The morning after the flood we began pushing mud out of the church & people's homes, we had a community prayer walk. We helped one another no matter the gap in culture, Earth or life that there had been before."
- "Missional effect in our 'Parish.' New believers through Backyard Parties at homes on streets adjacent to church."
- "Food, clothing, 'essential' drives are held monthly but beyond that there is direct connections with kids + parents thru game nights, dinners, fall fest, Christmas parties, etc."
- "Our community, we have an ongoing Food Pantry where we serve 15-25 families twice a week. Our church also participates in 'Peace of Bread' which feeds many people in our community."
- "The church began a Friendship Ministry many years ago to people with developmental challenges."
- "Turkey Box: a complete Thanksgiving meal, including a Turkey & a pie is boxed to give to needy neighborhood families."
- "Feeding America: Over 100 families use this once per month."
- "CarePortal which connects families with children who have particular needs with members of our church."
- "A collaborative high school after-school drop-in center staffed by volunteers from 6 churches and ministering to hurting and lonely kids."
- "Our partnership w/ Neighbors Plus, a CCDA that is part of ministry, as we serve the surrounding community."

Global Missions and Refugee Support: Churches are extending their reach internationally, supporting global initiatives and providing critical aid to refugees.

- "Over \$400,000 given in support of global missions."

- "Taking in many Ukrainian refugee families by giving them a new church home, helping them find housing and providing for them financially through gifts and helping them find housing."
- "A humble farm wife to bring in almost 130 Ukrainian refugees sponsored by area churches."
- "The presence of Ukrainian refugees... We now have at least 100 families, 4-5 in our church specifically."
- "Needs of the community in Haiti that we support have been met in so many wonderful ways."

Healing and Restoration: Numerous testimonies highlight the church's role in offering healing, support, and reconciliation in difficult situations.

- "Healing relationships."
- "A married couple who went through infidelity... Continued time with this couple in prayer has led to a healing journey. It did not end in divorce."
- "Walking alongside, loving on the broken, the outcast, the homeless, the ex-convicts, the single moms, the fatherless, etc. This led to a drug addict + ex-convict to turn himself in to the police, get right with God + people."
- "Incredible support for spouses of aged people who recently passed away."
- "Healing ministry. For those healed, gave their testimonies of God's goodness and mercy."

The Power of Prayer and Spiritual Disciplines

Prayer, worship, and engagement with scripture are consistently cited as foundational to the positive changes observed.

Centrality of Prayer: Prayer is highlighted as a vital and transformative practice, both individually and corporately.

- "New member prayer meetings."
- "The prayer ministry (led by a wonderful volunteer) has become a vital part of our church."
- "The power of prayer: healing from cancer; reversal of suicidal ideation; prophetic words shared that spoke directly to people... renewed vitality as a church; prodigals returning home; chronic pain healing limbs + joints."
- "We prayed regularly, 'come, Holy Spirit, come.'"
- "Weekly prayer with community ministry leaders is leading to deeper relationship + co-mission with each other and a week of 24/7 prayer hosted by several churches."
- "There has been like 3 or 4 times that we felt that we had to close the church due to finances and God comes thru in prayer."

Worship and Scripture Engagement: Vibrant worship and a deep commitment to studying God's Word are seen as catalysts for spiritual growth.

- "Our worship. Standing in front of our congregation every week and hearing them sing, and watching the work God is doing in their hearts as they worship, is such a gift."

- "Congregational worship has grown to include prayers, scripture, and song in L'siu (Myanmar tribal language), Swahili, French."
- "Reading through the New Testament together."
- "People are learning in small group to discover the Bible on their own."
- "Intent in confessional preaching."

Resilience and Adaptation in Challenging Times

Despite facing difficulties, churches are demonstrating resilience, finding new opportunities, and adapting to changing circumstances.

Overcoming Loss and Challenges: Congregations have navigated significant setbacks, including the impact of COVID-19 and internal conflicts, emerging stronger.

- "After losing 1/3 of our congregation through COVID there was a larger sense of loss. Many focused on the negative... A handful of people saw an opportunity. A number of different people came to me and said, 'What if God is making room for unbelievers to come in?'"
- "We had two women... at odds with each other... One Sunday, as we came forward to receive communion, they looked at each other, grabbed hands, and reconciled."
- "Our building burnt down 35 yrs ago and the 'congregation' rebuilt it. 7 yrs ago the pastor 'came out of the closet' on a Sunday morning. With many struggles, the congregation continued on."
- "Fifteen years ago, the church felt stuck in worship wars and was losing members. A group of people began to pray weekly for renewal and Spirit-led growth."

Innovation and New Ministries: Churches are embracing new ideas, launching innovative programs, and restructuring to meet current needs.

- "God opened door after door for us to start a new ministry for young adults."
- "Renamed + relaunched + restructured + reprogrammed."
- "Members together and individually began a new ministry and retooled an existing ministry."
- "Establish a program to train, equip, and send Gen Z young people."
- "Launching an ELL program for immigrant neighbors."

Intentionality and Leadership Development

The sources underscore the importance of intentionality in ministry and the crucial role of leadership in fostering healthy, growing churches.

Mentorship and Leadership Development: Programs and cultures that encourage mentorship and raise up new leaders are yielding positive results.

- "We intentionally developed a mentoring culture that encouraged people of all ages to discover their gifts and serve within the church."
- "Our mentorship ministry. Been going on for 8+ years now. Grades 9-12 meet twice a month + do fun stuff + discipleship stuff."

- "Many of the participants [in Soccer Camp 4 Christ] have grown up to become teen leaders/coaches."
- "Raising up young leaders."
- "Willing service of younger adults to serve as elders/deacons and a congregation that accepts them as leaders."
- "Recently growing leaders to spearhead new projects."

Strategic Vision and Adaptation: Churches that articulate clear visions and are willing to adapt are experiencing revitalization.

- "A renewed excitement + revitalization follow several years of healing that God is doing a 'new thing' in our congregation."
- "Unity for vision forward."
- "My story is from 1989 to today, how 3 pastors moved our church from old tradition to an exciting church with praise groups and new people coming to church every month."
- "The Holy Spirit softening the hard hearts of the oldest members to welcome, embrace, & mentor the New. So that we are known as the friendly church in town."

In conclusion, the provided sources paint a vibrant picture of churches actively engaged in their faith and communities. The overarching narrative is one of growth, spiritual deepening, compassionate outreach, and resilient adaptation, all underpinned by the transformative power of God at work through prayer, strong leadership, and genuine community.

We Believe God is...

Based on the stories provided, there is a strong belief that God is powerfully and actively at work in Christian Reformed churches. Gather participants worked with their groups to contribute statements describing various ways God is perceived to be working within the church, its people, and surrounding communities.

Here are some of the key ways the stories and contributed statements indicate God is working within the CRC:

Growing and Restoring the Church:

God is growing His church through personal relationships and is faithfully growing and providing for His Church. He is doing a new thing in local congregations resulting in growth. God is also faithfully calling people back/restoring relationships between His people and the church, and faithfully calling new people to our churches.

Discipling and Transforming People:

God is empowering His church to raise disciples and is transforming people in their walks in life. He is restoring people from spiritually dead to alive in Christ. God is transforming lives through encounters with His living Word and engaging hearts and changing lives through intentional commitment to prayer. He is faithfully deepening, shaping, and developing people to be a welcoming community.

Raising and Empowering Leaders, Especially the Next Generation:

God is raising up dedicated disciples of all ages. He is faithfully raising new leaders to meet new people everywhere and raising up leaders of all ages to passionately lead with unity of purpose. God is reviving the need for leadership and leaders to be focused on extending grace to all people. Importantly, God is empowering the next generation to serve in leadership capacities and working through a new generation of young leaders. He is also stirring a hunger in the youth to revitalize the church and empowering our youth to be active leaders who can articulate their faith story in powerful ways. God is raising up faithful young leaders.

Fostering Unity in Diversity:

God is uniting His diverse church and drawing nations to himself. He is giving us a taste of heaven by building his church through diversity and bringing renewal through all tribes, tongues, nations, and people.

Community Engagement and Outreach:

God is opening our eyes to needs and activating people to respond as a way of living the Gospel. He is connecting us to our communities in missional ways and drawing churches together to serve their local community. God is also opening our hearts to love our neighbors in reciprocal ways and faithfully meeting needs through community partnerships. He is sending us out to serve and share the Gospel and renewing a passion for Gospel-centered evangelism. God is creating a new movement outside of church walls and drawing people to Him through a variety of relational ministries.

Working Through Unforeseen Circumstances and Suffering:

God is working through our suffering for good and transforming His church through upheaval (unforeseen circumstances, like COVID). He is also the one who turns tragedy into blessing.

Empowering Through Prayer and the Holy Spirit:

God is using prayer and scripture to heal, transform and unify the church in mission. He is inviting us to grow in prayer and is breathing life and vitality into the body through the Holy Spirit. God is also faithfully answering our prayers.

Providing Resources and Expanding our Compassion:

God is moving the church to creatively and strategically redeploy our resources and providing resources for ministries. He also loves seeing His church showing compassion to one another and is inviting us to respond in compassion and generosity to His Creation. God is working through people in unexpected ways.

Fulfilling Covenantal Promises:

God is fulfilling His covenantal promises to the next generation in a counter-cultural way.

At the culmination of this exercise, participants were moved to praise the Triune God for his faithfulness to us and our congregations. With the psalmist we declare, "The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy (Psalm 126:3)."

What did God do through Gather?

The following summarizes the key themes and important truths present in the provided excerpts, which represent reflections from individuals who participated in Gather. The responses overwhelmingly highlight a sense of renewal, encouragement, and broadened perspective on God's activity despite challenges.

Main Themes and Truths:

A central and recurring theme is the profound realization that God is actively working in numerous, often unexpected, ways across various communities and contexts. Participants repeatedly expressed surprise and gratitude at discovering the breadth and depth of God's movement.

- "Showed me how God is working in my church. I came here thinking our congregation was not listening to Him and not accomplishing much but after looking at it through the lense of 'Gather' I now know that He is leading us in many different ways."
- "Learning about the context of other churches and seeing How the Spirit is at work everywhere in unexpected ways."
- "I learned that God is working in different communities in different ways."
- "Showed me how he has been working in a variety of churches in different locations all at the same time, to build his Kingdom on this great but growing earth."
- "Showed me how his spirit is moving in churches, communities, and the world. Showed me he's at work and he's doing good work!"

Despite acknowledged "discontent, animosity, and disagreement in the CRC denomination right now," "Gather" has instilled a strong sense of hope and optimism regarding the future of the CRCNA. Participants were uplifted by seeing the positive realities often overshadowed by denominational tensions.

- "...showed me that despite all the discontent, animosity, and disagreement in the CRC denomination right now, He is still working through His church and in His people."
- "Opened my eyes to some of the amazing things happening in the CRC. Reminded me that there is so much goodness!"
- "Showed how God is at work in the CRCNA for good, despite ongoing tensions and challenges."
- "Renewed a sense of hope and optimism in the work He is doing in and through the members of the CRC."
- "Renewed my hope for the CRCNA by forming relationships, revealing His work in the church, reminding that he meets me in my disappointment + resurrects to new life."

- "Gave me renewed hope that God is using the CRCNA to reach people, communities and the world for the Kingdom."

Gather fostered a strong sense of community and connection among attendees, leading to mutual encouragement and a realization of shared experiences, despite diverse backgrounds. This communal aspect was crucial for refreshing participants.

- "Feel like God has united us [as] a group. We can celebrate what we have in common and grow as a group."
- "Refreshed my soul. Through a season that has been very full of many good and some challenging things, it has been a GIFT to hear of all the ways God is at work in our churches and reflect on Scripture together."
- "Connected me to the CRCNA at large."
- "Showed me hope, community, and love in Christ."
- "'Community' and conversations about different experiences in member + faith communities. Regardless of where we are from we share many of the same stories."
- "Refreshed my soul by joining with my brothers and sisters and galvanized my hope that God is reaching the world through his broken people."
- "Provided opportunities to connect with people within my classis and across North America to listen, celebrate, and hope afresh what he is doing in each of their lives, ministry, and call (in the pew or at the pulpit or behind the scenes)."
- "Created new connections and friendships."

Many participants reported feeling personally encouraged, strengthened, and renewed in their calling for ministry. Hearing testimonies of God's faithfulness and power was a significant source of this revitalization.

- "Encouraged and strengthened for ministry, by hearing the statements 'We believe God is...' I was overwhelmed by God's faithfulness, power and goodness in lives and churches. God reminded me that the Holy Spirit is working through prayer and God's Word to transform lives and communities."
- "Confirmed one more time that He is at work in His church, renewing, transforming, bringing hope. He is always present. He [defeats?] our doubts. Spending time w. Him burn our hearts."
- "Gave me the gift of many stories to listen to, told by many voices. These stories carried the weight of ministry - grief, pain, confusion, worry - but also a testimony of grace that refreshed my soul & renewed my calling."
- "I came to Boston Gather depleted. This is the time of year that is very busy for Pastors + Church leadership. Gather Boston, through the Bible Study + reflection + new friends I met, filled me up so that I can go back with a rejuvenated self to the congregation + community I love."
- "Encouraged me as I listened to the testimonies of what God has done and is doing in the lives of individuals and churches. Has strengthened my desire to share the 'Good News' in a world that is seeking."

The event served as a powerful reminder of God's unwavering faithfulness, the effectiveness of His Word, and the transformative power of the Holy Spirit.

- "Reminded me of His still, small voice, working through ordinary people and ordinary circumstances."
- "Reminded me that His word is still effective to do his work. He is faithful to His covenant promises. Jesus continues to change lives and build His church."
- "Reminded me that His word is living and active and is the primary way to hear His will together. Reminded me of the power of prayer."

Participants noted God's active work in transforming individuals and churches, envisioning new possibilities for growth and the advancement of His kingdom.

- "God is transforming the church to a new dispensation. God is envisioning new statements of faith. God is writing new stories through new people joining us."
- "The collaboration, community engagement, transformation + discipleship happening in various ways, in various locations."
- "I believe God will raise a new generation to further His kingdom and bring the good news."

Key Facts and Specific Observations:

- *Diversity and Unity*: The event highlighted "how a diverse community is united through our love for Christ and service to Him" and showed "Love in church diversity."
- *Emmaus Analogy*: Several participants referenced the Emmaus Road story, emphasizing Jesus's presence even when unrecognized, and the opening of eyes to His work. "Showed us that in our journey Emmaus he has always been walking with us and walking side by side and sometimes we fail to recognize him, and sometimes we are the ones walking and we are never alone."
- *Importance of Listening*: The value of listening to others' stories, hopes, dreams, and disappointments was explicitly mentioned. "Taught me the joy of listening to other people describe their hopes/dreams/disappointments regarding their church."
- *Challenging Pessimism*: The event successfully moved individuals from "pessimism to more optimism about how God is at work in my church."
- *"Not Miss the Obvious"*: A challenge to remain open-minded and perceptive to God's ongoing work, even in ordinary circumstances. "Challenged me to 'not miss the obvious.'"
- *Focus on What God "Is" Doing*: Participants were reminded to focus on God's current activity rather than solely on personal desires. "Reminded me to think on what God IS doing and not solely in what I want God to do."
- *Youth Engagement*: A specific observation noted that God "is using young people in ways I have not known and young people are hungry for the word of God."
- *Global and Local Impact*: God's work was seen as both local and national, "Showed me how he is at work both locally and nationally and how his hand is at work."

Conclusion:

Gather has evidently served as a powerful catalyst for spiritual and emotional renewal among its participants. It has successfully counteracted feelings of isolation and discouragement by revealing the vast, diverse, and ongoing work of God within the CRCNA and the broader

Christian community. The emphasis on shared stories, communal connection, and the unwavering faithfulness of God has instilled a profound sense of hope, revitalized commitment to ministry, and a deeper appreciation for the goodness and vitality present within the denomination.