



## Gather Houston | 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 Houston was held Thursday to Saturday, March 20-22, 2025 at the CityPlace Marriott at Springwoods Village.

Fifty-nine (59) participants from classes Rocky Mountain, Hamilton, Yellowstone, Minnkota, Grandville, and Hanmi 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 equitable contribution of every invested attendee regardless of the size of one's church, the role they held in the church, or whether or not they were ordained.

Those who attended were assigned to a small group of six to eight participants with a team of 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:

### Limited Community Engagement and Outreach:

- There was a disappointment regarding the level of community engagement and outreach, with a desire for more involvement than currently experienced. Hopes for greater community outreach and involvement with other churches, such as through "serve days," have not been fully realized.
- The aspiration for the church to become a community center has not been met, with people still "commuting" to church, suggesting a lack of integration into the local neighborhood.

- The church is perceived as not being as "missional + outreach-focused" as it once was, or could/should be.
- Outreach programs that were initiated did not continue when the staff members leading them left.
- Impact in the community and local neighborhood is largely limited to financial support of community organizations rather than personal involvement, leading to churches being described as "quite insular and middle class."
- There is a lack of interaction or ongoing education/training about Indigenous matters/ministry, despite proximity to significant Indigenous communities.
- Specific outreach efforts, like a Farmer's Market presence, did not result in the hoped-for "slew of new members." Similarly, community programs were hoped to result in many people accepting Christ, but this expectation was not met.
- There is a sentiment that the church has "failed to step up its outreach and evangelism opportunities." For example, a "mission committee" became an "enfolding" committee, indicating a shift towards an inward focus.

### Challenges with Growth and Retention:

- A lack of commitment to attend services regularly is a disappointment, with the busyness of sports and other recreational activities keeping people from worshipping weekly.
- A significant hope that everyone would return after COVID-19 has not materialized, resulting in smaller churches.
- Youth program development has decreased, and students leaving for college often do not return to the church, finding other churches to attend.
- A concern exists about members who have come and slowly left over the years, raising questions about why.
- There is a strong desire and "longing for more youth and young families in the church," with increasing the number of younger families being an "ongoing hope that has been very slow to be met."
- Hopes for church growth in membership and stabilization have not been fully met.
- The "discipleship movement" is "not taking off (yet)."
- It was hoped that ministries would bear fruit in increased baptisms, professions of faith (POFs), and transformed lives, but this was not fully met.

### Leadership and Volunteer Shortages:

- There is a lack of enough younger leaders stepping up for various reasons. Many younger people are "passing and unwilling to serve," preferring merely to show up to church and leave.
- Not enough volunteers are available to support desired programs, leading to the risk of "burning out" existing volunteers.
- Greater enthusiasm from members willing to step up for nomination/affirmation was hoped for but not seen.
- There is difficulty finding people to serve as Elders or Deacons, and it seems to be a constant challenge to have enough qualified elders and deacons.

- It was hoped that more members would participate/volunteer in children's & youth programming.
- There's a desire for God to raise leaders among the "seasoned believers," noted with a sigh of disappointment.
- It was hoped that new pastors would be equipping leaders rather than doing most leadership themselves.
- Sufficient numbers of volunteers for children & youth ministry were also a hope that was not fully met.
- Churches are struggling to find pastors who can serve as "an under shepherd to lead our congregation."
- It was hoped that pastoral leadership would be more stable. Churches have struggled with pastors resigning, which can lead to other members leaving the congregation.

### Spiritual Maturity and Discipleship Challenges:

- While there is growth in Biblical and Christian knowledge, the knowledge often remains information, and living in accordance with this knowledge has been "slower than hoped."
- There's a concern that not everyone is "pursuing a growing relationship with Jesus beyond Sunday morning service."
- The church is seen as not having "discipled very well, as well as we needed to."
- There is a desire for "deep opportunities for discipleship," and figuring out how to encourage growth while allowing for individuality and God's pace is a challenge.
- Office bearers are described as "not (still) ready to disciple, teach, and lead others into the church."
- There's a feeling that more should be done to stimulate deep spiritual growth.
- It was hoped that more members would engage in Bible study (with others) and small groups, but this was only partially met.

### Internal Dynamics and Resistance to Change:

- There are unresolved fractures from COVID-19.
- Too many people are described as distracted by the "busyness of life" and miss out on being "fed by God's word each Lord's Day."
- Members sometimes "complain too much about the songs we use in church," indicating resistance to change, including music and even wall colors.
- Church leaders have struggled to effectively lead their congregations through challenging conversations about topics such as human sexuality.
- There is a hope for more openness and honesty in sharing areas of need and struggles, suggesting this is currently lacking.
- There's a desire for the church to be a place where new people can "find a place to belong and not feel on the outside looking in."

### Financial and Resource Constraints:

- Funding and resources "seem scarce," with funding and ministry shares decreasing, and classis funds not being replenished.
- Church planters are struggling to be fully funded.

# 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

Heavenly Father,

We come before you, acknowledging our foolishness and our slowness to truly believe and trust in your divine ways. We confess that we often carry over our own experiences and expectations from the past, assuming they directly dictate your work in the present, instead of paying attention to the unique ways you may be at work in our current circumstances. Forgive us for often believing that community outreach will automatically lead to church growth, and for setting our own measures of success based on numbers rather than your sovereign will.

We admit our tendency to rely on our own hard work and ministerial engineering, forgetting that you build your church in your time and in your way, among your people, and you do not depend on our efforts to accomplish it. We are slow to believe that it doesn't all rest on us, and that we simply need to rest in you and join you in the work you are already doing. We confess our desire to fix things on our own, which often leads to frustration and burnout, rather than trusting in your perfect provision and faithfulness.

We have been slow to believe that you will raise up the next generation of leaders for your church, and that our role is simply to equip and trust in your process. We have doubted that your provision for the expansion of your church will always be greater than our own limitations. We confess that our own expectations about success and growth are frequently not aligned with your plan, and we struggle when our prayers do not yield immediate or visible results. We know that your ways and thoughts are higher and greater than our own, and that you have plans and purposes, yet we often fail to act as if we truly believe this.

We ask for your forgiveness for expecting that the risk and uncertainty of ministry will diminish, instead of trusting in your proven faithfulness. We confess our impatience and our desire for changes to happen on our timeline, rather than trusting that you move at your own pace. We are often slow to see the fullness of your presence and engage with you in your purposes and priorities, especially when growth feels uncomfortable and challenging.

Lord, we acknowledge our foolishness in prioritizing our performance over our faithfulness and spiritual maturity. We confess that we sometimes see ministry as what we do and how much we do, rather than recognizing it as your power to transform lives. We admit our struggle to lean on you more, especially when you call us into leadership where we feel like a fish out of water.

Help us, Father, to die to ourselves and our desires, to live the way of the cross, understanding that suffering and sacrifice are expected and essential for the growth of faith. Open our eyes to see that your purposes and glory are the ultimate point, not our preferred pathways or events.

Strengthen us to be faithful to you, your Word, and your people. Help us to have patience and trust you with our current ministry goals, even in the face of perceived lack of resources. Remind us constantly that you are the God of the big picture, not worried about the things we worry about, and that you know the end of the story. May we learn to recognize your work, even in the messiness and tension, knowing that you are King of the 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:

### Growth and Expansion (Numerical & Spiritual)

The church is experiencing significant growth, both in terms of new members and the deepening faith of existing ones. This growth is evidenced by:

*New Members and Baptisms:* "20 new members/baptisms/profs of faith last year; many new guests/families." This includes diverse individuals such as "one baptism was with a lady who grew up LOS/Navajo; one [...] atheist." and "A recent convert to the faith who will be doing profession of faith + will be baptized. A month ago she underwent a deliverance ministry + the voices that have been in her head since she was 12 have left her!"

*Youth Engagement:* A strong emphasis on youth development. For example, "nine high school students coming over the last two elder meetings for profession of faith," and "Elementary school children actively involved in Sunday morning worship as part of worship teams leading singing and also sound team."

*Spiritual Maturation:* Individuals and the congregation are growing in faith. For example, "Men are eager & excited to serve on the council and teach our covenant children in many ways. People are more fluent in the Gospel & willing to share it with each other" and "A young adult desiring to grow deeper in faith taking the initiative to start a Bible study with other young adults."

## Radical Hospitality and Inclusivity

The community actively welcomes and integrates diverse individuals, reflecting a deep commitment to hospitality:

*Welcoming Immigrants and Refugees:* Numerous accounts speak to "The influx of African immigrants to our congregation, through no special initiative or program of our own," "The work of our Refugee Resettlement Team," and "A family fled from Mexico and came to our church. After their hearing they were landed Canadian status." The church is learning to "enfold and embrace people of new (to us) cultures."

*Support for Marginalized Groups:* The church extends care to "homeless accepted by church," and "people hurt by life and by churches find a safe place to rest and heal." Initiatives like "Freezer Meals" and partnerships with "Christians Against Poverty (CAP)" demonstrate tangible support.

*Intercultural Ministry:* There is a "Growing Diversity" with "One of church members witness to 3-4 Filipino people and they eventually witness to four more people," and the welcoming of "new attendees from Iran."

## Missional Living and Evangelism

The church is intentionally outward-focused, empowering members to share their faith and serve the wider community:

*Intentional Discipleship:* A "leadership committed to missional life, making disciples" is evident, with new discipleship initiatives and members actively "encouraging one another to grow in their faith."

*Personal Evangelism:* Stories abound of individual members sharing their faith, such as a 5-year-old inviting a neighbor to church, or a lifeguard building relationships with a coworker and inviting her to church. The pastor's experience at CrossFit gyms highlights finding "ways to do the things you enjoy w/ non-Christians + God will use your time w/ them to create evangelistic opportunities."

*Community Outreach:* The church engages in various community initiatives, including "Sponsorships of Hispanic kids at the Christian school," "Project Hope Food Pantry + Thrift Store," and "a generous committee team effort to feed the homeless."

## God's Providential Hand and Answered Prayer

Repeatedly, the narratives attribute positive developments, healing, and guidance directly to God's intervention:

*Miraculous Healings:* "After a lot of prayer, and after the pastor + elders anointed them with oil and prayed over them, they were starting to improve and now both of them show no more signs of presence of cancer in their bodies." Also, "God brings miraculous healing to one of our ladies with severe clinical depression."

*Divine Guidance:* The pastor's house purchase being on the "exact street I was prayer walking on years ago" illustrates divine leading. Another family started attending after the "Holy Spirit prompted their daughter to say we need to go to that church."

*Answered Prayers:* Stories of answered prayer are frequently shared, including a "growing prayer life" within the congregation.

## Deepening Community and Relationships

The church fosters strong internal bonds and a sense of belonging, crucial for spiritual support and resilience:

*Support in Crisis:* The community rallies around those facing hardship, seen in supporting a family during a "health crisis by providing meals, sending cards, making visits and praying regularly" and providing "meals, mentorship, friendship, and community" for mental health struggles.

*Intergenerational Connection:* "A young girl who sought fellowship outside of her friend group...found a wonderful friendship in our older couple and to this day is quite close friends with them."

*Intentional Fellowship:* New initiatives like "affinity groups (cooking, short-story club) that have grown new friendships and connections," and inviting new visitors for lunch demonstrate efforts to "befriend, assimilate, + enfold new folks."

## Most Important Ideas

*Growth through Ordinary Means:* The church experiences "God's blessing through His ordinary means of grace -- preaching, sacrament, discipline -- in huge ways." This highlights the foundational role of traditional church practices in fostering spiritual vitality.



*Diversity as a Blessing:* "Through growing diversity, I could see God is working through church members to bring His children to our church." This isn't just an outcome, but a celebrated aspect of God's work, enriching the community.

*Empowering Lay Leaders and Youth:* The shift towards a "governance structure in which individuals and ministry teams do not need to ask permission to do something new or unexpected" along with "Our youth group kids have taken on leadership roles in our church" signifies a culture of empowerment and shared ministry.

*Outward-Focused Mindset:* The commitment to "planting one church every three years" and the "micro churches in the neighborhoods surrounding campus" demonstrate a proactive and expansive missional vision.

*Resilience and Healing:* Despite past "a long season of division + decline," or "a contentious congregational meeting," the church shows remarkable resilience, unity, and healing, often through shared purpose and prayer, leading to "renewed hope/enthusiasm w/ congregation."

*The Transformative Power of the Gospel:* Individuals are experiencing profound life changes, finding recovery in AA and faith, to a woman "who used to deal with witchcraft" now wanting baptism, and "very broken people coming to God." The testimony of a young man "possessed to the point of paralysis" who was "set him free" is a powerful example.

*Intentional Hospitality:* Repeated emphasis on "practicing hospitality" and efforts to be "truly hospitable to them, not just friendly" reflects a core value beyond simple welcoming.

*Collaborative Ministry:* The "community pastors group has agreed to lead their congregations in a community-wide Bible reading campaign," and "Lenten services we take part in with two other congregations", which shows inter-church cooperation.

These narratives paint a picture of a church deeply committed to its faith, actively engaged in its community, embracing diversity, and experiencing God's tangible presence and blessing in remarkable ways. The focus on discipleship, hospitality, and empowering all members (including youth and new believers) stands out as crucial to its ongoing vibrancy and impact.

## **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:

## Restoration and Healing:

God is described as powerfully at work bringing renewal and restoration. This includes restoring people and communities, restoring families through children's, youth, schools, and family ministries, and restoring the family and the church itself. He is also working to redeem broken relationships, restore marriages, and return children to their parents, valuing wholeness and keeping His promises. Furthermore, God is restoring lives and healing minds, bodies, and families, ultimately using His church to bring hope and healing to a broken world. He is even miraculously transforming suffering and pain into joy and laughter.

## Church Growth, Strengthening, and Diversity:

God is equipping and discipling both old and new members of His church through ordinary means of grace and preserving/sustaining the church. He is transforming people's hearts and strengthening and maturing the church, as well as refreshing congregations and classes. A significant aspect of His work is diversifying the church, growing His church through the diversity of ethnic, cultural, theological, and socio-economic backgrounds, and as the creator of diversity, building His beautifully diverse church. He is also building unity in diversity among all nations in churches. God is drawing in diverse groups, including youth, new leaders, families, varying age groups, different ethnic groups, and students.

## Leadership Development and Discipleship:

God is actively raising up disciples and leaders, specifically young adults to serve, lead, and share the gospel. This extends to raising up leaders for future seasons of ministry and forming leaders through mutual refinement. God is also described as working in and through the next generation to build His church.

## Community and Outreach/Engagement:

God uses relationships and community to draw people in. He is working through congregations to meet tangible community needs as a demonstration of Christ's love. God uses kindness and acts of care to bring others into His community of believers and draws people into His family through acts of love. He is teaching believers to recognize opportunities to step out in faith to bless others. God is eager for His church to join in His work and is enfolding people into the church through the practice of hospitality. He is also using ordinary people reaching out in ordinary ways to extend His transforming love, and is using the church to bring the nations together into a saving relationship with Him.

## Prayer, Miracles, and Divine Presence:

God is speaking and moving when people pause, listen, and look. He is faithful and generous in His goodness. God is encouraging believers and answering prayer. God is also described as strengthening the faith of the church through prayer, healing, and miracles and performing

miracles in our modern day and age to remind us of His presence. God also uses suffering for His purposes and uses uncomfortable situations to show grace.

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:

The most prominent theme is the consistent affirmation that God is alive, at work, and actively building His church within the CRCNA. Participants repeatedly express experiencing God's presence, leading, and power.

- "Refreshed my conviction. 'He is alive and at work in the CRCNA!'"
- "God inspired me! God's word is forever relevant... We must always recognize him in times of triumph and times of sorrow. We must remember Jesus is Lord."
- "Has shown me a beautiful, hopeful picture of the church. He has excited me about the future... God will continue to use me as His instrument."
- "Encouraged me to see Him. See Him moving in the event. Moving through the stories/testimonies of my tablemates. Moving in our denomination."
- "Showed me that He is living, responsive, and moving across the world."
- "Demonstrated that there is a denomination wide desire to see Him work through us and to remain with us. There is a desire to seek the Lord God while He may be found."
- "God is working in the CRCNA. Gather Houston has shown me the power of God. He is doing a great work in CRCNA and God would leave to an even greater work."
- "Has shown me God is doing a great work in our denominational hearts - all we have to do is be mindful of the Spirit's leading."
- "...reminded me of God's faithfulness with the CRC. This is Jesus' church!"

Gather served as a significant source of personal and congregational encouragement, leading to renewed conviction and a sharpened sense of calling. Many participants felt refreshed, inspired, and better equipped for their ministries.

- "Convicted me to go beyond where I am comfortable -- and to take others with me."
- "Renewed my sense of calling -- I am called to faithfully preach the word, plant the seed, and let the spirit grow the church, add folks to the church, and build His church."
- "Enlightens my spiritual eyes to see the exact situation of my ministry and church for further journeys."
- "Gave me renewed energy and excitement about the many, many ways this denomination has a hand in building the kingdom."

- "Refresh my old ministries."
- "I was encouraged to see God working through his ordinary means of grace in churches. The preaching of the Word is growing congregations. Prayers are being answered. The sacraments are being sought by newcomers in faith of our Lord Jesus Christ."
- "Encouraged me to continue to trust Him to equip me when I feel inadequate, to provide when things seem bleak and to be faithful to His promises."
- "Ignited a renewed flame in me... not to simply keep the fire burning, but to multiply it."
- "Gave me renewed perspective on my role in my church."
- "I sense God leading me to lead the congregation into more prayer and expectation of the moving of the Holy Spirit in our church."

A crucial element of Gather's positive impact was the opportunity for connection, fellowship, and the sharing of personal and church stories. This fostered a sense of unity and shared experience.

- "Allowed me to meet fellow CRC-ers from various parts of the country to hear how God is moving in their churches and communities to grow his Kingdom and glorify Himself."
- "Inspired me through the stories of many others I met here."
- "Helped me connect with others."
- "Told our neighbor's churches stories (esp. individual stories/lives)."
- "Introduced me to brothers & sisters I hadn't yet met. Gave me the opportunity to get to know others better."
- "Showed me regardless of different situations we may face as a denomination there are many vibrant local churches doing amazing work... God also showed me the importance of our denomination and how important it is that we get together more often to listen to the challenges and celebrate each other."
- "The gathering made me realize the wonderful make-up of the CRC family."
- "Encouraged my hope for the future. Built connections with people from other places and other cultures."
- "Brought us together and opened our eyes to what He's doing in our churches... it is so encouraging to study the Word together and to know that Jesus is with us even when we feel discouraged or alone!"
- "Brought me into a space filled with beloved brothers and sisters... Many who were new to me -- beautiful new siblings + friends who prayed with and for me."
- "Blessed me to meet with wonderful God's servants from different places and walks of life. It was an honor to meet with them and learn from them."
- "Encouraged me by hearing of good things happening in churches among our group."
- "Reminded me that we are one church body from many places, with many different ideas, but that we are all genuinely seeking God... Thank you for bringing all of us together in this special way!"
- "More spaces for churches to connect are needed. This is important work."
- "United our classes through conversations, fellowship, and worship...beautiful experience! Created a safe place for sharing burning heart issues."
- "Made me see the importance of story... sharing our stories could be such an encouragement."

Participants noted and appreciated the diversity within the CRCNA, alongside a strong sense of unity in core beliefs and mission. This suggests a hopeful outlook despite varying contexts.

- "I was inspired by the diverse group of leaders. CRCNA cares."
- "Gave me a richer appreciation for the ways he is working in and through CR churches in vastly different situations, vastly different realities, with vastly different challenges and opportunities."
- "Our hopes and vision across the CRC are blissfully NOT diverse... we are, in fact, quite united in our passion FOR the Gospel. That's a very good thing!!"
- "I was encouraged by the diversity of those present."
- "Highlighted various cultures and the bigger pictures of the CRC."
- "Showed me that our brothers and sisters in the CRC come from MANY different backgrounds and cultures."
- "Revealed his plan to work with and use a wide range of people to bring the Good News to the world. Revealed there are many common connections in this diverse group."
- "Even if you are coming from different sizes of churches, different nationalities, and different backgrounds, we have something in common, and the Holy Spirit also is strengthening us, building us, and uniting us in one body."

While largely positive, the reflections also touch upon challenges and struggles, but consistently frame them within the context of God's faithfulness and a hopeful future. There's an acknowledgment that difficulties are part of growth.

- "Reminded me that [being] comfortable leads to nothing and that growth happens in the uncomfortable."
- "Has opened my heart to reflect on the way the church has operated in the past to look at the good and struggles we have faced and see through patience God is at work and with us in his church he will not let us fall as long as we continue to trust in Him."
- "Has challenged me to understand that difficulty & suffering is a significant path to greater maturity. I needed only to pause, gather, and listen."
- "Reassured me that Immanuel is not the only church with problems, not the only church struggling with some issues. Reassured me that He is with us/me, He is in control, He has a plan and a future for me/us."
- "Deepened my appreciation for patience as an essential ministry strength."
- "Reminded me that discomfort can bring growth. That God's ways are higher than my ways."
- "Helped me realize that he remains gracious and faithful to those we disagree with, and desires his communities to flourish despite differences."
- "Made me more aware that we not alone but many of our fellow travellers are dealing with the same issues throughout Canada and USA. It was most helpful to openly discuss this and share how this complex journey of faith is sometimes hard, confusing, yet a blessing."
- "Reminded me of the ways Jesus deals with our frustrations, expectations, and how he is insisting with His church, through correction, scriptures, breaking bread, moving us towards his mission."

Several comments highlight the importance of fundamental Christian practices as the means through which God works.

- "The preaching of the Word is growing congregations. Prayers are being answered. The sacraments are being sought by newcomers in faith of our Lord Jesus Christ."
- "Reinforced the importance of the means of grace as the primary strategy through which He leads His church."
- "Reminded me to plant and water faithfully, He gives the increase."
- "Encouraged my heart with... reflection in scripture, meaningful community, heart-felt worship, stories of hope."

These excerpts reveal a profoundly positive and encouraging experience for the CRCNA members who gathered. The event successfully fostered a sense of God's vibrant activity within the denomination, provided personal and collective refreshment, strengthened relational bonds across diverse contexts, and reaffirmed a unified commitment to the Gospel, even amidst challenges. The desire for more such connecting spaces and a continued focus on core spiritual disciplines are clear takeaways.