



## Gather Minneapolis | 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 Minneapolis Event Details

Gather Minneapolis was held Friday to Sunday, April 19-21, 2024 at the Saint Paul Riverfront Intercontinental Hotel in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul, Minnesota.

Sixty-two (62) participants from Classes Lake Superior, Huron, Hackensack, Lake Erie, Columbia 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 6-8 participants with a team of 2 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:

### Challenges with Growth and Membership

- There is a struggle to achieve numeric growth in membership and attendance. The church is not attracting many new members, and there's a lack of significant overall growth.
- Members express disappointment over high turnover and many people moving due to life circumstances.
- There is a notable loss of young adults and a concern about where the "90s kids" are. Hopes for youth staying and for a booming young adult ministry through intentional

spaces have not been realized. Inactive members also remain inactive, especially since COVID.

## Lack of Leaders and Volunteer Engagement

- The congregation struggles to raise new leaders, with a general lack of leaders and members not stepping up in volunteer/leader roles.
- Existing leaders face burnout, with the same volunteers doing all the work.
- There's a concern about the stalled maturity of emerging leaders and deacons operating at only 15% capacity.
- Churches struggle to fill pastoral vacancies, leading to significant leadership gaps.

## Limited Community Outreach and Impact

- Efforts to start community initiatives like a food pantry or a Love Inc. model community resource center couldn't get the necessary support.
- Despite intentions to be present in the local community, there is a lack of support (participation) from the congregation for these efforts.
- There's disappointment that people aren't coming back to Sunday worship after utilizing the food bank, and the church is not well-known in the community.

## Internal Unity, Relationships, and Identity

- Politics has divided people and caused them to leave the church. There are concerns about people avoiding conflict and leaving and not having important conversations.
- Relationship problems and a "spirit of dissension" can emerge.
- There's a lack of intergenerational unity and common life, with older members feeling that "their" church norms are changing.
- Some members do not feel welcomed in the Christian church community, and people's worship styles are not always accepted.
- The congregation struggles with a lack of diversity and resistance to embracing its emerging multiethnic identity, often still being seen as "the Dutch church."

## Challenges in Ministry Development and Discipleship

- Hopes to offer more programs and ministries have not been fully realized.
- Adult discipleship is not being prioritized, and there are limited opportunities for members to grow with others, such as through small groups. Discipleship training is ongoing but not with whole church members.
- There is a desperate need for a stronger youth ministry, and a struggle to keep youth ministries engaged.
- Disappointment exists regarding the lack of radical Christian living and that evangelism and discipleship to new believers are not happening.
- A fear and lack of openness to all spiritual gifts and a nervousness to engage the Holy Spirit for healing are also noted.

## Financial and Building-Related Issues

- The church faces financial struggles, being described as too frugal and not financially independent.
- Churches struggle to find permanent church buildings, leading to a sense of being un-rooted.

## Other Noted Disappointments

- Some members feel their concerns are ignored or unaddressed, and there are experiences of “Power Brokers” still being in charge.
- Congregation members report being too embarrassed to invite others to church.
- Hopes for vibrancy and excitement post-COVID have not materialized.

## 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

Oh, Lord, our God,

We confess before you our foolishness and our slowness to believe. We acknowledge that without you, without your Spirit, we are very foolish, often thinking people would come to church for us, rather than for you.

We have been slow to believe in your continuous work. We doubted that the Holy Spirit is STILL at work in the lives of believers and this world, and we were slow to believe you were at work even in our unbelief, or in others who saw things differently, or those who had experienced God in ways we had not. We confess our reluctance to truly embrace what the Holy Spirit was doing, even when we spoke about Him, and our slowness to submit to the Holy Spirit’s lead.

Forgive us for our slowness to believe in your timing, often wanting our plans to align with our own schedules rather than yours. We struggled to believe that you hold this world and its people in your hands, and that your ways are higher and your wisdom greater than ours. We doubted

that adversity, brokenness, and loss are things that you use to form your people, and that you could turn such brokenness into a beautiful masterpiece.

We confess our slowness to believe in the growth and survival of your church. We were slow to believe our church could grow or that it would survive during COVID, or even after a pastor leaves. We questioned if you were causing people to leave or that those leaving wouldn't kill the church. We doubted that our church can do well and even thrive in a time now without a pastor. We have also been slow to believe that our current divisions and disagreements could lead to a stronger gospel sharing, or that people could see past their differences and find unity, or that you could grow our congregation amid disunity.

Lord, we were slow to believe in our own value and participation within your body—that my voice mattered, my influence mattered, my talent mattered, my participation mattered. We struggled to believe that you didn't need us to bless and grow your church, or that you could act without us, or that you, God, provide growth despite our hard work or past efforts. We were slow to believe you were using us, or that our ministry to people makes a difference in eternity, or that we could effectively lead change, or even pastor or disciple people towards growth. We have also been slow to believe that our church would be able to host a service given the current challenges of finding volunteers.

We admit our slowness to believe in your provision, doubting that the resources (time, people, money) would be there to accomplish what we felt called to do, or that you would provide what we need. We were also slow to believe that you could bring reconciliation or that your definition of success is the only one that matters.

Finally, Lord, we confess our slowness to believe in your mission for our community. We were slow to believe that you are at work in the community coming for food, even after years, if they are not coming to our church, and that our church could meaningfully and effectively reach our community. We have been slow to believe that Jesus is moving in our community to bring sinners to faith in Him, or that the Good News would be embraced and needed in our local community.

Help us, Father, to trust fully in your supreme wisdom, your love, and your power, knowing that you are the Lord of your church and of this 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:

## Evangelism and Conversion: Lives Transformed

A recurring and powerful theme is the transformative power of the Gospel, leading to individual conversions and renewed faith. This often stems from consistent, loving outreach and a tangible demonstration of Christian community.

### *Long-Term Faithfulness Yields Fruit:*

- "Our pastor prayed for years for his neighbor who was an alcoholic, always showing Jesus love and kindness... Years passed and now this man is an on-fire believer and member of our church! Our God Reigns!" This illustrates the power of sustained prayer and loving engagement.

### *Unexpected Encounters Leading to Faith:*

- A man who "only stole from one church... and it happens to be ours" ten years ago, later attended an Alpha session at that same church, sought forgiveness, and began attending regularly on a day pass. This showcases divine irony and the power of forgiveness.
- A barbershop owner, after receiving a Bible as a tip during Advent, later recognized the giver and started attending church 1.5 years later. This highlights the delayed but powerful impact of simple acts of witness.
- A woman seeking a sign from God saw the church sign that read, "If you need a sign from God, this is it." She became a regular attendee and member. This exemplifies a direct divine intervention.

### *Healing and Deliverance:*

- Individuals struggling with addiction experienced profound freedom: "God brought a man out of alcoholism to sobriety. So joy-filled. "The husband was on drugs; his wife was an alcoholic. After 7 months, the husband stopped drugs and his wife stopped drinking, and the two son's behavior changed for good."

### *Children Leading the Way:*

- "A 5-year-old girl told her Grandmother, 'I want to go to that church.' Her grandmother has been bringing her for about two months. After GEMS the girl told her Grandmother, 'Those are my people, and that is my church!'" This demonstrates the powerful draw of a loving church environment, even for the youngest. A seven-year-old girl's invitation to VBS led to her entire family becoming believers years later.

#### *Diverse Paths to Faith:*

- "One man came and took the classes and began coming to church. Soon after he was helping with the sound system, he became an elder, recently finished some theological studies and actually he is doing church planting." This shows the organic progression of faith and leadership.

#### *New Insights and Renewed Commitment:*

- "One lady wanted to be baptized while another lady made it a rule to get up at 5 a.m. to read the Bible before she does her routine."

## Community Engagement and Outreach: Opening Doors Beyond the Walls

The sources consistently highlight proactive efforts to engage with and serve the broader community, leading to increased visibility, trust, and church growth.

#### *Addressing Tangible Needs (Food, Clothing, Shelter):*

- "Using Red Cross blood drives to open our doors to the community."
- "During COVID lockdowns, our church started a 24/7 free food fridge to help combat issues of food insecurity." This evolved into a "Dinner Church gathering for those who use the fridge."
- The expansion of food pantries from serving "100 families (households) to 700 families (households)" during COVID, with some guests becoming church attendees and even co-leading the ministry. "This ministry is now run partially by the guests. Some of them now attend church."
- "Clothing Closet – Free clothes in a poor neighborhood." This ministry also led to prayer for physical needs and access to additional resources like legal aid and counseling. "Within a week, 13 clocks arrived!!! After that, we've always had provision of what we've asked for. Now my community volunteers pray for meds too."

#### *Intentional Hospitality and Relationship Building:*

- "Men's breakfasts one Saturday a month. Over 100 men attend, 80% from the community. God is at work!"
- "Coffee Break meeting... a lady who sat next to me at the table had fallen and hurt herself... I prayed for her... five years later she started to come regularly to church."
- "Pickleball at our church has opened our doors to the community and we have seen people coming as a result of the connection."
- "Our local town's annual parade/celebrations used to 'allow' us a spot to hold an evangelical open air service. Now they urge us to be part of the planning committee, provide the stage, the sound man, advertise and supply a pancake breast." This signifies deep integration and influence within the secular community.

#### *Targeted Programs for Youth and Children:*

- "Kids Ministry (neighborhood). About 4 years ago God led New City Kids to open a program... teaching them tutoring, literacy, food, music, and faith."
- "Sports Camp (50-60 children). Most are children from the surrounding community."



- "Invited a neighbor girl to VBS – she comes, we move away. We come back seven years later and continue on at our church." This highlights the lasting impact of early exposure to faith.

#### *Innovative Use of Space and Resources:*

- Converting a "Cadets Garage" into a food pantry during COVID.
- "Christian school needed space to run high school building construction. That year's payment was enough to pay off the balance of the mortgage."
- Using church space for "remote classrooms for local high school students" during COVID lockdowns.

## Diversity and Inclusion: A Growing Tapestry

Many accounts celebrate the increasing ethnic, racial, and generational diversity within congregations, often facilitated by outreach efforts and a welcoming spirit.

#### *Ethnic and Racial Diversity:*

- "Growth in diversity through Indian graduate students."
- "Being led from above in the combination of a Hispanic recent church plant into a declining traditional CRC."
- "Online streamed service gained a large Nigerian following. Two families have moved from Nigeria to our town to join our church."
- "Growing diversity . . . Over the past year, visitors who have stayed are from Bolivia, Fiji, El Salvador, Turkey, and Iran and Cameroon. This has NEVER happened before."
- "Pentecost 2020. I made a video of a scripture reading in various languages spoken by the church... This year, 4 years later... We have at least 5 languages we can add to the 5-6 we had in 2020. Jesus has been working to grow our church in ethnic diversity."
- "A number of Latinos come for our church's weekly food pantry. One day our usual interpreter... A usual customer/recipient volunteered to help. That meant she moved to the other side of the table. She went from being served to serving. She never went back." This is a powerful illustration of integration and empowerment.
- "We go to church with Korean families and we (wife and I) are now church Grandpa/Grandma or church uncle/aunt. Growing in Christian community (beyond ethnic ties)."

#### *Intergenerational Connection:*

- "Intergenerational – Youth. Connection groups intended to foster intergenerational interconnection via Bible Study."
- "Elderly people in the church who really shifted to offering clear and proactive support to young people (when young people were not expecting it)."
- "Young people leading, singing, scripture, prayers. Love seeing more youth than adults leading."

#### *Welcoming to those with Disabilities:*

- "Welcoming of new people with all levels of ability."
- "Allowing young adults with developmental delays to participate in leading services."



## Resilience and Renewal: Overcoming Challenges

The sources reveal churches navigating significant challenges, including transitions, leadership voids, and physical limitations, with God's provision and congregational commitment.

### *Overcoming Building Challenges:*

- "Our church does not own a building but needed to find a rental facility... PRAISE THE LORD! God, in an unexpected connection, guided us to rent space in a school that used to be a Catholic church. Within the school they had an intact sanctuary that included everything on our concern list."

### *Navigating Pastoral Transitions:*

- "Two years prior to our need – God prodded us to hire a second pastor. We couldn't afford it at the time but God provided. God foreknew that he would fill a void left by the sudden death of our pastor."
- "Many members of our very small church are putting in significant hours to prepare for the transition of our pastor of 32 years retiring."
- "No pastor over COVID. A couple holds new member's classes because there are so many new people. In three classes over two years, over 40 new members of all ages have joined the church. God is at work!"

### *Adapting to New Realities (COVID-19):*

- "Providing a renewal process to help us find direction when we couldn't be doing anything in the community anyway due to COVID."
- "Several people have begun coming to church after watching online for several months."
- The food pantry and online streaming examples above demonstrate adaptation.

### *Restoring Dysfunctional Situations:*

- "I am involved in a very dysfunctional board for a small business. Through repeated sharing of Biblical principles, the marriage of the founder and his wife is being rebuilt on prayer and discussion after coming to the brink of divorce."

### *Spiritual Refreshment and Direction:*

- "An on-fire interim pastor that has invigorated younger people and those who haven't been interested before."

### *Leadership Development and Empowerment:*

- "Young people (ages 10 – teen) are wanting to help with church needs (reading scripture, running a/v)." and "New young adults taking on leadership in the church."

## Global and Broader Kingdom Impact: Extending the Reach

Beyond local church growth, there's evidence of a broader vision and impact, from supporting international missions to engaging in reconciliation efforts.

#### *Support for Global Missions:*

- "Support for a sister church in Bolivia has broadened our vision for God's church around the world and support for global missions."
- "Support for women and their children who are Ukrainian refugees in Poland. \$40K was raised to help them settle in Poland."

#### *Missionary Sending:*

- "Growth of 5 units getting ready to serve on the mission field for at least 1 year or more."
- "People giving up the "American dream" or the prime years of their lives to become full-time missionaries."

#### *Reconciliation and Justice:*

- "Canadian Indigenous Ministry Circle + Diversity, Anti-Racist Collective + Communicating with Canadian Government. Working together to recommend how and where we can review and bring justice in the CRCNA and in Canada."
- "Hearts Exchanged Program, educating CRC members about reconciliation, and seeing the fruits/actions of grace and justice from across Canada, coast to coast!!"

## Internal Strengthening and Spiritual Growth

The documents also reflect a focus on nurturing the existing congregation, deepening faith, and fostering a supportive internal community.

#### *Deepening Faith and Discipleship:*

- "Long term members persevering and being faithful through many changes."
- "God is strengthening our members and bringing them closer together, through worship, Bible studies, service, ministry in a way that we support one another (in good times and bad) more than before."
- "Watching my own grandchildren come to faith and leading prayer and talking about Jesus."
- "Congregation growing in faith and still learning new perspectives on Scripture (same Bible stories with new insight)."

#### *Care and Support for Members:*

- "The congregation loves her [a significantly handicapped person] and her mother and they always take time to talk to and encourage her."
- "Congregates rallying and caring over those that are physically ill."

#### *Prayer as a Foundational Practice:*

- "Growing weekly prayer meetings."
- "Prayer is working all the time. Finance, numbers, all generations, youth pastors, etc. Through the Pandemic (difficult time), God is working."

#### *Stewardship and Generosity:*

- "Creating incredibly generous hearts that support local ministries financially and in person."

In summary, the sources paint a vibrant picture of churches actively engaged in their communities, embracing diversity, overcoming obstacles, and witnessing profound spiritual transformations. The consistent theme is that "God is at work!" in diverse and unexpected ways, often through the faithfulness and obedience of His people.

## 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:

### Building a Diverse and United Community:

God is actively drawing people together from various places and connecting ALL of his children through his church's growing diversity. He is building a multi-cultural and diverse church and is unifying in the midst of diversity. This involves making disciples of all nations and observing that people are coming into our church doors that we didn't think to invite. God is also grafting in new branches, supporting multilingual congregations, and enabling multiple congregations meeting in one building. This work reveals what a church community is, demonstrating that God's love is for everyone and that God wears a tapestry from every nation, tribe, people and language.

### Raising and Equipping Leaders and Disciples:

God is empowering the priesthood of ALL believers and raising up shepherds for his flock. He is calling his leaders to humble stretching, raising us all to leadership, and raising creative leaders. Furthermore, God is equipping his disciples and teaching sacrificial love and moving believers to deeper spiritual maturity, aiming to make followers not fans. God is also preparing and equipping people from unanticipated places and discipling youth.

### Engaging in Mission, Outreach, and Community Care:

God is igniting our hearts for mission and outreach and opening doors for our message. He is active in communities and makes the love of Jesus tangible. God is caring for our community through the hands, feet, and hearts of his people and crossing barriers and building bridges into the community. This includes loving the lost, lonely, poor, and hungry and using ordinary acts of kindness to invite neighbors into his presence.

## Fostering Generational Connection and Future Growth:

God is turning the generations towards each other and reaching his children and raising the next generation. He is calling for the future of the church, calling servants of all generations, and claiming our youth through relationships. God is also inspiring the next generation.

## Promoting Spiritual Maturity and Transformation:

God is inviting us into deeper relationships with God and each other and inviting us to orient and order our lives around the revelation of Jesus in scripture. He is reminding us to trust the simple truth of the Bible, getting us to change the topics we're talking about, and awakening our practice of prayer. God is powerfully showing up beyond our expectations and pierces our generic sense of gloom with lightbulbs of specific blessings!

## Inviting Reassessment and Revealing Surprises:

God is inviting us to reassess how we organize, govern, and steward our resources. He is described as ON THE MOVE! and a God of surprises!, actively breaking down barriers and inspiring holy imagination.

In essence, God is persistent, relational, and continually fulfilling his promises to the ENTIRE kingdom, providing purpose and acting as a healer and protector.

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 narratives consistently highlight several core themes:

**God's Active Presence and Work:** A pervasive belief that God is actively working in and through people, churches, and the denomination, often in unexpected ways and through challenging circumstances.

**Renewed Hope and Vision:** A significant restoration of hope for the future of the church and its mission, dispelling previous anxieties and disappointments.

**Unity in Diversity:** The profound impact of experiencing unity among a diverse group of people, transcending differences and fostering a sense of shared purpose in Christ.

**The Power of Story and Connection:** The transformative effect of sharing personal and church stories, fostering new relationships, and broadening perspectives.

**Call to Action and Trust:** An invitation to engage more deeply in God's work, trust in His plan, and move forward with courage.

**God's Omnipresence and Active Engagement:**

The most frequently recurring idea is God's continuous and often surprising involvement in the lives of individuals and the church. This is manifested in various ways:

- Working Through Difficulties: "He proved that he is working in his people through hard situations and mountain top moments, in ways we did not expect and filling deeper needs than we realized."
- Providing Unexpected Insight: "God allowed me to get insight in one area of my life for which I prayed for a long, long time and I was not sure if I should go forward or not. God gave me the insight to do it and not let the fear of lack of finances hold me back."
- Revealing His Plan: "God is revealing that He has called His Church and it is alive and will accomplish His perfect will." and "God is in Control!"
- Constantly at Work: "God is still at work in our churches and communities," and "God is affirming that He is doing his work in our midst."
- Leading and Guiding: "God is calling us/me to catch up to Him in the work He is doing." and "God reminded me 'He's in charge' and he knows what's doing."

**Renewed Hope and Optimism for the Church:**

A palpable sense of renewed hope permeates the text, particularly concerning the future of the CRCNA:

- Hope for the Future: "God filled me with new, renewed hope for his church and kingdom in our present culture with all its dynamics." and "God has given me hope for the future of the church."
- Restored Faith in the Ordinary: "God restored my hope in the ordinary people of the CRC. It's about people and spirit."
- Evidence of God's Movement: "God has allowed me to witness how he is moving throughout the church." and "It is uplifting to read and hear so many stories of the people who are following the Spirit."
- Hope Amidst Challenges: "Renewed our hope even when things seem bleak" and "I feel encouraged seeing all the ways in which God is showing up, even though there is shrinkage in the CRC."

**The Power of Unity, Diversity, and Connection:**

The experience of coming together and connecting with diverse individuals is highlighted as a profoundly positive and impactful aspect:

- Unity in Christ: "God made us remember that we are connected in Christ." and "God created unity among diverse people."
- Embracing Diversity: "God demonstrated the growing diversity within the CRCNA." and "God opened my eyes to see His people – from all over the world – united in desire and expectation of what God will do."

- Building Relationships: "Connected me with others in my classis." and "Developed new relationships/friendships."
- Learning from Others: "Sharing how other churches do things" and "Sharing personal stories."
- Spiritual Fellowship: "Spiritual fellowship with a diverse group of believers." and "God molded us together."
- The Beauty of the Diverse Body: "God showed me how cool this diverse CRC body of Christ is and I look forward to Jesus' second coming."

### **Broadened Perspectives and New Insights:**

Attendees report a significant shift in their understanding and approach to ministry and personal challenges:

- Expanded Ministry View: "God broadened my perspective in ministry. Allowed me to see how small things give big results."
- Challenged Mindsets: "Challenged my mindset. Gave me words to problems I couldn't articulate."
- New Ways of Thinking: "Us – Prod us to look at problems in new ways. You – Develop a new understanding of my perceived problems." and "God stretched our thinking. God allowed all voices/ideas to sync into One Sound! That's Kingdom!"
- Seeing God's Bigger Picture: "God's story is so much bigger than I can imagine." and "God revealed a macro view of what he's doing in the world."

### **Encouragement, Empowerment, and Invitation:**

The experience is described as deeply encouraging and empowering, leading to a desire for continued engagement:

- Feeling Welcome and Empowered: "Made me feel welcome and empowered to go back with strength."
- Inspired Courage: "Inspired courage by the glimpses of God that I saw/heard."
- Invitation into God's Work: "God reminded me that he has invited me into His work. He is at work in his church." and "Invited me into His plan for the Renewal and Revitalization of his church."
- Purpose and Direction: "Gave us hope and a purpose – Get on with it."
- Personal Restoration: "Restored my joy at this crossroads moment."

### **Key Takeaways and Implications:**

- Experiential Faith Reinforcement: The experiences described emphasize a strong belief in a living, active God who intervenes in real-time, moving beyond theoretical understanding to practical revelation.
- Importance of Gathering and Sharing: The collective experience of "Gather Minneapolis" appears to be a powerful catalyst for spiritual renewal, fostering community, and sharing best practices. The "family table" metaphor highlights the intimate and relational nature of these interactions.
- Embracing the Unconventional: God is shown to work in "creative ways" and "outside the box," suggesting a need for flexibility and openness to new approaches in ministry.

- Focus on Discipleship and Missions: There's a renewed sense of purpose around sharing the "Good News of salvation" and engaging with community and the "next generation."
- Trust in Divine Control: Despite internal denominational challenges ("arguing and divisive elsewhere"), the recurring message is to trust in God's ultimate control and His ongoing work within the CRC.

In conclusion, these testimonies convey a powerful narrative of spiritual rejuvenation, communal bonding, and a reaffirmed faith in God's active presence and benevolent plan for His church, particularly within the diverse and evolving landscape of the CRCNA.