



THE REFORMED
COLLABORATIVE

*Working Together to Expand
the Reformed Witness*

February 2014

The Reformed Church in America (RCA) and the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC) have worked closely together at the denominational level over the past few decades. For example, denominational staff members Allen Likkel of the CRC and Dick Welscott of the RCA collaborated in new church development through the 80s and 90s.

Encouraged by the synergistic relationships and committed to unity in Christ, denominational leaders Peter Borgdorff and Wes Granberg-Michaelson continued to move toward greater relationship and encouraged collaboration whenever practical and possible. In 2004 a more formal partnership was formed as Faith Alive became the print distributor for both the CRC and RCA and other partnerships continued to spring up. A complete list of current collaborations follows.

Building upon this foundation, in early 2010 Wes Granberg-Michaelson, General Secretary of the RCA and Jerry Dykstra, Executive Director of the CRC, invited a cross section of RCA and CRC leaders and pastors to engage with them in an informal conversation about the future of our collaboration. Two areas with potential for further collaboration were identified by this group: equipping congregations for greater health and missional impact and developing a collaborative system for new church development. Two task forces were formed to work with the development staff of the RCA and CRC to explore the possibility of external grant funding in order to initiate a pilot project.

Work continued for much of 2010. In June, the Board of Trustees for the CRC and the General Synod Council of the RCA were informed about the possibility of external grant funding for a pilot. Late in 2010, The Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation awarded a grant to develop the Church Multiplication Initiative (CMI) pilot under the leadership of Jul Medenblik and Tim Vink. Two new teams; a Leadership Team to manage the grant and oversee the work, and an Implementation Team to design and implement the work were formed. The work of the Leadership Team and the expertise of the Implementation Team proved fruitful. Two subsequent grants were awarded and the work of the CMI grew through 2013.

The new General Secretary of the RCA, Tom DeVries and the Interim Executive Director of the CRC, Joel Boot continued the relationship. In 2013, World Renew and Reformed Church World Service formed a partnership. Recognizing the growing number of formal and informal collaborations between the two denominations, the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America and Synod 2013 of the Christian Reformed Church in North America requested the formation of a joint task force to further define the growing relationship and plot a course for the future. The task force will bring their report to the Synods of 2014 meeting together in Pella, IA.

In January of 2014, the Leadership Team, which was initially formed to work exclusively with the CMI project, felt a broader leadership structure could better serve the growing collaboration. The team disbanded and a new structure was formed with three distinct levels: Executive Team, Vision Team, and implementation teams specific to areas of

collaboration. The newly formed Reformed Collaborative initiated a series of events in places where large numbers of Reformed and Christian Reformed congregations are located in order to inform and receive input from Classis and congregations, to answer questions, and note concerns. Because the two denominations do not agree on every issue, 5 shared values upon which current and future collaborations are built were identified:

By the grace of God, the RCA and CRC embrace a common commitment to:

- Shared beliefs and convictions
- Working together to equip the local church to engage in mission
- Moving to a posture of lifelong learning as adaptive leaders
- Innovation that is rooted in our traditions
- Personal transformation in Christ that seeks the transformation of lives and communities.

All for the glory of God!

Rooted in these shared values, the Reformed Church in America (RCA) and Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC) collaboration is being driven by our common desire to:

Increase missional impact – When working together we are able to better equip leaders and churches that will expand the Reformed witness in the world.

Realize efficiencies – Reducing redundancies within the two denominations results in greater financial resources available to equip churches for local and global mission.

Express a common witness – Working together and with the larger Christian church expresses Christian unity and amplifies our prophetic voice.

Increased Missional Impact

Children in Worship

“Children in Worship” is a vibrant children’s education program being used extensively in both CRC and RCA churches. It is a partnership between the RCA and the CRC involving shared trainers, training events, and joint decision making about resources and program direction. By working together to nurture the spiritual lives of children, we are creating more special places where children can encounter God.

Church Multiplication

In 2011 the collaboration currently referred to as the Church Multiplication Initiative (CMI) was awarded a significant grant from the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation to expand the Reformed witness in North America. The CMI began the work by establishing Kingdom

Enterprise Zones (KEZs), places where CRC and RCA leaders come together to create systems and structures in order to plant churches together. Since 2011, 20 new churches and over 100 new initiatives have launched.

The focus of CMI is now expanding to encourage 20 classes (10 CRC/10 RCA) to develop similar collaborative relationships. A single Operations Team composed of four RCA and CRC staff members and serving both denominations has enabled seamless collaboration on church planter assessments, communication, resources, *Thrive* church planter training, and the *Exponential Conference*. Integrating this work at the operational level has led to deeper collaboration throughout CRC and RCA agencies.

- The first generation KEZs in Florida; Phoenix, AZ; San Francisco/Sacramento, CA; and Wyoming, MI, continue to flourish as they move through the Transition Zone Phase which requires them to integrate their work into existing local structures and become self-funding.
- The second and third generation KEZs are Detroit, MI; Southwest MI; Whatcom County, WA; and Seattle, WA. These Zones currently have the greatest access to grant funding for collaborative leadership training and community outreach that supports new church development.
- There are three KEZs that comprise the newly emerging fourth generation: Chicago, Ill; Lincoln, NE; and New York City, NY. Regional leaders are laying groundwork by building collaborative relationships with CRC and RCA pastors, leaders, and churches in each Zone.

Congregational Revitalization and Leadership Development

The CRC and RCA have a vision to develop coordinated, collaborative, and shared resources for leaders and revitalizing congregations in order to increase the missional impact of all of our congregations.

A number of components are in place or in development that indicate growing potential for collaborative CRC and RCA regional networks for revitalizing congregations and resourcing leaders. RCA regional synods and the emerging Regional Resource Networks of the CRC are

positioned to take additional steps to coordinate, collaborate, and share resources for training, coaching, supporting, and revitalizing congregations and leaders across both denominations.

Coaching is proving useful for general congregational leadership and is being integrated into small group and prayer leadership, cluster coaching, and church planting and development.

Disability Ministries

By sharing expertise and working collaboratively, North America's Reformed and Christian Reformed churches keep moving toward the biblical model where everybody belongs and everybody serves.

The CRC has staffed for Disability Concerns since 1982. In 2008, the CRC Board of Trustees responded favorably to a request from the RCA General Synod Council to share its expertise in disability ministry and work collaboratively with the RCA in launching a ministry to support RCA churches. Leaders and congregations in both denominations have affirmed the partnership and the shared ministry that's been done in the past four years.

Since September 2009, when the RCA hired a coordinator for Disability Concerns, the two offices have worked together to produce a quarterly newsletter, *Breaking Barriers*, and have released two editions of an *Inclusion Handbook* for disability advocates and congregations. Since 2011, more than 6,000 copies of the *Inclusion Handbook* have been sold or provided to individual volunteers as well as congregations in the CRC, RCA and other denominations.

The two offices sponsor joint regional and denominational conferences and events, host a combined Disability Concerns Facebook page, and link to each other's websites. Together they have planned and led conferences in the U.S. and Canada that equip church leaders and disability advocates for engaging people with disabilities in church life and ministry. A growing number of regional committees of RCA and CRC disability volunteers meet three times a year for event planning and support. An annual two-day CRC/RCA Disability Leadership Conference brings together volunteer disability advocates from throughout the two denominations. The RCA coordinator for Disability Concerns and the CRC director of Disability Concerns serve on each other's advisory teams and the two advisory groups meet jointly each August.

Leadership

Learning from each other and working together is shaping men and women who are better able to lead personally, lead productively and lead in ways that reproduce others who can lead well.

Over the past several years, the RCA has emphasized the value of coaching for pastors and other church leaders. The RCA's coach training events have been attended by CRC participants, including a couple of sessions offered especially for CRC pastors in Classis Holland. This led to a collaborative effort in the design of the CRC's coach training process.

The CRC has included a few RCA Revitalization leaders in the training of coaches for their Church Health Assessment and development process. The RCA is evaluating it for future use.

The Ridder Church Renewal process, a program that focuses on the momentum and leadership needed for sustainable change, is sponsored by Journey at Western Theological Seminary, the RCA and the CRC. An initial group of CRC and RCA pastors and church leaders found the process so helpful that they extended the two-year program for two more years by adding a second module.

Currently the Ridder Church Renewal process is offered in New York, Canada, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan—through four separate groups and with 85 congregations involved. This process will be further expanded to other regions of North America in early 2015.

In 2005, the RCA and the CRC agreed to an orderly exchange of ordained ministers between the denominations. Further, the denominations exchange ministerial and church profiles to facilitate pastoral searches. The RCA's Ministerial Opportunity Listing includes openings at both RCA and CRC ministries and the denominations are exploring full integration of denominational placement services.

Trained specialized interim ministers are also available to churches in either denomination conducting a search for a pastor during a vacancy.

The CRC and RCA together with Calvin Theological Seminary and Western Theological Seminary are collaborating on an emerging leadership development vision called The Reformed Leadership Initiative: a distributed network for leadership equipping and training providing collaborative

resourcing from all four institutions as well as through local congregations. The current focus is on piloting this network with Hispanic leaders and congregations. The next phase of development will invite the contributions of all institutions and ministries, like New Brunswick Theological Seminary, Newbigin House of Studies, Church Leadership Center, Christian Leaders Institute and others that are currently engaged in training lay and pastoral leaders for the Reformed and Christian Reformed Church.

Leadership Education

Western Theological Seminary and Calvin Theological Seminary serve the Reformed Church in America and Christian Reformed Church respectively: students, alumni and leaders.

Both CTS and WTS live with the awareness and appreciation of our deep affinities, shared history and a growing sense that greater collaborative efforts would strengthen each school. The most consistent sharing over the past years has been through annual faculty gatherings over dinner and theological discussion, worship leadership exchanges in morning chapel, shared placements in theological education field work, and student leadership exchanges.

In addition, over the past several years the presidents of each school have looked to one another for encouragement and counsel. This is a collaborative instinct that we celebrate and long to expand, particularly calling forth the mission, history and gifts of New Brunswick Theological Seminary in New Jersey.

Ministry to Chaplains

CRC and RCA leaders are better realizing their shared goal of providing support and resources for women and men serving in chaplaincy roles.

The RCA's Coordinator of Chaplain Support and Services and the CRC's Director of Chaplaincy and Care have a long history of collaborating to support the ministry of military, prison, camp, college, developmentally disabled, federal law enforcement, hospice, hospital, nursing home, workplace/industrial and residential treatment chaplains. Their intentional work together includes but is not limited to the following:

- holding their annual conferences simultaneously in 2012 and 2014 in Grand Rapids with some joint sessions and meals together

- hosting events on issues of concern for both denominations
- exchanging information about job openings
- hosting joint gatherings for RCA/CRC chaplains at the annual meetings of the Association of Clinical Pastoral Education and Association of Professional Chaplains
- sharing military installation services for military candidates going on active duty
- holding joint retreats for military chaplains
- mentoring military chaplain candidates
- working together as part of the National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces
- participating in a Presbyterian and Reformed evening get-togethers at the army chief of chaplains Senior Leadership Conference

Herman Keizer, now retired as the CRC's director of chaplaincy, has assisted in mentoring RCA chaplain candidates at Western Theological Seminary and has worked with RCA chaplains in leadership positions.

Mission, Relief and Development Work

By reducing redundancies and pooling resources, our denominations are better able to facilitate and coordinate CRC and RCA responses to disasters and work in relief and development.

The RCA CARE Network has worked with World Renew Disaster Response Services for a number of years, which culminated in a memorandum of understanding in 2013 that establishes World Renew as the RCA's primary partner for domestic disaster response. This helps to expand the compassion ministry capacity for both the CRC and RCA.

The RCA has contributed substantial funds to CRC disaster relief projects in the Dominican Republic, in Haiti following the January 2010 earthquake, and in Japan following the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami. World Renew and the RCA work together on the placement of volunteers for long-term rebuilding projects after domestic disasters.

Both CRC World Renew and RCA Global Mission work collaboratively with Church World Service Development and Humanitarian Affairs roundtable in disaster response. We are both members of Foods Resource Bank as well, which funds agricultural development through domestic farmers growing projects.

Since 1990, the RCA has supported the CRC in Cuba, initially by sending ministry teams from the Council for Hispanic Ministries to Cuba to work in evangelism with local pastors, and more recently through a financial partnership that provides evangelistic resources to churches and pastors there. The RCA has also partnered with the CRC in the Dominican Republic as they respond to the sanitation and health care needs of Haitian communities.

The RCA has partnered with World Renew on the Sea to Sea bike tour since 2008, with increased involvement in the 2013 tour. They will continue to partner together in future years.

Realize Efficiencies

Benefits

The Christian Reformed Church Board of Trustees and RCA's Board of Benefits Services voted in the spring of 2013 to form the Reformed Benefits Association, an independent 501(c)(3) corporation governed by a six-member board appointed by the two denominations organizing bodies. RBA was formed in response to changes in health care under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (health care reform) and the ability, starting in 2014, for ministers and other church workers to purchase insurance through federal and/or state marketplaces. The RCA's former medical plan was mandatory for ministers. Health care reform caused the RCA to re-evaluate that practice and permit its churches to consider plans offered through the marketplaces or by other carriers. The potential loss of a significant participant base initially caused the RCA to consider ending its plan. However, by forming RBA, the two denominations were able to bring together their current medical plan (for active workers, overseas mission personnel, and retirees), as well as dental, vision, group life, accidental death/dismemberment, and long-term disability plans to ensure the continued viability and strengthening of these programs going forward.

The RBA was established on July 1, 2013. Most of the current insurance plans of the RCA and the CRC were brought under the RBA umbrella starting January 1, 2014 with little or no change. However, RBA was able to offer a single retiree Medicare Advantage plan (the former CRC plan) and a single medical plan for overseas mission personnel (the former RCA plan). The CRC and the RCA merged their insurance staff teams effective January 1, 2014 with the primary office located at the CRC facilities in Grand Rapids and a smaller regional office at the RCA facilities in New York City. In 2014, RBA retained 80 percent of the former RCA insurance plan participants and the vast majority of CRC participants.

The staff of RBA looks forward to merging all of its insurance plans by January 1, 2015. RBA will also be able to provide insurance benefits to faith based and church affiliated organizations as well as other denominations beginning in 2015. A growth strategy is currently in development along with conversations with potential partner organizations.

By bringing together the very similar programs that had been offered separately by the RCA and the CRC we are confident in our ability to provide continued high quality group insurance benefits to our ministers, mission personnel, retirees, and other church workers at a fair and competitive cost while offering our participants and their families a level of personalized care and support unavailable through other providers.

Information Technology

In 2010 the RCA and CRC IT departments decided to approach their work in as collaborative a way as possible. The initial joint project was the shared purchase of hardware for use at synod events starting in 2011.

In May of 2013, a single team was formed to provide helpdesk and infrastructure support for the CRC and RCA offices. As of February 2014 the IT staff is fully integrated and is working as a single department that is responsible to both denominations. This single department was formed with the goal of more effectively leveraging technology to enhance the ministry and mission of the CRC and the RCA.

Joint Publications and Distribution

The CRC, under its Faith Alive imprint, is the distributor for printed resources for both the RCA and the CRC. It is also a publishing partner with the RCA and has recently released *Lift Up Your Hearts*, the new hymnal that has been developed by CRC and RCA leaders with expertise in worship arts. The CRC and the RCA regularly collaborate on numerous projects including Sunday school curriculum, children's worship, and discipleship materials.

Union Churches and Community Ministry

A few churches, particularly those in urban areas, have become union churches in order to expand ministry beyond social-economic boundaries, grow financially sustainable, and work toward greater community and life transformation.

Maple Avenue Ministries in Holland, MI; Angel Community Church in Muskegon, MI; and City Hope in Grand Rapids, MI; are “union churches,” sharing membership in RCA and CRC classes. Additionally, Nardin Park Reformed Church in Detroit, MI, has a long-term relationship with a faith-based community outreach nonprofit started by the CRC, which is housed in Nardin Park’s facilities. Faith Chapel Reformed Church in Paterson, NJ, has had similar relationships with CRC congregations and outreach organizations in Paterson.

Websites

The RCA’s website team and the CRC’s web and e-communication manager have initiated deeper collaboration on a number of fronts. They are currently working together to create a Central Resources Database that will allow easy access to online resources on either the RCA or CRC website. The CRC’s web manager has also been providing expertise in Drupal, a content management coding system that the CRC has implemented for their new site and that the RCA is considering for theirs. If the RCA decides to use Drupal (which is likely) there will be on-going collaboration in the development of custom coding for use by both sites.

Express a Common Witness

Centre for Public Dialogue

The RCA participates in the CRC’s Centre for Public Dialogue, which seeks to provide thoughtful support and constructive input for political leaders in Canada. Sourced and powered by faith in Jesus Christ, the Centre engages in an on-going conversation with policy and decision makers about seeking justice, peace, and the good for all.

Ecumenical Partnerships

The RCA and the CRC are partners in a variety of ministries because we share a desire to deepen all expressions of Christian unity, to give expression to a common witness, and to amplify our prophetic voices on issues that relate to life, social justice and peace initiatives. Together we support and are engaged in several national and international ecumenical organizations and endeavors. The ministries we support include the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), Christian Churches Together (CCT), the Global Christian Forum (GCF), the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC), The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC), and Sojourners. By these means we proclaim that God is concerned about the issues of our time.

General Synod

The RCA and the CRC also share a more intimate relationship. The respective synods have met several times in simultaneous sessions giving expression to and providing meaningful support and encouragement for the ministries we do together. Collaborating as much as possible allows both denominations to share resources, realize significant cost-savings, be blessed by joint worship and more effectively testify that in Christ we are one. Both synods will meet together in Pella, Iowa in June 2014. At that time we will celebrate our relationship and explore our commitments to each other as collaboration grows and our together-service deepens. Together we will worship our Lord with praise and thanksgiving for the opportunities we share and the blessings of our fellowship. The cooperation of the RCA and the CRC, in all its various forms and ministries, has served as an encouragement to the Reformed community of churches and beyond.

International Gospel Ministries

Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI) and Words of Hope are collaborating in Arabic media ministry, media ministry in several languages throughout northern India, "Spotlight" (simplified English) broadcasting, and the new "Groundwork" broadcasts that replaced both the historic "Back to God Hour" and "Words of Hope" English preaching programs. Indonesia is the newest field in which BTGMI and Words of Hope are working together. In 2012, Words of Hope joined the ministry partnership between BTGMI and the broadcast ministry affiliated with the Indonesian Christian Church. Words of Hope's participation provides additional resources to enable the development of broadcasting and follow-up in a number of minority languages throughout Indonesia – work that complements the established broadcasts in the national language of Bahasa Indonesian