Task Force to Study Multisite Churches

I. Background and mandate

In response to its own experience with a multisite expression of church, Classis Chicago South presented an overture to Synod 2024 to study multisite models of organizing congregational life (*Agenda for Synod 2024*, pp. 427-28). Recognizing that our Church Order and synodical regulations do not presently envision multisite arrangements, synod appointed a task force with a mandate to provide the following information (*Acts of Synod 2024*, pp. 884-85):

- direction, advice, and guidance on what models best fit Reformed theology and polity
- direction, advice, and guidance on what models should not be employed in Reformed churches
- a roadmap for how churches might become a multisite campus or enfold a church as part of a campus
- recommended changes to Church Order supplements to facilitate such arrangements and provide clarity for how such churches should properly function in relation to each other, the classis, and synod.

In keeping with the Rules for Synodical Procedure, the officers of synod met in summer 2024 and appointed the following members to this task force: Derek Buikema (chair), Scott Vander Ploeg (reporter), Pedro Aviles, Jonathan Kim, and Samantha Teran. Staff members Tim Sheridan (Resonate), Joel Vande Werken (director of ecclesiastical governance), and Lesli van Milligan (Thrive) served as consultants to the task force, and Ashley Medendorp and Melody Van Arragon provided administrative support. The team consulted over Zoom and via email a number of times and met in person in Elmhurst, Illinois, on December 9, 2025.

II. Orienting definitions and the rationale for multisite expressions

Within today's ecclesiastical landscape, the term *multisite* is used in a variety of ways. In practice, churches that identify as multisite exist along a spectrum, ranging from highly integrated expressions of a single congregation to loosely connected networks of related but autonomous churches. Most real-world models fall somewhere between these poles. What follows is a descriptive framework that names six broad categories along this spectrum, moving from the lowest level of separation to the highest.[1]

A. One church in many rooms

At one end of the multisite spectrum are churches that function as a single congregation while utilizing multiple physical spaces at the same time. This may include a primary worship space alongside overflow rooms, a gymnasium, fellowship hall, or chapel, all operating simultaneously during a

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[1] For more information, see *MultiChurch: Exploring the Future of Multisite* (Zondervan, 2017) by Brad House and Gregg Allison.

service hour. In some cases, different worship styles and music are used in each room (traditional vs. contemporary), differing "atmospheres" are expressed in each venue (formal vs. informal), and differing people are involved, but the preaching is most often shared—either live from one location or via video.

These churches share a single leadership structure, unified budget, common branding, and one membership body. For some churches, such an arrangement may be temporary, and sometimes it is a more permanent feature of the congregation's mission. Functionally the groups remain one congregation using multiple rooms rather than multiple locations. While this model is not always labeled "multisite," it is worth identifying as the beginning of the spectrum.

B. One church in multiple services or venues

Closely related but slightly further along the spectrum are churches that operate multiple services or venues within the same physical campus. These services may differ in worship style—such as traditional, contemporary, or language-based services—and yet remain part of a single church organization.

In this model there is typically one council or leadership team, one budget, and one membership roll, and there may be either a shared preaching pastor (whether live or by video) or multiple pastors (especially in language-based services). The congregation understands itself as one church expressed through multiple services.

C. One church in multiple locations (classic multisite)

The most commonly recognized multisite model involves one church operating across multiple geographic locations or campuses. In this arrangement, campuses are often miles apart and may serve distinct local communities yet remain part of a single church organization.

Typically, this model includes a shared council or elder board, a unified budget, a common sermon series, and centralized staff functions. Preaching may be delivered live at some campuses and by video at others, while local campus pastors provide contextual leadership and pastoral care. Membership is usually held in a single roll shared across all campuses.

D. Networked multisite (sister campuses with shared DNA)

Further along the spectrum are networked multisite arrangements, where campuses or congregations share a common vision, theological commitments, and philosophy of ministry but retain a greater degree of local autonomy. These churches often collaborate around shared teaching themes, ministry resources, curriculum, systems, and/or branding while allowing flexibility in local expression.

In this model, each campus may have its own council or leadership team and its own budget even while participating in an extended structure. Membership may be held locally rather than centrally. Some networked

multisite arrangements emerge through mergers or strategic partnerships between congregations. Multipoint pastoral charges also may be considered to fit in this pattern.

E. Replant or adoption multisite
A replant or adoption multisite model represents a more intensive expression of either the classic multisite or the networked approach. In this scenario, a declining or struggling congregation becomes a campus or partner of a healthier, established church.

The adopting church typically provides significant support, including council oversight, preaching, administrative systems, and branding. Over time the replanted congregation may follow different trajectories: it may fully integrate as a permanent campus; it may relaunch as a revitalized but independent church; or it may remain semiautonomous within an ongoing partnership. This model is often driven by a desire for gospel presence, stewardship of assets, and congregational revitalization.

F. Church network or family of churches
At the end of the spectrum are church networks or families of churches, which emphasize relational connection rather than organizational integration. These networks share theology, vision, and often leadership development pipelines or ministry resources, but each congregation functions as a fully autonomous church.

Each church maintains its own leadership team, budget, membership, and local preaching ministry. While there may be regular collaboration or occasional shared worship gatherings, authority and accountability remain local. Many house church networks fall under this category.

III. Key factors for defining multisite models
For the purposes of this task force, clarity may best be achieved not by labels alone but by attending to several core organizational factors. Across the spectrum, five areas consistently distinguish one model from another:

1. **Governance**—whether authority is vested in a single council or leadership team, or distributed among multiple local councils.
2. **Budget**—whether finances are unified across sites, managed locally, or structured through a hybrid model.
3. **Membership**—whether there is one shared membership roll or multiple site-based memberships.
4. **Preaching**—whether preaching is unified, shared across campuses, or independently developed at each site.
5. **Branding and identity**—whether congregations operate under a single name and identity or maintain distinct local identities.

Together these factors provide a practical framework for describing and evaluating multisite expressions within the CRCNA, allowing for greater

precision, shared understanding, and constructive dialogue across diverse contexts.

IV. The need and rationale for multisite expression in the CRCNA

The task force observed that within the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) there already exist examples of congregations operating across the full range of multisite expressions described above. From congregations utilizing multiple rooms on a single campus, to geographically distinct campuses, to networks of related churches, our denomination is organically experimenting with and embodying various ways of being the church in multiple places and forms. In general, the task force affirms both the need for and the rationale behind these multisite expressions even as we identify areas of caution, discernment, and pastoral wisdom that will be addressed later in this report.

This section articulates why multisite expressions matter for the current and future health of our denomination. It offers a theological and practical rationale for supporting, resourcing, and—where appropriate—encouraging such expressions within the CRCNA.

A. Responding to growth

At the most basic level, some multisite expressions arise from the simple and welcome reality of numerical growth. Many congregations have outgrown their sanctuary spaces, leading them to utilize overflow rooms or alternate venues simultaneously. Others have expanded from one worship service to multiple services on Sunday morning to accommodate growth combined with varied worship preferences.

These forms—what we have described as "one church in many rooms" or as multiple services on one campus—are not new phenomena in the CRCNA. They reflect faithful stewardship of space and resources to welcome increasing numbers of worshipers into the life of the church. Historically, as congregations have grown, they have responded creatively to make room for all who seek to worship together. These patterns demonstrate that multisite expressions can be an organic outgrowth of local vitality and congregational health.

B. Extending ministry into new places

Beyond the local campus, the CRCNA has a history of establishing chapels, ministry points, and emerging congregations that serve communities "off location" (see *Acts of Synod 1908*, pp. 37-38; *Acts of Synod 1941*, p. 115; *Acts of Synod 1957*, pp. 100-1, 203-5). These ministries have functioned as important extensions of congregational life, bringing word and sacrament to neighborhoods and populations beyond the immediate core congregation.

Such expressions help congregations to incarnate the gospel beyond their walls. They deepen ministry into distinct geographic and cultural contexts while retaining a shared accountability and often a shared identity within the broader church.

C. Revitalizing dying congregations

A particularly compelling rationale for multisite expression in recent decades has been the opportunity to revitalize congregations that might otherwise have closed. Across North America, many historically rooted churches face declining attendance, aging membership, and the very real possibility of closing their doors. In multiple instances within the CRCNA, healthy congregations have adopted these struggling congregations as campuses or ministry partners, bringing fresh leadership, shared resources, renewed vision, and renewed life.

The task force affirms this as a missional imperative: where geography, culture, and ministry context allow, healthy congregations can—through intentional partnerships and strategic resource sharing—help to sustain and renew congregational life that might otherwise end. Rather than allowing weak and dying churches simply to conclude their ministry life cycle, multisite adoption and replant strategies marshal the gifts and resources of stronger congregations to reestablish a gospel presence in local settings that deeply need it.

D. Planting for diversity and mission

Another significant rationale for multisite expressions is found in the demographic realities of our denomination and the communities we serve. The CRCNA is committed to church planting as a key strategy for advancing the gospel and reaching new people and cultures. In many regions this includes planting congregations within or alongside existing churches that intentionally serve particular language groups, cultural backgrounds, and ethnic identities.

Multisite approaches—such as hosting language-specific congregations or culturally distinct worship communities within a larger church structure—offer a strategic means of nurturing diverse expressions of church life without duplicating infrastructure unnecessarily. These nested church plants can become vibrant, self-sustaining communities of faith that reflect the multicultural reality of the kingdom of God and the communities in which we minister.

Our denomination has set ambitious church-planting goals, and it is clear that multisite strategies will play a central role in achieving those aspirations. We encourage every church that has the capacity—spiritual, human, and material—to explore how it might participate in planting congregations for diverse language and cultural expressions within its context.

E. Encouraging innovation and local creativity

Finally, multisite expression invites creative thinking about how congregations can embody the church in ways that are faithful to Scripture, adaptive to culture, and responsive to mission. Whether through worshiping in multiple rooms, partnering across locations, revitalizing struggling congregations, or hosting culturally distinct worship communities, multisite models offer flexible and contextual ways to proclaim and live out the gospel.

We are grateful to see that much of this activity is already happening across the CRCNA. While not every context will adopt every model, the diversity of expressions represented within our denomination reflects both our theological convictions about the unity of the body of Christ and our commitment to contextual mission. As we look toward the future, we encourage continued innovation, discernment, and collaboration in how multisite expressions can strengthen congregational health, extend gospel presence, and nurture faithful discipleship across varied contexts.

V. Reformed ecclesiology and multisite expression

Any consideration of multisite expressions within the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) must be grounded in the church's confessional and ecclesiastical commitments. At the heart of Reformed polity, as articulated in Belgic Confession Articles 27–32 and embodied in the Church Order, is the conviction that Christ gathers, protects, and preserves his church in local, concrete congregations. These congregations are marked by the faithful ministry of the ordinary means of grace—Word and sacrament—governed by ordained officebearers elected by congregation members, and sustained through pastoral discipline. Broader assemblies, denominational agencies, and shared structures exist to serve this local reality rather than to replace it.

The task force affirms this foundational principle. The instituted local congregation—with its own council of ministers, elders, and deacons—remains the primary and ordinary expression of the church on earth. Multisite expressions must therefore be evaluated by how well they preserve and strengthen this local, embodied reality, even when ministry is shared across locations, cultures, or communities.

We took note as well that multisite expressions have a rich history in our Reformed tradition. Both John Calvin's Geneva and Abraham Kuyper's Amsterdam were cities that employed a multisite conception of church, given that Amsterdam had citywide elders, and Calvin's company of pastors shared pulpits throughout Geneva.

A. Multisite expressions and ecclesiastical order
Because multisite churches exist along a spectrum of integration and decentralization, not all multisite expressions raise the same ecclesiological concerns. Some models—such as those featuring multiple services or venues within a single location—largely preserve traditional patterns of governance, preaching, sacramental administration, and discipline. Other models, particularly those involving geographically distinct campuses or networked congregations, require greater intentionality to ensure that Reformed ecclesiastical principles are honored in practice.

The task force notes that certain multisite arrangements risk unintentionally reversing the proper ecclesiastical order. When authority is concentrated in a central brand, pulpit, or governing board, and when local worshiping communities function primarily as extensions of that center, the local

congregation may be reduced to a dependent gathering rather than a full expression of the church. This concern reflects the Reformed conviction that ecclesiastical office is exercised in and for the local church, for its edification, and is not abstracted from it.

B. The marks of the church in multisite contexts
Belgic Confession Article 29 identifies the marks of the true church as the pure preaching of the gospel, the pure administration of the sacraments, and the faithful exercise of discipline. These marks provide a necessary lens for evaluating multisite expressions.

1. Preaching
   Reformed ecclesiology assumes a close pastoral relationship between the minister of the Word and the congregation. While shared sermon series and occasional shared preaching may serve unity and theological coherence, preaching functions best when delivered by ministers who know the particular joys, struggles, sins, and hopes of their local membership. Multisite expressions should therefore guard against patterns in which preaching becomes detached from local pastoral oversight or reduced to a centralized product delivered without contextual care.

2. Sacraments
   Word and sacrament belong together in the gathered congregation. Multisite expressions must ensure that baptism and the Lord's Supper are administered locally, under the oversight of elders who know the members and their lives, and by ministers lawfully called to that ministry. Sacraments should not ordinarily be mediated through screens, delayed indefinitely, or treated as occasional events disconnected from the regular pastoral life of a congregation.

3. Discipline
   Church discipline is most faithful and restorative when exercised by elders who are personally known to the members and who share life with the congregation. While broader councils may rightly participate in final decisions, the ordinary work of shepherding, admonition, and restoration should remain rooted in local relationships.

C. Differentiated maturity within multisite expressions
In its deliberations the task force recognized that a one-size-fits-all approach to multisite governance would be neither realistic nor helpful—though all multisite expressions should be shaped by confessional convictions (Belgic Confession, Art. 30-31). Multisite churches often include worshiping communities at different stages of maturity, capacity, and leadership development. Reformed ecclesiology has long recognized such differences, particularly in mission contexts, church planting, and congregations in transition.

For this reason, the task force finds it helpful to distinguish between established/organized congregations and emerging worshiping communities that are both within a multisite structure.

An established congregation is a worshiping community with sufficient spiritual maturity, numerical stability, and leadership capacity to call and ordain elders and deacons who are locally present and actively engaged in oversight, pastoral care, and diaconal ministry. In such settings the marks of the church are exercised in a fully local and embodied way, even when the congregation remains connected to a broader multisite structure or shared council.

An emerging congregation, by contrast, may be at an earlier stage of development and may lack the readiness or capacity to ordain local elders and deacons. In these cases it may be appropriate for elders and deacons ordained in another congregation within the multisite to exercise oversight for the emerging community. Local leadership teams or steering committees may assist with ministry coordination, pastoral presence, and mission, while formal ecclesiastical authority remains with the council of the multisite church.

This distinction allows multisite churches to nurture new or fragile worshiping communities without prematurely imposing structures they cannot yet sustain, while also maintaining a clear trajectory toward fuller local expression of the church wherever possible.

D. Differentiated roles among council members
The task force also recognized that when a multisite church operates under a single shared council, it is often neither practical nor desirable for every elder to function in exactly the same way. For example, many multisite churches designate certain elders or deacons as having primary responsibility for the shepherding of a local campus while others focus on providing leadership and vision for the entire network. This is appropriate, provided the distinction remains consistent with Reformed ecclesiology and the Church Order, which views the "common administration of the church" as the responsibility of all officebearers collectively (Art. 35-a). Our polity also holds that the distinct tasks of elders and deacons are the responsibility of the consistory and diaconate together (Church Order, Art. 35-b and -c).

Thus it may be appropriate to designate some elders whose primary responsibility is pastoral care, visitation, spiritual oversight, and discipline within a local context, and others who are entrusted with council-level oversight, strategic discernment, and accountability for the multisite church as a whole. This differentiation does not create two classes of elders; nor does it diminish the authority of local shepherding. Rather, it reflects a practical ordering of responsibilities within a complex ministry structure, analogous to how councils already assign particular roles or portfolios among elders. However, whatever work is delegated to smaller groups within the consistory should be reported to the whole body, which is ultimately responsible to ensure that the work expected of elders (Church Order, Art. 25-b) is being accomplished faithfully.

The same is true of deacons, who may similarly be designated for particular roles within the multisite network but whose work as deacons (Church Order, Art. 25-b) must be done collectively. Our Church Order also expects the consistory and diaconate to "give an account of [their] work to the council" (Art. 35-b and -c). Such procedures are important to foster coordination and transparency in ministry, especially given the complexity of multisite governance.

E. Safeguards and accountability
While affirming flexibility, the task force emphasizes several important safeguards:

- Emerging congregations should be understood as temporarily lacking local officebearers, not as permanently dependent communities (see Church Order, Art. 38-a).
- Elders providing oversight to emerging sites must be intentionally present and relationally engaged, not merely administratively responsible (Art. 25-b).
- Multisite structures should include clear pathways for leadership development and, where feasible, movement toward greater local governance.

The structure and status of multisite congregations—including distinctions between organized and emerging communities—should be clearly communicated to classis to ensure appropriate ecclesiastical accountability. Congregations and classes in need of assistance are encouraged to draw upon the multiple denominational resources available through Thrive.

Reformed polity itself also provides safeguards in that it assigns primary responsibility for the supervision and administration of the church to a council chosen by the members of the congregation. Even when staff (ordained or unordained) bear the most responsibility for providing a church's vision and implementing ministry decisions, the ultimate authority remains with the council. This principle helps also to ensure that a multisite church's vision will remain with the congregation and will not be dependent on a single leader.

Regular reviews of the details of the multisite network, and accountability to the classis for such an arrangement, can also provide key safeguards for the functioning of such a church.

F. Ecclesiology in service of mission
In making these distinctions, the task force draws on Reformed theological insights that emphasize both the institutional and organic dimensions of the church. The church as institution—marked by Word, sacrament, and discipline—must be preserved. At the same time, the church as organism grows, adapts, and takes root in diverse contexts over time.

The task force therefore concludes that multisite expressions within the CRCNA fit well within a framework of Reformed ecclesiology. When well-

structured, they can serve mission, foster revitalization, and express unity across diverse contexts. The central question before the CRCNA is not whether multisite expressions may exist but how they can be shaped in ways that remain deeply rooted in Reformed ecclesiology, accountable to the Church Order, and oriented toward the flourishing of local congregations and the faithful exercise of Christ's ministry through ordained officebearers.

G. Guarding against abuses of power
At the same time, the task force recognizes that certain multisite arrangements—particularly those with highly centralized leadership, diffuse accountability, or unclear lines of ecclesiastical authority—can unintentionally create conditions in which pastoral abuses of power go unchecked. Recent and well-publicized failures in large multisite systems outside the CRCNA illustrate how charismatic leadership, opaque governance structures, and weak external accountability can undermine trust, silence concerns from local leaders, and delay appropriate intervention. Reformed polity provides important guardrails against such dynamics by locating authority in councils of known officebearers elected by the congregation, requiring mutual accountability through classis, and maintaining clear processes for discipline as outlined in Church Order Articles 82–84. Multisite expressions within the CRCNA should therefore be intentionally structured so that no pastor or board functions without meaningful oversight, grievances can be addressed without fear of reprisal, and discipline—when necessary—is exercised carefully, transparently, and ecclesiastically for the good of the church and the honor of Christ.

VI. Proposed Church Order supplement on multisite congregations
In light of the increasing number and diversity of multisite expressions within the Christian Reformed Church in North America, the task force recommends that synod adopt the following principles to guide the polity of multisite congregations. These principles are intended to provide clarity and ecclesiastical accountability while allowing appropriate flexibility for local discernment and missional context. Given their focus on governance and oversight, the task force believes these principles would fit most appropriately in a supplement to Church Order Article 35, which addresses the work of the council.

Supplement, Article 35

Multisite congregations

1. Forms of governance
   Multisite congregations may be organized in various ways, including as a single congregation governed by one council, as a network of congregations each governed by its own council, or as a combination of these arrangements. In all cases, the ordinary provisions of the Church Order apply with respect to the calling and

election of officebearers and the matters for which the judgment of the congregation is required (see Art. 4, 25, 35–37). Multisite structures do not suspend or replace these ecclesiastical responsibilities but must give them appropriate local expression.

2. Establishment, merger, and classical oversight
When one or more councils enter into a multisite arrangement—whether by merging congregations, adopting another congregation, or establishing a new campus—the approval of classis is required, in keeping with the principles of Church Order Articles 38-a and -e.

In granting such approval, classis shall discern and record the ecclesiastical status of each campus or worshiping community. This includes determining whether a campus functions as an organized congregation with its own council of elders and deacons, or as an emerging congregation under the care of a broader council. In making these determinations, classis shall consider factors such as leadership capacity, numerical and financial viability, and long-term sustainability and shall take into account relevant synodical guidance.

Church visitors should regularly inquire into the formal arrangements governing multisite congregations and their campuses to ensure continued ecclesiastical clarity and accountability.

3. Representation in broader assemblies
For purposes of delegation to classis, individual campuses of multisite congregations may be represented in accordance with their recognized ecclesiastical status as determined by classis. Organized congregations shall be represented in the ordinary manner prescribed by the Church Order, while emerging congregations may be represented according to the classis' organized provisions for emerging churches.

Regardless of status, classis shall ensure that appropriate church visitors and, where applicable, church counselors are assigned to each campus or worshiping community within a multisite structure.

4. Membership records and pastoral accountability
The council of a multisite congregation shall maintain clear and accurate membership records for each campus or worshiping community. This practice serves pastoral care, discipline, and ecclesiastical accountability and assists both council and classis in discerning the health, development, and status of each community within the multisite arrangement.

VII. Roadmaps for multisite development in the CRCNA

Because churches pursue multisite expressions for different reasons, the task force recommends "roadmaps" tailored to the most common scenarios. These roadmaps are not intended to be rigid templates. Rather, they offer a

suggested process that helps councils and congregations proceed with clarity, pastoral care, and ecclesiastical accountability—especially through early consultation with classis and careful attention to Church Order principles.

Across all of the roadmaps presented here, the task force encourages churches to (1) name their intended multisite model on the spectrum; (2) clarify whether each worshiping community will be treated as organized or emerging; (3) specify how Word, sacrament, and discipline will be administered locally; and (4) ensure transparent relationships of governance, finances, and membership.

Roadmap 1: Responding to growth
(from "one church in many rooms" toward additional services/venues and, where appropriate, a second location)

1. Discernment and data
   Council reviews attendance patterns, space limitations, neighborhood demographics, and ministry capacity. Identify whether the need is best addressed through additional services/venues on one campus or through a new location.

2. Clarify the ecclesiological aim
   Articulate how the proposed approach will preserve the marks of the church in practice: faithful preaching, regular sacraments, and local pastoral care/disciple-making. Ensure that the plan does not unintentionally reduce a worshiping community to a "dependent gathering" without clear oversight.

3. Choose a model and governance structure
   Decide whether the next step is (a) multiple services/venues, (b) a new campus under one council, or (c) a more networked approach. Identify whether the new gathering will be an emerging worshiping community (at first) with oversight from existing officebearers and with a trajectory toward becoming organized as leaders develop.

4. Early consultation with classis
   Before launch, consult classis leadership and/or church visitors for counsel on polity questions, representation, and reporting. If the plan includes establishing a new campus/location, follow the classis approval pathway described in the proposed supplement to Church Order Article 35 (section VI above) and ensure consistency with Article 38 principles.

5. Congregational communication and required approvals
   Clearly communicate the plan, including membership implications, pastoral staffing, worship schedule, and financial strategy. Where Church Order requires congregational involvement for specific actions (e.g., calling of officebearers or ministers), ensure that those processes are followed.

6. Launch with clear pastoral oversight
   Ensure that elders and deacons are assigned and visibly present, even if the site begins as emerging. Keep Word and sacrament integrated in the life of the worshiping community, not treated as occasional add-ons.

7. Review, report, and adjust
   As time proceeds, the council evaluates fruitfulness, pastoral strain, finances, and discipleship health. Provide classis with an update as appropriate, especially if the site is moving from emerging to organized.

Roadmap 2: Extending ministry into new places
(from chapel/ministry point to an emerging worshiping community, and potentially to an organized congregation)

1. Begin with mission clarity
   Identify the community being served and the ministry aim: outreach, mercy/justice, evangelism, discipleship, or worshiping community. Clarify whether the effort is a ministry program, a ministry point, or a congregation-in-formation.

2. Define the "threshold" toward becoming a worshiping community
   Establish criteria for when a ministry point becomes a regular worshiping community: consistency of gathering, pastoral leadership, sacramental readiness, and basic structure for care and accountability.

3. Establish oversight and local leadership
   If the community is emerging, appoint a local leadership team/steering group while assigning elders/deacons from the sponsoring council to ensure real pastoral oversight. Maintain clear lines for handling membership, pastoral care, and concerns.

4. Engage classis early—especially as worship and sacraments emerge
   Once regular worship begins (or is planned), consult classis about ecclesiastical status, appropriate reporting, church visitors, and representation. This is especially important if the ministry is moving toward organized status with its own council.

5. Membership and sacramental practice
   Decide how members relate to the ministry point: Are they members of the sending congregation, or is a separate roll being formed? If sacraments will be administered locally, ensure proper administration under ordained ministry and local elder oversight.

6. Leadership development plan
   Create a pathway from emerging to organized: developing qualified elders/deacons locally, training leaders, and clarifying whether and when the community might become an independent organized congregation or remain a long-term campus.

7. Formalize status and representation
When readiness emerges, work with classis to recognize the ministry as an organized congregation.

Roadmap 3: Revitalizing dying congregations
(adoption/replant multisite: from exploration to covenant, to revitalization, to clarified long-term status)

1. Begin with shared spiritual discernment
Both councils (the potential adopting church and the struggling church) enter a season of prayerful discernment. This includes honest assessment of spiritual health, finances, facilities, leadership capacity, and community context.

2. Initial classis consultation
Because this affects the ecclesiastical status of an existing congregation, classis involvement should occur early. Consult classis leadership and church visitors about possible pathways consistent with Church Order principles (merger, adoption as a campus, reorganization, etc.).

   Note: Classis itself might actually catalyze a process of discernment between a potential adopting church and a struggling church. In fact, classis through its church visitors, counselors, or otherwise should take note when a congregation's membership numbers decline below a sustainability threshold (historically the CRCNA has considered forty-five members to be the threshold), when there is not a sufficient number of individuals qualified or able to serve as elders and deacons, or when the financial viability of a congregation has become strained (see Supplement, Church Order Art. 38-d).

3. Determine the intended ecclesiastical form
Agree whether the revitalized ministry will function as an organized congregation with its own council, as an emerging campus under another council, or as a hybrid arrangement (e.g., transition period with outside oversight moving toward local organization).

4. Develop a written covenant/plan
The councils draft a plan that addresses governance, preaching and pastoral care, sacraments, discipline processes, finances, property stewardship, staffing, branding/identity, and a timeline for review. The covenant should specify how accountability will function, including classis reporting and church visitor review.

5. Congregational communication and required processes
Both congregations should be treated pastorally and transparently. Where decisions require congregational input or approval under Church Order (e.g., significant structural changes, calling actions), those processes should be honored.

6. Implement revitalization with visible local shepherding
   Ensure that the congregation experiences genuine shepherding, not just operational change. Assign elders/deacons who are present and known. Clarify membership records (including whether membership remains local or transitions).

7. Review and determine long-term status
   As time proceeds, conduct a formal review with classis/church visitors: Is the congregation becoming organized with local officebearers? Will it remain a campus? Is organization as an independent congregation appropriate? The goal is not to force independence but to ensure ecclesiastical clarity and pastoral health.

Roadmap 4: Planting for diversity and mission
(nested or partnered church plants serving a different language/culture within an existing church's structure)

1. Start with relational listening and community partnership
   Identify the language/cultural community and ensure leadership is shaped with them, not merely for them. Clarify ministry aims: evangelism, discipleship, worshiping community formation, leadership development.

2. Choose a structural pathway: campus, partner, or future independent congregation
   Decide whether the plant will begin as

   - an emerging worshiping community under an existing council,
   - an organized congregation from the outset (rare but possible), or
   - a community with a planned transition toward organization over time, whether in a multisite/partner arrangement or as an independent organized church.

3. Clarify governance and pastoral authority
   Put in writing how oversight will function: which elders/deacons are responsible, what authority the local leadership team has, and how decisions about worship, ministry direction, finances, and staffing will be made. Protect the plant from becoming merely an "extension" without local agency while also ensuring true ecclesiastical accountability.

4. Consult classis early for status and representation
   Early classis consultation is especially important in cross-cultural contexts so that status, delegation, and pastoral safeguards are clear. Classis can help churches avoid ambiguity and support healthy accountability.

5. Membership and sacramental practice with cultural sensitivity
   Decide how membership is held and how sacramental administration will occur. Ensure that sacraments are administered locally under

proper oversight and that the elders responsible for admission and fencing understand the community well.

6. Leadership pipeline and movement toward organization
   Build a deliberate plan for identifying, training, and ordaining local elders and deacons as readiness develops. The long-term health of the plant is strengthened when local leaders from within the community are developed and empowered.

7. Periodic review and long-term discernment
   Set review points with council and classis: Is the plant thriving spiritually? Is governance functioning well? Is there clarity, transparency, and mutual trust? Determine whether the community should remain a campus, become an organized congregation, or move toward another form along the multisite spectrum.

VIII. Summary and conclusion

Synod 2024 appointed this task force because multisite expressions are increasingly present within the CRCNA, yet our Church Order and synodical regulations do not explicitly envision these arrangements. In response, this report has sought to provide the denomination with shared definitions, theological and ecclesiastical guidance, practical roadmaps, and a proposed Church Order supplement that aims to clarify how multisite ministries can be pursued in a manner consistent with Reformed polity.

First, the task force observed that the term *multisite* is used broadly in today's ecclesiastical landscape. We therefore described a spectrum of multisite expressions ranging from highly integrated "one church in many rooms" models to decentralized networks and families of churches. We further identified five key factors—governance, budget, membership, preaching, and branding/identity—that provide a consistent framework for describing and evaluating multisite arrangements in CRCNA contexts.

Second, the task force offered a rationale for multisite expressions within the CRCNA. Multisite development may arise from healthy growth, from extending ministry into new places through ministry points and emerging congregations, from revitalization and adoption of struggling congregations, or from planting culturally and linguistically diverse worshiping communities. The task force is grateful that much of this activity is already occurring, and we believe these expressions may contribute to the future health of the denomination when pursued with theological clarity, pastoral wisdom, and ecclesiastical accountability.

Third, the task force assessed multisite expressions through the lens of Reformed ecclesiology. We affirmed the foundational conviction that Christ ordinarily gathers his church in local, embodied congregations under ordained officebearers, by the ministry of Word and sacrament, guarded by discipline. Multisite expressions are consistent with this ecclesiology, but they must be structured to preserve the marks of the true church and the

integrity of ecclesiastical office in each worshiping community. To avoid one-size-fits-all assumptions, we also encouraged clarity regarding maturity and capacity, distinguishing between organized congregations and emerging worshiping communities within multisite arrangements, and recognizing that councils may differentiate local shepherding responsibilities from broader council-level oversight.

Fourth, the task force proposed a supplement to Church Order Article 35 aiming to provide clarity and accountability for multisite arrangements, especially regarding governance forms, classis approval and discernment of status, representation in broader assemblies, and maintenance of clear membership records by the campus or worshiping community.

Finally, the task force provided roadmaps for churches and classes navigating multisite development in four common scenarios. These roadmaps are offered not as rigid templates but as practical guidance for churches to proceed transparently, pastorally, and in close collaboration with their classis.

The task force concludes that multisite expressions can serve the CRCNA's calling to faithful worship and contextual mission. The central question is not whether multisite expressions may exist but how they can be shaped in ways that remain deeply rooted in Reformed ecclesiology, accountable to the Church Order, and oriented toward the flourishing of local congregations and the faithful exercise of Christ's ministry through ordained officebearers.

IX. Recommendations

The task force respectfully recommends that synod take the following actions:

A. That synod commend this report to the churches as a resource for discernment and guidance regarding multisite expressions, particularly as a resource for congregations considering disbanding, and encourage councils and classes to make use of the report's definitions, roadmaps, and ecclesiological principles as they consider multisite developments in their contexts.

B. That synod encourage classes to recognize multisite expressions as a potential pathway for growth, revitalization, and church planting, and to cultivate a deeper sense of shared ownership for the health and mission of the churches within a classis.

> *Ground:* This provides one more avenue for churches and classes to consider toward church planting and congregational renewal as we seek to fulfill the Great Commission.

C. That synod instruct classes to work with new and existing multisite churches to provide a clear ministry plan to classis when forming or significantly restructuring a multisite arrangement (see Appendix). Such a plan should address, at minimum, how the worshiping communities will

fulfill the marks of the true church in their context, including preaching, sacraments, discipline, pastoral care, and clear lines of accountability.

> *Ground*: Such accountability is essential to the health of multisite churches and their members and is a key element of Reformed church polity.

D. That synod direct the Office of General Secretary to develop and implement a method for collecting and reporting membership and leadership data by campus or worshiping community in multisite arrangements (as distinct from only aggregated reporting), in order to support pastoral accountability, ecclesiastical transparency, and accurate denominational understanding.

> *Ground:* Providing a standardized way of reporting membership and leadership data promotes clear expectations for multisite congregations and their individual campuses.

E. That synod encourage classes to ensure that emerging worshiping communities are appropriately recognized, supported, and—where consistent with classis rules and Church Order provisions—represented in broader assemblies, and to develop or clarify classis policies regarding delegation from emerging congregations where such policies do not yet exist.

> *Ground:* This provides support and accountability for multisite churches and their campuses within the broader framework of the church assemblies.

F. That synod adopt the proposed supplement to Church Order Article 35 included in this report with the goal of providing clear ecclesiastical guidance regarding governance, classis approval and discernment of status, representation in broader assemblies, and membership recordkeeping for multisite arrangements.

> *Ground:* The proposed regulations provide consistent and clear pathways for recognizing multisite arrangements within the framework of Reformed church polity.

G. That synod dismiss the task force with thanks for its work.

Task Force to Study Multisite Churches

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Jonathan Kim
Samantha Teran
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Multisite Campus Governance and Partnership Description

This document describes the formal relationship between
_____ (original campus)
and _____ (new campus),
which together function as campuses within the _____
multisite network. Where this template is used as a partnership between
two existing congregations, both sites should complete this document.

> *Note*: This is a template intended to identify a number of issues common
> in multisite arrangements. It may be edited and adapted as necessary. It
> should be noted that any appeals of a decision of a council (either of a
> local campus or of an entire network of churches) will be taken to the
> classis; where a local campus is considered an "organized" congregation
> by its classis, appeals may not be made to the network council because it
> is not "the assembly next in order" (Church Order, Art. 30-a). No provi-
> sions in this document should be construed as superseding the
> CRCNA's Church Order and/or synodical regulations. A regular review
> of these arrangements is recommended every three to five years, with
> updates shared with the classis.

A. Campus identity and context
Describe the basic identity and ministry context of this campus.

- Name of campus:
- Physical location and ministry context (neighborhood, city, region):
- Regular worship/gathering times:
- Campus pastor(s) and primary ministry leaders:

B. Nature of church governance
1. Membership
Describe how church membership is held within this multisite arrange-
ment. Clarify whether membership is held at the network level, the local
campus level, or in another configuration. Indicate how membership statis-
tics are recorded and reported for denominational purposes.

2. Council oversight and organization
Describe whether this campus is considered an organized congregation
with its own council of elders and deacons, or an emerging campus under
the supervision of another council.

- If the campus is emerging, identify the supervising council and ex-
  plain how oversight is exercised (including any council members
  specifically assigned to this campus).
- If the campus is organized, describe the relationship between the lo-
  cal council and the multisite network, including how authority, ac-
  countability, and mutual submission are practiced.

3. Congregational voice and decision-making
Describe how members of this campus participate in significant decisions, including (but not limited to) the following:

- Election of elders and deacons
- Approval of budgets
- Calling of pastors
- Major ministry or property decisions

Explain whether this participation occurs through joint congregational meetings, local campus meetings, delegated representation, or a combination of these methods.

4. Network-level decision-making
If a multisite or network council exists, describe the following:

- Its composition and authority
- Which decisions (if any) are binding on local councils
- How local campuses participate in or consent to network-level decisions
- Any defined exceptions or limits to network authority

5. Recordkeeping
Describe how official records (minutes of council meetings, congregational meetings, etc.) are maintained and where they are filed (locally, centrally, or both).

C. Pastoral care and tasks of the church
Describe how the following responsibilities are carried out and who holds oversight in each area:

- Pastoral care, supervision, and church discipline
- Preaching and administration of the sacraments
- Shared or network-wide ministries
- Campus-specific or contextual ministries
- Benevolence and mercy ministries

Clarify how coordination and accountability are maintained across campuses.

D. Financial and legal arrangements

1. Budgeting and financial oversight
Describe how budgets are developed, approved, and monitored, including the roles of local campus leadership and any network-level bodies.

2. Ministry shares
Explain how denominational ministry shares are calculated and paid (e.g., based on local campus membership, network-wide membership, or another method).

3. Legal incorporation
Describe whether each campus is incorporated separately or under a shared legal entity, and explain the rationale for this arrangement.

4. Property ownership and control
Describe how property is owned and governed, including the following:

- Whether property is held by the network or the local campus
- What approvals are required for purchase, sale, or transfer
- Any restrictions or covenants related to property use

5. Financial liabilities
Explain how debts, liabilities, and financial obligations are allocated between the local campus and the multisite network.

6. Employment, pension, and benefits
Describe how ministers and staff participate in pension, insurance, and benefit programs, and which entity serves as the employer of record.

E. Dissolution or transition of the multisite relationship
Describe the process by which this multisite arrangement may be modified or dissolved, including the following:

- Required congregational approvals
- Voting thresholds
- Number and timing of meetings
- Notification of classis
- Disposition of property, staff, and financial obligations

F. Schedule for review
This document will be reviewed by the multisite network leadership and the individual campus again and will be shared with the classis in (date) _____.