

Canadian Gathering 2016 Report

Keeping in Step with the Spirit

On May 6–8, 2016, ministry leaders (clergy and lay) from churches across Canada gathered in Waterloo, Ontario, to connect, share stories and discern God’s leading.

We worked with classes across Canada to select participants who represented the “Boots on the Ground” – approximately 120 clergy and lay ministry leaders from around the country who are deeply engaged in a variety of missional and ministry activities. We aimed for a healthy blend of younger and older participants and men and women. Also present, as observers and ambassadors, were representatives from CRC agencies, ecumenical partners, and educational institutions.

The focus was to listen together for the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit to guide the path of our church in the Canadian context. The purpose of this gathering was in many ways different from other established church meetings like classis or synod. While we affirm that those meetings have their necessary and proper place in the administration and leadership of a healthy denomination, the Gathering took a unique approach.

Another denominational goal at The Canadian Gathering 2016 was to present the CRC’s ministry plan—*Our Journey 2020*—and gather feedback and further validation from engaged members of the church, specifically within the Canadian context. As we continue to absorb the information we gathered during group discussions and post-gathering survey feedback, we are blessed with a shared conviction that God has been working ahead of us, putting stepping stones in place for our journey.

The Spirit was truly at work at Canadian Gathering 2016 and spoke to us in some very compelling ways. This report is offered as our reflection of what we heard and continue to hear as we process the memories, input and feedback about this important weekend. We offer this report humbly, not as a comprehensive or definitive set of guidelines or initiatives, or even as a blow-by-blow rundown of the Gathering’s proceedings. Instead, please accept it as a reflection of some of the themes that resonated most strongly with us and with the participants at the Gathering and a sampling of the voices of the CRC in Canada.

Your humble servants,

Darren Roorda and the Canadian Gathering Planning Team



Photo courtesy YALT.

The Program

Friday, May 6	Activity	
1 pm	Early Arrival & Registration	
2 pm	Ministry Fair	
4 pm	Opening – Rev. Dr. Darren Roorda	
4:30	Worship – Jeremy Zeyl and Body+Soul Collective	
5 pm	Keynote 1. Dr. Sylvia Keesmaat “Our Ministry Context”	
7:30 pm	Storytelling: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rev. Arie Van Eek• Rev. Dr. Darren Roorda• Hilda Vander Klippe, Village Church• Bernadette Arthur – CRC Race Relations• Mike Hogeterp – Centre for Public Dialogue	
8:30 pm	Reception – Sharing local stories over punch and snacks	
Saturday, May 7		
8 am	Worship & Song	
8:30 am	Keynote 2. Dr. Glenn Smith “Sharing Ministry Stories in Secular Canada”	
9:30 am	Group Discussions “What does it mean to keep in step with the Spirit in your congregation and in your ministry context?”	
10:50	Facilitated Classis Ministry Dialogue	
	Classis BC Southeast/Classis Toronto Facilitator: Hannah Smele	Classis Alberta North/Classis Niagara Facilitator: Darren Roorda
	Classis BC Northwest/Classis Huron Facilitator: Gary Van Arragon	Classis Alberta South-Saskatchewan/Classis Chatham Facilitator: Richard Bodini
	Classis Lake Superior/Classis Eastern Canada Facilitator: Patricia Storteboom	Classis Hamilton/Classis Quinte Facilitator: Peter Noteboom
12:10 pm	Devotion & Grace: Dr. Sylvia Keesmaat	

2 pm	Keynote 3. Michelle Visser-Wikkerink “Contextualization in Action: The Canadian Urban and Indigenous Context”
3:45 pm	Greeting from ecumenical leaders
4 pm	Open Plenary: Kathy Vandergrift, Rev. Dr. Darren Roorda, Dr. Stephen Timmermans
7 pm	Facilitated Classis Work Groups: What is our Takeaway? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where are we going as local churches? • Where does this lead the CRCNA Canada? • What do we see as our shared future?
8 pm	Evening Program – Rev. Dr. Darren Roorda <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What I am hearing is... What you are hearing is... • What inspires me is... What inspires you is... • Where we see the Spirit leading the CRC is...
Sunday, May 8	
9 am	Worship & Commissioning Service <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music: Jeremy Zeyl & Body+Soul Collective • Sermon: Dr. Sylvia Keesmaat • Communion & Commissioning: Rev. Dr. Darren Roorda and local pastors • Offering: Centre for Public Dialogue
10:30	Parting Blessing

Vitality, Excitement, Hope & Renewal in the CRC

I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

John 17:21-23

We are uplifted by the strong messages of hope, excitement, and unity that we heard repeatedly from participants. There was also appreciation for the posture of the denomination as a servant of the local church.

The stories and inspiration that participants shared mesh nicely with the 5 desired futures of the CRC's ministry plan: Church and Community, Leadership, Discipleship, Identity and Collaboration. To us, this affirms that the plan is a good fit for the boots-on-the-ground ministry leaders who work every day to share Jesus' grace and truth in their unique communities and settings. We praise God for that, and we are excited about where He is leading us as individuals, as churches, in partnership with other denominations, and together as the CRCNA, both in Canada and binationally.

Voices of the CRC in Canada

What most inspired you about the Gathering?

"The emphasis on keeping in step with the Holy Spirit and the interest by leadership to connect with the grassroots."

"The Canadian CRC is alive and well, involved in numerous ministries and a variety of resources, which we have to learn to "tap" into on the local level. So as we listen to the needs in our communities, learn where we can minister in time and space, know how to use the resources, we will be equipped to build relationships, build community and make disciples in our churches and neighbourhoods."

"The large number of participants and the excitement of so many eager to do the Lord's work. "

"The hope that exists in the denomination by its people... "

"That God is at work in the CRC in beautiful ways."

"The excitement of participants to be a part of the CRC while speaking about things that really matter to the heart, soul and mind."

"That the Presence of God was right there among us during those three days—unifying us, gracing us with patience and articulation, and allowing gifts to manifest themselves in so many delegates in ways which I have not experienced at synod, worship conferences, classis meetings, and other denominational or regional gatherings to the same extent."

Our Journey 2020

The CRC's Ministry Plan.

What does it mean to be Christian Reformed? What are the challenges we face? What are our hopes?

For the last couple of years, a team of listeners asked these questions across the CRCNA. The CRC's new ministry plan—*Our Journey 2020*—is the result.

Canadian Gathering 2016—and other similar gatherings—have been an opportunity for engaged ministry leaders of local churches to offer their response to the plan.

We have been richly blessed by the response of hope and energy that the plan has received and we put our trust in God to move us forward in faith together.

“The Holy Spirit is alive in the CRC.”

A Shift in Focus: From Inward to Outward

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Acts 1:8

Many churches in the Christian Reformed Church in Canada appear to be experiencing a significant shift in missional focus from inward to outward. God is growing in us a desire to build relationships with those on the margins, to better understand and serve the needs of our neighbourhoods and communities, and to learn to appreciate and acknowledge the richness of the cultures we seek to serve. While our keynote speakers focused on those topics, the response from gathering participants to these themes was overwhelmingly positive.

Voices of the CRC in Canada

What most inspired you about the Gathering that you want to share with your local congregation?

"I think my church community will respond well to some of the points and ideas from Glenn Smith. Being with churches from east to west in Canada and hearing how being mission minded is echoed in all the churches."

The focus on faithfully and effectively engaging our communities and the great presentations by Glenn Smith and Sylvia Keesmaat on this.

"It was a positive, learning, sharing, and encouraging experience and while it will probably be "received for information" there is a 'do' component here and I will make the suggestion to "get on board" and be intentional about being missional to our neighbourhood and greater community."

"I'm [also] excited to encourage my church community to try to connect with our First Nations neighbours and other marginalized people."

"I am excited to share some examples of how specific churches and the denominational ministries are impacting secular Canada in such powerful and faithful ways."

"Encouragement to reach out into our community sharing the love of Jesus within our own place looking for opportunities to serve where we are."

"The atmosphere of restlessness that is resulting in a move toward redirecting us towards missional living."

"The bubbling excitement regarding mission in our specific contexts."

"The passion exhibited for walking with the marginalized."

"I am excited and proud once again to be part of a national organization that is serious about seeing the local church become more effective, loving and relevant in our communities."

"I very much appreciate the missional direction that the CRC is going in and I was excited to see our shared vision in this!"

Goals of the CRCNA

From the CRC's Ministry Plan: *Our Journey 2020.*

Our congregations will explore their communities, learning from neighbours where a community's life is lively and fresh, and where it is parched and asking for help.

Our congregations will discover where God's Spirit is moving, working through individuals, organizations, other churches, and businesses to meet needs and to bring health and freedom.

Our congregations and ministries will joyfully answer the call to do justice and walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8).

Sharing Our Stories

*"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news."
Isaiah 52:7*

When we planned the Gathering, our aim was to invite a mix of active and engaged ministry leaders—clergy and lay—who could come together to share their stories. We've referred to them as "boots on the ground." We don't typically describe boots as beautiful, especially when they're covered in dust. But is there anything more beautiful to God than the feet of those who are willing to walk a dusty and dirty journey for him? Especially when they share their good news with those along the way? Perhaps it's why Jesus was so willing to kneel and wash them.

Based on the feedback we received from Gathering participants, it is abundantly clear that people in the church are blessed by sharing and hearing each others' stories.

Voices of the CRC in Canada:

What most inspired you about the Gathering that you want to share with your local congregation?

"Let's tell our story!

"The idea of sharing tangible stories of what God is doing through the CRC and our own local context."

"The concept of storytelling! I hope to bring this idea back to our church so that we can do a better job of encouraging each other with our good news stories."

"I was encouraged and inspired by the stories of what is going on in other churches."

"The impact that story-telling can have in our congregations and communities - learning to be more vulnerable."

"How my story is important and our stories are very important, how the brokenness and vulnerability can be part of my story and our story. That we need to listen to each other's story

"Other people's stories and how they impact the church."

"I am excited to share some examples of how specific churches and the denominational ministries are impacting secular Canada in such powerful and faithful ways."

"Sharing our stories is a great way to motivate and build relationships."

Goals of the CRCNA

From the CRC's Ministry Plan: *Our Journey 2020*.

Our congregations and ministries will learn to tell, in ways that are clear and compelling, the story of God's grace and restoring love, and of God's call to join him in renewing all creation.

Our congregations and ministries will live out that story so that our churches radiate welcome and a sense of belonging to people of all ages, abilities, genders, and ethnicities.

A Heart for Youth & Young Adults

Then our sons in their youth will be like well-nurtured plants, and our daughters will be like pillars carved to adorn a palace.

Psalm 144:12

There is a growing desire within our denomination to be a more intergenerational church that disciples and mentors children, youth and young adults, so that the church is increasingly relevant to them and they are willing and able to participate in church activities and take on leadership roles at an earlier age.

We were moved by the full participation of young leaders at the Gathering. Their energy and enthusiasm were strongly felt.

Goals of the CRCNA

From the CRC's Ministry Plan: *Our Journey 2020*.

We will search out the gifts and skills in members of all genders, ages, abilities and ethnicities, and help them grow and strengthen those gifts through education, ministry opportunities, and deep relationships with experienced leaders.

Voices of the CRC in Canada

What most inspired you about the Gathering that you want to share with your local congregation?

"Many young adults are very involved and show strong leadership rolls throughout the country, and are willing to share the gospel."

"...the CRCNA is alive in Canada. There is passion, excitement, expectation and youthful involvement."

"Young leaders getting excited and engaged."

"As we seek to be faithful churches of Christ in our communities, please also do what you can to support congregations and leaders in ministering to young adults. Many of them are leaving the CRC and too many of those are "dropping out of church" altogether. It's seems assumed sometimes that engagement is more important than discipleship and equipping our own congregation. Of course we need, with God's help, to do both."

"Creating a culture of mentoring will take persistence and constant communication of that shared vision, for the 'older' generation of leadership is having a hard time letting go of leadership and catching on to this vision."

"Would like to see even more young people although very encouraged by the participants."

Belonging and Identity

For you, O God, have heard my vows: you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name.

Psalm 61:5

There was a palpable tension at the Canadian Gathering around our cultural identity and reformed heritage. The CRC in the Canadian context continues to experience a shift in culture, even as culture shifts around us. This is somewhat unique to the Canadian experience as our congregations are younger than most of our American counterparts. At times, awkward and predictable references to “our” Dutch-ness were set against a desire to recognize and acknowledge the strength and accomplishments of our cultural, theological and missional heritage.

Rev. Arie Van Eek’s story about the Canadian CRC’s early leadership in First Nation’s ministries and many other achievements demonstrate how contextual, collaborative missional activity is part of our denominational DNA. This missional behavior remains relevant. Plus, our reformed heritage is always a rich element from our past and it can inform our present while inspiring our future.

While each local church is in a different place on a spectrum, we still find ourselves within a process of changing hands from first generation mostly Dutch immigrants whose early goal was to establish themselves in a new country. Second, third and even fourth generation Dutch Canadians have moved and are moving into leadership roles in the church. Others have left the CRC as denominational loyalties have fallen away, and others have left churches altogether. On the other hand, many people have joined the Christian Reformed Church from varied and rich cultural backgrounds. In some of the larger urban centers we have newer immigrant CRCs that have established and are establishing themselves, such as predominantly Korean CRC churches in Toronto and predominantly Chinese CRCs in British Columbia.

Voices of the CRC in Canada

Comments from our participants

“While denominational loyalty is diminishing there is still a great love for the CRC in the congregations but the flame does need fanning and this gathering was a good instrument for that.”

“My grandparents are Dutch, but I am Canadian.”

“There doesn't seem to be a strong sentiment of what it means to be Reformed, but I think this is a double-edged sword—we need to celebrate our identity but be careful not to exclude people from having a relationship with Jesus by focusing on religion.”

“I am very proud of my Dutch heritage and my Dutch immigrant parents. They are a testament to how God does provide and to have trust. They came with nothing, had blind faith that God would provide and he did. They truly had a vision and they persevered and moved forward.”

Via Twitter...

Chris DeWinter: At #CRCgathering #CanadianCRC I think it needs to be said, I’m part of a gen of CR Christians who are Canadian. Not Dutch & not not Dutch.

Our Faith

From the CRC’s Ministry Plan: *Our Journey 2020*.

Like a great tree, our faith is a living, growing thing. Fed by the river of life, this great tree of faith continues to send out branches and bear fruit. In the Christian Reformed Church in North America, we are experiencing that growth in transformed lives, transformed congregations, and a fresh vision for the future. Rooted and sturdy, we are becoming ever new.

Where do we go from here?

A few Commitments from Canadian Ministries Director Darren Roorda

"I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

Philippians 1:3

It would be easy and tempting to simply add our memories of Canadian Gathering 2016 to the historical archives—to rest on our laurels and say "Another job well done." But the Spirit was at work at the Canadian Gathering and he calls us to do far more.

I continue listen for and hear the urgings of the Holy Spirit as they are expressed through the voices of his people, and particularly as they relate to his direction for the ministries and mission of Christian Reformed congregations across Canada. Here are some commitments I make to you as Canadian Ministries Director as a result of the Canadian Gathering:

- I will continue to meet with local Canadian churches and classes across the country to learn your stories and better understand how CRCNA can be a servant to Christ and the work he would have done through you, its clergy and lay leaders and members.
- I will continue to seek ways to improve communications within the CRC, both within Canada and binationally, improving the flow of stories, resources and information between the denomination, ministry agencies and partners, ecumenical partners, classes and local churches.
- I will seek out and share opportunities for discipleship and leadership for all members of the church, with an understanding that Canadian churches have a particular desire to minister to, walk alongside, and be ministered by youth and young adults, First Nations Peoples and those at the margins of society, including the differently abled.
- I will continue to serve the CRCNA in the implementation of its ministry plan: *Our Vision 2020* within the Canadian context, while remaining fully committed to the binational nature of the CRCNA, understanding that we and our American counterparts are more alike than we are different and we have much to share.

I thank all of the participants of Canadian Gathering 2016 and joyously anticipate our next gathering in 2023. In the meantime, there is much work to be done as we continue to seek out and follow God's will together.

In Christ and his service,

Darren Roorda

Canadian Ministries Director

Our Journey 2020 Desired Futures of the CRCNA

Desired Future 1

Church & Community: Churches Flowing into Their Communities

Our congregations will flow like streams into their communities. We will meet our neighbours at community events and gathering places, listening to each other, learning from each other, and serving each other. By our presence we will become channels for the love of Christ and the Holy Spirit's life-giving

Desired Future 2

Discipleship: Churches Nurturing Disciples

Our churches will be vibrant communities, radiating grace. As we preach, teach, and live out the gospel within and beyond our walls, we nurture people of all generations as they grow into the likeness of Christ.

Desired Future 3

Leadership: Churches Cultivating Leaders

Our churches and ministries will grow new leaders of many kinds. At all levels—local, regional, denominational—we discover the talents, skills and strengths in our ordained and lay people. We cultivate those gifts through education, hands-on ministry opportunities, and guidance from mature leaders in order to raise

Desired Future 4

Identity: Churches Telling Our Story in Partnership

Our churches will be vibrant communities, radiating grace. As we preach, teach, and live out the gospel within and beyond our walls, we nurture people of all generations as they grow into the likeness of Christ.

Desired Future 5

Collaboration: Churches Working in Partnership

Our churches will be vibrant communities, radiating grace. As we preach, teach, and live out the gospel within and beyond our walls, we nurture people of all generations as they grow into the likeness of Christ.

Additional Resources

We have provided resources to enable you to further understand Canadian Gathering 2016, including a commemorative video of the event, audio and video of keynote addresses and proceedings, a slide presentation, quantitative results of our post Gathering survey and media and blog coverage of the event. We encourage you to use these resources to learn more about what happened at the Gathering and to share it with others. You'll find them at www.crcna.org/gatherings/canadian-gathering-2016.

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