

# **Report of the General Synod Council on Transformed & Transforming**

## **POLICY WORDING**

The RCA will engage, equip, and encourage congregations and missional communities in the work of cultivating transformation that results in faithful and passionate disciples of Jesus.

The RCA will identify potential leaders and encourage and equip potential and existing leaders for missional, congregational, and pastoral leadership. These leaders will reflect the full diversity of the RCA, such as gender, age, race, ability, and cultural backgrounds, with a special emphasis on youth.

The RCA will engage, equip, and encourage congregations and missional communities to participate in Christ's kingdom mission, both locally and globally.

## **GENERAL SECRETARY'S INTERPRETATION**

### **Discipleship**

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Jesus's command to make disciples is the church's mandate to help all people grow and deepen their faith as they live it out in everyday life. Transformed disciples become more like Christ as they read and reflect on God's Word, pray and listen to God, spend time in community with other Christ followers and engage in Christ's mission. The RCA's commitment is to help in providing accessible environments, processes, resources, and relationships that can be used by local congregations to foster, in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, more fully devoted followers who willingly and boldly live and love like Jesus.

The discipleship pathways uniquely created by congregations will foster transformation in both hearts and minds, exhibited in changed actions in the lives of equipped and empowered disciples. These growing disciples will make contributions as leaders, teachers, and people of influence within their congregations. Transformation will be manifest in our relationships with one another, our increasing love for each, our sacrifice for the cause of Christ, our willingness to influence our world for the gospel, and how we advocate for justice with compassion in communities where we live and serve.

### **Leadership**

"Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith" (Hebrews 13:7).

Women and men who are open to being used by God help guide the church as they actively pursue God's purpose for congregations and ministries. Leaders willingly and passionately live out their calling and giftedness to accomplish a missional vision that brings a gospel of grace and hope to a lost and broken world.

The RCA commitment is to help develop leaders, based on a foundation of discipleship, who:

- know how to lead themselves (their leadership is focused on their inward journey)

- know how to lead others (they are equipped to lead and influence in a God-ordained direction, increasing their leadership gift)
- know how to reproduce new leaders (they view leadership development as a key component of their call to be a leader)

This commitment to leadership development requires environments and accessible opportunities for growth and learning that will help lead RCA congregations forward in mission.

The RCA vision for leadership sees the leadership potential in all followers of Jesus Christ. It helps to raise up servant leaders who develop a courage and competence to lead in the church and the world in a multiplicity of environments and with an openness to equipping and empowering all people to be influencers for Christ's kingdom. This leadership vision has a special focus on empowering people who may not have leadership positions, privilege, power, or even access to them, but who have been called and gifted by God to serve boldly. It is a vision that especially is committed to the next generation and developing leaders for the church of the future.

## **Mission**

"May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations" (Psalm 67:1-2).

Mission becomes a way of life when we reach out to people with the gospel, meeting needs in neighborhoods, cities, and throughout the world. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we boldly give witness to the hope within us and willingly serve others by becoming the hands and feet of Christ in every corner of the world. The RCA commitment is to respond with God's love to meet spiritual and individual needs around the globe. It is envisioning the people of the RCA as a movement of faithful followers who live and love like Jesus as they radically follow Christ in mission together.

Individuals and churches experience transformation as they open themselves to be used by God and reach out in giving and receiving, learning and sharing, and extending the kingdom of God through missional engagement. It means bringing the good news of God's grace in Jesus Christ to those who have never heard the message, mobilizing RCA congregations to connect with global partners for greater kingdom impact, helping resource volunteers for expanding involvement in mission efforts, extending compassion, mercy, and justice in places of discrimination, poverty, famine, disaster, and injustice. In a world of brokenness and need, we offer help, hope, and tangible expressions of God's love.

## **CULTURAL AGILITY AND ADVOCACY**

Cultural Agility and Advocacy has focused on helping congregations and people to live more fully into the biblical vision of shalom and the human hope of the beloved community. The initiative has been led by Earl James.

The ancient Hebrews spoke the word "shalom" both at greeting and parting. The word meant "peace," but conveyed more, including life with complete wholeness wherever one lived, worked, and worshiped.

The beloved community grows naturally out of Jesus's own hunger for the felt unity of his followers, mirroring the unity he shared with the Father (John 17:20-23). That unity expresses a

readiness to engage everyday life in close friendship and to actively take a stand when society and societal systems block access to the abundant life for people and places God created.

Cultural Agility and Advocacy has offered congregations two pathways as they strive for shalom and the beloved community, helping congregations:

- Increase their cultural agility.
- Advocate by addressing societal patterns including influencing public policy.

“Cultural agility” begins with whatever culturally-rooted style of relationship-building a person or congregation has, and focuses on adapting that style when communicating, negotiating, and building trust with other people, congregations, or groups whose cultures differ from one’s own.

As congregations increase cultural agility, tangible, sustainable transformations can occur in leadership, outreach, discipleship, and worship.

In advocacy, congregations come to see and engage societal patterns and public policy matters and practices as simply a third expression of their shared compassion ministries.

Many congregations express compassion by “giving a fish.” They see a need and meet that need. Food pantries are excellent examples of “giving a fish” compassion ministry.

Congregations also express compassion by “teaching to fish.” By sharing any particular knowledge, skill, or ability, they assist a person or family in overcoming a particular life challenge that threatens them. Tutoring and financial stewardship ministries are excellent examples of “teaching to fish” ministries.

Not very many congregations ask, “Why do so many people and families need those fish to begin with?” Advocating by addressing underlying societal patterns and public policy results in partnering with others to make tangible differences in everyday life challenges, locally or globally. Those differences do not simply affect a few people. They can affect hundreds or even thousands of people. Making those differences happen also can add greater liveliness and spiritual focus to the shared life of engaged congregations and people.

Late in 2018, GSC’s implementation strategy for cultural agility markedly changed. Originally, that initiative was led by a single staff person. Currently, the GSC Transformed & Transforming staff is in process of embedding cultural agility within all of the Transformed & Transforming initiatives.

The embedding learning process has three goals:

1. Increasing the Transformed & Transforming staff’s understanding of cultural agility as well as its ability to enfold cultural agility within their respective initiatives.
2. Increasing the demographic diversity of the persons deeply trusted by the Transforming & Transforming staff. That increased diversity will assist them as persons and leaders to grow in cultural agility. There is a principle that says, “You cannot lead where you have not been.” This goal will allow leaders to connect closely to demographic people groups they might historically have been distant from. The closing of such relational distances will assist them to lead in our diverse denomination.

3. Assessing the distribution of Transformed & Transforming resources and opportunities to ensure racial-ethnic congregations equitably benefit from the RCA's strategic ministry plan.

As cultural agility is being embedded in all the RCA's Transformed & Transforming ministries, the staff person previously dedicated to it has been reassigned to serve as coordinator for the African American Black Council (AABC) and Advocacy. As with the other racial-ethnic councils, the AABC will also benefit from accessing Transforming & Transforming services.

## **Progress**

### Cultural agility connection events

- October 2019 connection event for new members of the GSC, commissions, and GSC staff. Twenty-eight participants participated in this high-level training experience. Cultural agility was explored across demographics of race, generation, gender, and cultures, with opportunities to anticipate lessons learned in their denominational leadership positions, home congregations, and personal lives.
- October 2018 connection event for the same population and similar outcomes as above. Approximately 25 people participated.

### Connection event for the AABC

- October 2019. AABC connection event on Vision 2020. Forty-eight participants, many of whom are leaders in their respective congregations. A Vision 2020 Team member provided meaningful information and facilitated small group conversations regarding the options the Vision 2020 Team was considering at that time.

### Leadership collaboratives for the AABC

- A leadership collaborative has been launched to serve vice presidents of consistories. Five vice presidents have been involved. Each serves a church that has no pastor. As is often the case with vice presidents of consistories around the RCA, these received little to no training to serve as the lead lay person in their congregation and reported being overwhelmed by the scale and scope of their work after their pastors left. Key elements in the collaborative involve self-care, managing volunteers who are used to pastoral leadership, learning tools and tips to assist with casting leadership vision and managing ministries and time, identifying real issues that might differ from simple presenting problems, etc. Understanding how to use the Bible and the *BCO* to get the business of the congregation done effectively and efficiently are also discussed.
- A discipleship leadership collaborative called "Inward/Outward Journey" was completed in 2019. Ten participants from five small, declining churches learned ways in which they as leaders can move into a vision that small churches can be vital, not merely underperforming "large-church-want-to-bes" that need fixing. Participants visited a vibrant network of small churches in Washington DC, and Baltimore, Maryland, as well as a deeply impactful small church in Queens, New York. The participants determined that they would like a second round of this leadership collaborative. Goals for that collaborative have been identified and the steps to implementing are being developed.

- A missions leadership collaborative was launched and completed in 2019 that focused on developing nonprofit corporations through which outreach ministries can thrive and be resourced. The coordinator of AABC co-developed and co-led that collaborative with the coordinator for Local Missional Engagement and special projects. Sixteen participants from ten congregations were part of the collaborative. One group of participants successfully formed a 501(c)(3) corporation and have launched their ministry. Another group has made good progress toward identifying an expanded ministry plan.

#### Four advocacy connection events

- In March 2019, a creation care connection event was held in Franklin Park, New Jersey. Approximately 30 people engaged in 1) biblical and theological search that supports the earth being God's and people are responsible for stewarding its resources; 2) how to have discussions about creation care at home, work, and in church (a new experience for many); 3) how addressing creation care imperatives can help congregations reduce utilities expenditures and perhaps redirect some of those resources to other ministries; and 4) partnering with others for advocacy purposes. That congregation's consistory subsequently adopted and is implementing a multi-faceted overture from some of its members that is reducing their collective carbon footprint.
- In June 2019, a disabilities advocacy connection event was held in Franklin Park, New Jersey, involving three coordinators for advocacy. The 30 participants 1) learned about and discussed biblical stances to take for people with disabilities and to oppose "ableism"; 2) learned about local resources to assist persons and families that live with disabilities; and 3) heard from members who live with disabilities. The host congregation subsequently brought a delegation of their members to visit an RCA congregation in Poughkeepsie, New York, that exists for people with disabilities and those who love and serve them. The connection event and its follow-ups heightened the profile and expanded the impact of that congregation's disability advocate's ministry.
- In June 2019, in two locations surrounding Chicago, Illinois, two mass incarceration connection events were held in co-sponsorship with a Christian mass incarceration outreach ministry led by an AABC constituent. Both events involved assisting the ministry's staff to hold focus groups with families of people who are incarcerated. Through those focus groups, the ministry heard profound stories about the impact the loss of an incarcerated family member had on the families left behind. The learned information greatly impacted the participating staff and enhanced their understanding of their shared work. Approximately 10 staff and 45 participants were involved.
- In July 2019, in Riverdale, Illinois, we held a connection event on small business/economic development. The event was co-sponsored by the AABC, Living Springs Community Church – Riverdale, and the Christian mass incarceration ministry mentioned in the immediately previous connection event notation. StartingUp Now, a small business consultant/incubator in the Chicago area, served as the lead equipper/facilitator for the event. Twenty participants learned more about and were invited to consider starting micro and small businesses through the StartingUp Now process.
- In August 2019, in New Paltz, New York, a creation care connection event was held. About 35 people participated. As with other creation care connection events, the time

focused on 1) biblical bases for adopting a creation care mindset; 2) coaching for persons, families, and congregations about how to initiate unfamiliar conversations around creation care; 3) identifying ways to reduce carbon footprints at home and at church; and 4) partnering with others to advocate for environmental justice and caring for God's world. There were two additional fascinating and unique features to this particular connection event. First, there already are several existing, active local creation care networks. Second, there are people from a plethora of religions who participate locally in caring for God's world. We used a form of scriptural reasoning. Scriptural reasoning is a tool by which people of different faiths share from their scriptures and sacred traditions about what guides them on particular life matters. In this case, participants shared from their scriptures and traditions about what guides them about caring for the earth. The goal of scriptural reasoning is not to say we worship the same God. The goal is to say we all can have high-level motivations for why we engage in certain activities. This tool can be of particular service when people of different faiths share both geographic proximity and a common cause.

### **Current Goals**

- Three AABC connection events that link to discipleship, leadership, and/or mission
- Two AABC leadership collaboratives
- Three advocacy connection events
- One advocacy leadership collaborative

### **DISABILITY CONCERNS**

Scripture's vision of the kingdom is a unifying embrace of the love and grace of Jesus Christ that reaches all people—every race, tribe, people, and language, every type of disability and special need. Raising awareness and making our churches accessible to people with disabilities establishes a needed foundation, but our own attitudes require even greater transformation so that ministries to and for people with disabilities that may be grounded in pity or compassion can grow into ministries with and by people with disabilities that recognize everyone has gifts to serve the purposes of God's kingdom mission. The vision of RCA Disability Concerns is to welcome and engage the gifts of all people in Christ's ministry, becoming accessible, inclusive, missional churches where everybody belongs and everybody serves. A covenant with CRC Disability Concerns between the governing boards of the RCA and the Christian Reformed Church (CRC)—in place since 2009—has demonstrated a track record of multiplied effectiveness and continues to deepen ministry impact in both denominations and beyond, welcoming all the partners that God provides.

In the eleventh year of the Disability Concerns partnership, the two staff leaders of RCA and CRC Disability Concerns have collaborated to:

- Offer a third Bearing Hope learning event to assist churches in West Michigan seeking to support people living with mental health challenges
- Lead two workshops at the May 2020 Institute on Faith and Disability, one on mental health and the church, and another on the mutual benefits, impact, and discoveries of the Disability Concerns partnership between our two denominations.

- Hold its annual training event for RCA and CRC disability advocates in conjunction with the CRC's 2019 Inspire gathering in Windsor, Ontario, which included distinct disability and ministry workshops in all five workshop slots during the three-day event.

The RCA's Disability Concerns initiative is led by Terry DeYoung.

## Progress

- A network of RCA regional mental health consultants has been established—spanning four regional synods (Albany, Heartland, Mid-Atlantics, and New York)—to support and consult with pastors, churches, and classes in their efforts to reduce stigma, provide education, and support ministry initiatives related to mental health and the church.
- A hearing loop consultant now is available to consult with RCA churches in their efforts to provide effective systems, environments, and approaches to support church members with hearing loss.
- RCA-CRC Disability Concerns connection events have been or are scheduled to be held in Iowa, Michigan (two), New Jersey, New York City, and Ontario.
- All church disability advocates identified in the RCA database were encouraged to facilitate an accessibility audit (identifying and addressing barriers in attitude, communication, and facility design) and/or work with leaders to adopt a disability policy for their church. Often these are lengthy undertakings, particularly an accessibility audit.
- About 100 churches have designated a church disability advocate who has submitted a signed covenant to RCA Disability Concerns so individual follow-up, resources, and support can be provided by Disability Concerns staff.

## Current Goals

- As mentioned in the first item under “Progress,” a network of regional mental health consultants has been established in four regional synods. These consultants are RCA members who have significant experience, training, and connections in a variety of mental health specialties. Commitments from additional consultants within some of those regions are in process. Promoting the availability of their consultation services is underway in efforts to engage churches, classes, and all the partners God provides in becoming a church where everybody belongs and everybody serves. If the response is good and the work of consultants is making an impact, work will be done to identify consultants in other regions of the RCA.
- After two reprintings of the second edition of the *Inclusion Handbook*, a primary resource for churches published in 2013, work on an updated and expanded third edition of the *Inclusion Handbook* is nearing completion. There will be a print version as in the past, along with a new online version that will include additional content and provide an online learning platform as well. Two partners have joined RCA and CRC Disability Concerns in this venture: Christian Horizons, a large faith-based provider of services for people with disabilities in Ontario, and Elim Christian Services, a faith-based provider located in the Chicago suburbs with deep ties to the RCA and CRC.

- The issue of ableism—an unconscious bias and prejudice toward people with disabilities that’s both personal and systemic—has become an area of focus within Disability Concerns and beyond. In seeking to become a church where everybody belongs and everybody serves, disability advocates and RCA staff are beginning to name personal and systemic biases toward people with disabilities, while pursuing the engagement of this challenging issue at General Synod Council (GSC) and General Synod levels.
- Through connections with various partner organizations and institutions, RCA-CRC Disability Concerns is seeking financial resources needed to support children’s and youth ministry programs in RCA and CRC churches to build resilience among youth, utilizing Adverse Childhood Experiences research. Separate grant applications to the Louisville Institute and subsequently to the Templeton Foundation both have been declined. Collaboration efforts and further work in this groundbreaking area continues with additional partners and institutions.

## **DISCIPLESHIP**

The Transformed & Transforming Discipleship Guiding Coalition defines a disciple as somebody who looks like Jesus and who does the things that Jesus does. This simple definition engages the two “greats” of Scripture: the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. In short, the focus and goal of the Discipleship Guiding Coalition is to help every RCA church in defining a discipleship pathway that develops and deploys disciples who look and live like Jesus.

The Discipleship Guiding Coalition (led by Jeff Allen, Pat Dirkse, and Ruth Langkamp) is a collaborative team of discipleship practitioners from across the denomination. The coalition includes practitioners who are male, female, pastors, lay leaders, are from the east and west, are of various ethnic background, and who are from various mission contexts ranging from urban to suburban, church plants, smaller churches, larger churches, and mission outposts. This coalition of 12 “in the field” practitioners exists to connect leaders in conversation that often point to the provision content, coaching, and the sharing of proven pathways that help teams move forward in community processes for adaptive change in their context.

### *Connections and Conversations*

The guiding coalition engages in countless connection and conversation opportunities ranging from emails, phone and Zoom calls, and webinar and website interactions to classis and regional events across the vast geography of the denomination. These discussions frequently center around two questions: “What is your plan for discipleship?” and “How is that plan working?” Best practices are celebrated and opportunities extended that invite every RCA congregation to put in place a discipleship pathway (process or pipeline) that develops disciples who look like Jesus and who do the things that Jesus does in their context.

### *Content*

In discussion with leaders, content is frequently a topic that comes up relatively early as churches look to move forward in the development of a disciple-making culture. A website, webinar, workshop, podcast, book, or a classis event are examples of Taste and See content opportunities provided to leaders and churches across the denomination. In initial conversations, guiding coalition members listen first, seeking to understand the unique needs and specific context of the leader and church. In the information age, content is abundant! As a result, listening is of utmost importance in order to discern and offer content suggestions that

are helpful to leaders in their particular church and situation. Of particular note, the RCA has been working to provide increased access to content through an online learning platform. This initiative, led by Eliza Cortés Bast, is developing a platform across all Transformed & Transforming priorities to help churches to engage with testimonies, tools, and resources that will help their congregations to move forward faster in discipleship, leadership, and mission.

### *Coaching*

Coaching is without a doubt the most important step that a leader can take in their journey of discipleship. Why? It reflects a step of faith that demonstrates a personal commitment to move from “what is” to “what could be” as disciples and leaders. Further, this first step demonstrates humility and an understanding that as a leader, “I cannot expect people to follow me to a place that I have never gone before.” In this light, coaching can best be understood as inviting a Barnabas-like encourager to walk alongside me who is seeking to ignite and catalyze character and competency development that is directed by the Holy Spirit. On-ramp, or pilot, coaching is a frequent first step as leaders take a dip into new water for a brief season (usually six to eight weeks). The frequency of coaching ranges from monthly to weekly (recommended to maximize relational connection and the pace of development) and invites leaders into an environment that provides both grace and truth (encouragement and challenge) to help the leader to grow personally as an example worthy of imitation in their particular congregational family. Coaching options can range from personal, to staff, to consistory and classis, and can be brief (six to eight weeks) to multiple years. To start a conversation of coaching possibilities for your context, contact Jeff Allen ([jallen@rca.org](mailto:jallen@rca.org)), Pat Dirkse ([pdirkse@rca.org](mailto:pdirkse@rca.org)), or Ruth Langkamp ([rlangkamp@rca.org](mailto:rlangkamp@rca.org)).

### *Communities and Change*

While coaching frequently focuses on the development of character and competency in a leader, communities of learning are undoubtedly the most effective proven pathway for igniting adaptive change in a church family system. Learning communities involve teams (with a minimum of three people) from multiple churches in a geographic area in a facilitated process that helps each team (a guiding coalition for change) to identify “what is,” to consider “what could be,” and then to develop objectives, strategies, and tactics to move forward into “what will be” in their particular church context. Learning communities provided in recent years include: Building a Discipling Culture, Growing Young, Cultivating Generous Congregations, Being a Small Church on a BIG Mission, Leadership Development, Churches Learning Change (formerly Ridder Church Renewal), Faithwalking, Volunteer Engagement, and Local Missional Engagement. The RCA has developed relationships for coaching and learning community proven pathways with a number of partner ministries, including 3DMovements (3DM), Congregational Vitality Pathway, and Organic Outreach. To start a conversation of learning community options that best fit your context, contact Jeff Allen, Pat Dirkse, or Ruth Langkamp.

### **Progress**

As we enter what is considered to be the 2.0 evolution of the Transformed & Transforming goal, there are a number of areas of collaboration that include but are not limited to the engagement of leaders, churches, and classes in conversations and events that provide bridges that cross Transformed & Transforming areas of discipleship, leadership, and mission; that involve cohorts and communities that involve church plants, micro church leaders, missional communities, and partner not-for-profits; and involve hybrid processes that invest significant relational capital investment that engages leaders both with face-to-face equipping as well as with online

resources and platforms developed both inside the RCA and in collaboration with proven pathway partners.

### *Specific Progress Points*

In particular, the following areas of specific progress are noted:

- The guiding coalition was re-formed and aligned with an emphasis on “in the field” practitioners who connect leaders in conversation that point to the provision content, coaching, and the sharing of proven pathways to help teams move forward in community processes for adaptive change in their context.
- The new discipleship brochure designed, developed, and distributed January 2020 to build awareness of the Transformed & Transforming focus on discipleship and the definition of a disciple as being somebody who looks like Jesus and who does the things that Jesus does. The focus also includes questions of “What is your plan for discipleship?” and “How is that plan working?”
- The majority of the team of 11 are presently (or have in the past) engaged in weekly coaching and preliminary train-the-trainer equipping process as disciple-making coaches.
- 123 connections and conversations with leaders and churches across the RCA have been documented.
- 62 classes have been engaged in the provision of discipleship training gatherings that provide connection and conversations as well as content for the building of a discipling culture in their context.
- 21 leaders have been engaged in coaching, ranging from pilots (eight weeks) to ongoing (weekly) with leaders across the RCA.
- 10 churches have been engaged in learning community processes to initiate forward movement and adaptive change with leaders across the RCA.

### **Current Goals**

- The Transformed & Transforming Guiding Coalition for Discipleship is full and fully functioning with an emphasis on “in the field” practitioners who connect leaders in conversation that point to the provision content, coaching, and the sharing of proven pathways to help teams move forward in community processes for adaptive change in their context.
- Top of Mind awareness delivered of the Transformed & Transforming focus on discipleship and the definition of a disciple as being somebody who looks like Jesus and who does the things that Jesus does.
- Top of Mind awareness delivered of the Transformed & Transforming focus on discipleship and the questions of “What is your plan for discipleship?” and “How is that plan working?”

- Partner Practitioner / Equipping: More than six partner practitioners from across the breadth of the denomination in terms of gender, context, and ethnicity will begin to engage in a multi-year train-the-trainer equipping process as disciple-making coaches and consultants.
- Trial / Connections and Conversations: 350+ connections and conversations with leaders and churches across the RCA.
- Trial / Content: Engage 100+ congregations in classes in the provision of discipleship training gatherings, which provide connection and conversations as well as content for the building of a discipling culture in their context.
- Partner / Coaching: 100+ leaders in coaching ranging from pilot (eight weeks) to ongoing (weekly) with leaders across the RCA.
- Partner / Community and Change: 175+ churches have completed a learning community process to initiate forward movement and adaptive change with leaders across the RCA as categorized below, with all being able to articulate their defined pathway for disciple development and deployment in their context:
  - Leadership: 25
  - Churches Learning Change/Thriving Leaders Thriving Churches/Faithwalking: 65
  - Cultivating Generous Congregations: 10
  - Growing Young: 25
  - 3DMovements (3DM): 35
  - Being a Small Church on a BIG Mission: 10
  - Organic Outreach: 15
  - Congregational Vitality Pathway: 10

## **LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

*Who:* The work of the Leadership Development initiative is guided by a coalition of pastors, regional executives, classis leaders, business entrepreneurs, and marketplace leaders representing different areas of specialized expertise in leadership development. The guiding coalition is led by staff member Sung Kim, who has been in this role (part-time) since November 2018.

*What:* The work of Leadership Development is to catalyze the multiplication of more and better leaders in ways that are smarter and faster than traditional methods of training both emerging and established leaders. Our goal is to develop leaders who demonstrate God-honoring character, emotionally healthy chemistry with others, and uniquely skilled competence where their “deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet” (Buechner).

*Why:* Because great and godly leaders transform the world. They lead teams, departments, and organizations that are more faithful and fruitful in every way. They are “humble, hungry, and smart” (Lencioni). At the same time, they understand that to lead others, you must first lead yourself.

*How:* We aim to accomplish our goal by (1) centralizing the most effective, research-based tools and resources, and (2) decentralizing training and coaching at every level of the denomination, region, classis, and churches in the Reformed Church in America.

## Progress

- Centralizing tools and resources: We've identified and tested some leading tools and resources that we will be using to train and equip churches and leaders.
- Decentralizing training and coaching: We gathered as a new guiding coalition for the first time in September 2019, and we are empowering them to be regional hub leaders to further train and equip local churches and leaders.

## Current Goals

- Curate some of the world's best leadership development resources to train 50 regional executives, classis leaders, and leadership coaches who will then train 5,000 leaders in 500 congregations in four major areas of leadership development:
  - **Micro** (personal leadership)
  - **Meso** (team leadership)
  - **Macro** (organizational leadership)
  - **Multi** (reproducing leadership)

These leaders and congregations will have a clear pathway to develop leaders that is unique to their local vision, calling, and context.

## LOCAL MISSIONAL ENGAGEMENT AND SPECIAL PROJECTS

Local Missional Engagement (LME) helps churches discern what God is doing in their church and in their communities and helps explore ways to bring those things together. LME champions the work of reviving the church's missional imagination. Local mission seeks to equip the church to share the good news of the gospel in word and deed, as individuals and a corporate body. The Local Missional Engagement initiative is led by Eliza Cortés Bast. Eliza also functions as the coordinator of special projects. The LME office also houses a part-time specialist, Eduardo Rodriguez, as well as the part-time coordinator for interreligious relations, Laura Osborne.

## Progress

The focus of this year was to expand the work of local mission to include the interreligious work approved at General Synod 2018. Laura Osborne began her work in July 2019. In addition, Eliza's role expanded to include diverse projects that furthered the work of both local mission and Transformed & Transforming. Collaboration throughout Transformed & Transforming continues as a high priority, and collaborative efforts include the development of platforms to help connect and support congregations and ministries. The LME office committed this year to multiple learning opportunities, as well as better collaboration with the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) and other partners.

Several new partnerships have been cultivated and created, both internally and externally, to maximize the resourcing and initiation of LME work, equipping, and networking for the RCA and for local congregations.

- The RCA has partnered with Wheaton College to provide joint training for an MA in Evangelism and Leadership or an MA in Leading Missional Movements. Students will be

able to learn from practitioner faculty in mission and evangelism, as well as Reformed theology from accredited RCA staff.

- Interreligious Relations works closely with the ecumenical associate, as well as a joint task force with the CRCNA, to further the interreligious dialogue and training.
- LME continues its partnership with Next Generation Engagement to continue embedding missional engagement as part of the faith formation journey. In addition, LME is targeting second- and third-generation Latino and Latina leaders for equipping in ministry leadership.
- Special Projects received a Lilly Endowment to center equipping on healthy congregations doing ministry, furthering the work of innovation in the church. In partnership with the coordinator for Equipping Thriving Congregations, Andrew Bossardet, a learning process will begin in the 2020-2021 year around vitality and innovation.
- LME/Special Projects is also partnering with Church Multiplication, assisting in the process of helping planters of two- to four-year-old church plants identify and apprentice leaders for multiplication.

LME has sought to continue and complete high level learning through the Transformed & Transforming delivery systems, including learning communities, leadership collaboratives, and connection events. In addition, LME has worked to foster a spirit of collaboration among Transformed & Transforming initiatives, embedding missional practice in equipping of leaders and the discipleship process.

- LME and Discipleship have completed their learning community in Illinois.
- A regional model for connection events yielded one event in Central California in early 2019, one in Southwest Michigan in late 2019, with one more scheduled for late winter 2020 in Southern California. Although each regional connection event has a different focus that local leaders have requested, Transformed & Transforming staff have provided integrated teaching and focused workshops as a way of equipping.
- The leadership collaborative around social entrepreneurship with Advocacy was completed, with two registered non-profits birthed from that work.
- The coordinator for interreligious relations, Laura Osborne, has had four connection events with over 100 participants. Laura is also part of five other learning communities, three in partnership with the CRCNA.
- LME facilitated Christian community development space for college students from Northwestern College, hosting them at the annual CCDA conference. Eduardo and AABC coordinator Earl James hosted students and multicultural ministry leaders together for multigenerational connection and learning.
- LME/Special Projects will host a kick-off connection event to begin a learning process in northwest Iowa around immigration reform, and how local economics and faith are impacted by immigration. This work will be done in collaboration with JJ TenClay, the

RCA's coordinator for refugee ministries; the CRCNA; and local community and nonprofit leaders.

- Via video, Eduardo and Eliza participated in a small church learning community in New Jersey, providing video content for local mission on behalf of Thriving Leaders, Thriving Churches.
- The Robben Island Project young leader leadership collaborative will wrap up in April 2020. This pilot initiative is a high contact investment in emerging leaders, combining a contextualized Sankofa experience by a local leader, following with leadership development and faith formation, as well as training in design process. Each young leader develops a contextualized project around race and biblical justice, using principles from design and gaming theory. Coaching is provided between times together, and online content (e.g., TED talks) is available to assist with learning. Six students from four colleges (Hope, Central, Fuller, and Kuyper) entered the process. The three sessions (faith formation, leadership development, and design theory) were taught in Charlottesville, Phoenix, and Ferguson, giving the students perspective on history and white supremacy, immigration reform and border issues, indigenous justice for Native American issues, and perspective from African American leaders on justice.

Special Projects has also worked to create and develop new ways for congregations and members to be equipped for the practical sharing of the gospel that promote an incarnational practice that is rooted in both demonstration and proclamation.

- Special Projects is committed to prioritizing providing online content in 2020-2021 for equipping for Transformed & Transforming. This will include studies and study guides, webinars, podcasts, and more, available to RCA churches.
- Special Projects is also coordinating new resourcing and curated partnerships as part of the Lilly Endowment grant, providing equipping around healthy congregations. This project will focus on resource hubs, located throughout North America, where churches can find specialized support for work with their communities and congregations, as well as core content around innovation. The RCA staff and hub leaders will engage in Phase 1 learning, with an anticipated rollout of Phase 2 in 2021, to local congregations.
- LME, with Faithward, will publish its first interactive, online study for holistic community development.
- LME, with Faithward, will pilot a "table" series, in conjunction with multiple departments and locally sourced community leaders in multiple communities, to engage with neighboring and outreach with food, with Eduardo leading the process.
- Interreligious Relations will partner with Calvin University on an Interfaith Photo study on engaging with your neighbor of another faith.

## **Current Goals**

- To launch an online learning hub, in conjunction with Faithward, that houses congregational and leadership equipping resources. Resourcing will include webinars, studies, work sheets, podcasts, etc., to offer curated and new content for RCA churches and beyond.

- To complete the first phase of training and to establish hub centers for innovation and church mission and health, as supported by the Lilly Endowment grant.
- To coordinate more regional connection events, providing churches with contextualized learning with multiple local leaders and Transformed & Transforming initiative leaders.
- The continuation of Transformed & Transforming delivery systems, providing learning communities and connection events throughout North America, highlighting such timely topics as faith-sharing in multi-religious communities, community development, immigration reform and the church, and more.
- Continued integration of evangelism work with discipleship learning, continuing collaborative work between initiative leaders.
- The coordinator for interreligious relations will continue her work with the CRCNA, co-hosting the second annual Journeys into Friendship collaboration, raising up local leaders to scale the work for our local communities.
- Continued partnership with Next Generation Engagement in embedding missional work and outreach as part of leadership and faith formation.
- The launch of a new learning cohort with Wheaton College in Evangelism and Leadership, and Leading Missional Movements.

## **NEXT GENERATION ENGAGEMENT**

The purpose of Next Generation Engagement is to empower young adults, ministry teams, and congregations to create a culture of intergenerational ministry—that is, all people of all ages serving in leadership positions at the church, classis, and denominational levels. The goal of intergenerational ministry is to reframe the mental model of young people in the church; we are no longer seeking to “keep” these young people in our congregations. Instead, this ministry seeks to empower young leaders and congregations to serve one another into future ministry endeavors. Anna Radcliffe is the coordinator of Next Generation Engagement. She has served in this role for just under two years.

### **Progress**

- In January 2020, we successfully launched another Grand Rapids–based Growing Young cohort in partnership with Fuller Youth Institute. Eight churches committed to this yearlong process. In the first week of February 2020, five churches committed to the process of a Growing Young learning community—a regional-based model that harnesses the expertise of church practitioners and the research and development of the Fuller Youth Institute. Overall, 32 churches have participated in some form of a Growing Young learning model. They will continue this learning model through a network-based approach that involves regular coaching and webinar calls.
- In re-evaluating this goal, intern Brianna Ruiz developed a student leadership process to help raise up students for participating congregations. Brie recruited and expected 15 leaders to participate from different congregations. This model will equip both students and congregations for younger leadership in congregations.

- The Robben Island Project is a student leadership learning process launched in the fall of 2019. This Sankofa-style learning model aims to cultivate three priorities, through three different Sankofa experiences, while developing a robust understanding of design thinking for college students around race and advocacy. These priorities are: healing through storytelling, expansion of capital and resourcing through education, and fostered encouragement through action of developed process/project/product. The feedback responses from the first two Sankofa experiences included: “This has been healing for me,” and “I’ve never told my story before...” An unanticipated but very much beneficial outcome of this project has been the natural impulse to include these young leaders into other leadership and participating avenues of the denomination. One student will attend a Southwest Michigan Classis event to further advocate for Native American awareness in our congregations. Another student is collaborating on grant writing projects targeted to help African Americans with education. An additional student will venture with RCA Global Mission to advocate around border awareness.
- Through the work and support of communications editor Becky Getz and Next Generation specialist Ruth Langkamp, Next Generation Engagement’s online presence has been rebranded from *Restoring You* to *Next Gen*. This newsletter aims to resource and equip all leaders to better work intergenerationally. Our priority is about building awareness around the current state of the church as it relates to youth. Over this past year, this resource has expanded over 400 subscribers. A Next Generation Engagement podcast will launch this coming spring.
- We are re-evaluating the effectiveness of the regional connection events of young leader gatherings as hosted by denominational leaders. There are a few pending events for this coming September, but due to budget constraints, these will continue to be held in a pending status until further clarity has emerged this coming spring.
- Lastly, Next Generation Engagement has moved to deepen our partnership with the CRCNA through many collaborative efforts that include a joint leadership/guiding coalition strategy designed to equip local leaders to advocate for youth and young adults at classis and regional levels. We have begun developing a joint denominational database locating all CRCNA and RCA campus ministries across the U.S. and Canada. We are in the beginning phases of developing a congregational and denominational renewal structure that will elevate the voices of youth and young adults throughout our discerning bodies.

### **Current Goals**

- Over the next five years, Next Generation Engagement will work to establish a joint denominational leadership team with the CRCNA to create a regional, classis, and church-wide advocacy campaign around intergenerational ministry for the purpose of turning over leadership to future generations.
- Next Generation Engagement will establish a binational network of at least 1,000 leaders under 35 who are invested and championing the vitality of the Reformed Church in America through generous support by giving financially, starting new churches, fostering vocational ministry, etc.

- Next Generation Engagement will raise up leaders who are diverse, thriving, and competent. This work will be accomplished through a network of collaboration between youth group development, camp ministry, college, and seminary education.
- Next Generation Engagement will mobilize youth pastors, leaders, volunteers, and children's workers through resourcing and connection on an online learning platform. This platform will offer new disciples strategies, leadership development guides, and other necessary resources by demand.

## **SHORT-TERM MISSION**

The Short-Term Mission initiative (previously known as Volunteer Engagement) is focused on empowering, equipping, and engaging RCA volunteers of all ages in service for Christ through short-term mission opportunities that have a transforming impact on individuals, congregations, and the partner communities in which they serve. We believe that as people serve in short-term mission in the name of Christ, whether in their local community or around the world, that service can have long-term impact on all participants.

This team is focused on supporting congregations and equipping Christians for service with RCA missionaries and mission partners. We work with mission trip leaders and participants throughout the planning process, providing support on-field, and helping ensure effective debriefing and follow-through.

Short-Term Mission is led by Stephanie Soderstrom.

### *Four Areas of Focus*

1. **Mission Trips**  
Working with local, long-term ministries, mission teams can help meet needs, build relationships, and share the hope of Christ. Mission trips are available for teams of all ages.
2. **Disaster Response**  
When disaster strikes, RCA volunteers can help provide much-needed support in the months and years that follow. The RCA partners with World Renew - Disaster Response Services for domestic disaster response in the United States and Canada.
3. **Individual Volunteer Opportunities**  
Opportunities are available for students and adults to serve for a few weeks or up to two years alongside RCA missionaries and partners. The Cultivate program, launched in 2018, provides individual opportunities for young people, ages 18-25, to serve alongside RCA missionaries and mission partners for either a summer or a year.
4. **Church Equipping**  
Working with RCA churches, we will offer resources, training, and equipping processes to help them take their next step in short-term mission. These equipping resources will be available to churches that serve through the RCA and those that do not.

Many RCA churches have been engaged in short-term mission trips for years. Our vision is to become value-added for these churches as well as churches that are new to engaging in short-term mission. Additionally, we will seek to engage individuals, especially the next generation, in

dynamic mission opportunities and internships that allow them to utilize their unique gifts to contribute to the long-term goals of our mission partners.

## **Progress**

RCA Short-Term Mission has engaged 930 volunteers in service with RCA missionaries and mission partners. We have expanded services for specific Global Mission partner sites to include wrap-around services such as trip participant registration, finance management, flight booking, and pre-trip logistics. These services are currently available for trips to our partners in Brazil and South Africa, with plans to include more partners in the future.

A new partnership with Genesis allowed us to work with close to 1,000 students through the service opportunity at Genesis 2020, located in Traverse City, Michigan, March 13-15, 2020.

The Cultivate program has four volunteers starting new service this year and two volunteers continuing yearlong service placements. At this point, three Cultivate volunteers have returned to their placements for additional service opportunities, and one of those is working toward becoming a missionary with RCA Global Mission.

The Next Generation Missional Engagement Fund, during the 2019 calendar year, awarded 85 scholarships, amounting to \$109,237.50 and benefitting 772 young people.

The Short-Term Mission team has also been working to provide new and updated resources for mission trip leaders. This has included a full update of our Short-Term Mission Toolkit. We are also in the process of creating a Youth Mission Trip resource addition, with the help of our guiding coalition.

## **Current Goals**

As we move forward, RCA Short-Term Mission is focused on continuing to support congregations in sending groups and individuals on mission trips. Our goal is to assist as many congregations and individuals as possible in planning mission trips. This will include helping groups and individuals find places to serve, providing equipping resources via an online learning platform, offering coaching calls for trip leaders, and awarding Next Generation Missional Engagement Fund scholarships.

We plan to continue offering wrap-around support for mission trips with specific Global Mission partners and hope to increase that service. We will also recruit young adults for mission service through the Cultivate program.

## **THRIVING LEADERS, THRIVING CHURCHES**

Andy Bossardet has been leading this initiative as the coordinator for equipping thriving congregations since December 2014. Thriving Leaders, Thriving Churches is guided by a coalition of pastors, staff, and regional synod staff. The team's focus is to empower leaders and congregations to take the next faithful step in their ministries, navigating the complexities of leading change. This empowerment is delivered through high-impact coaching, learning communities focused on personal and corporate transformation, support systems for pastors and congregations in transition, and equipping in vision discernment. Some of the major partners for Thriving Leaders, Thriving Churches are the following:

### *Ridder: Churches Learning Change*

Ridder: Churches Learning Change (formerly Ridder Church Renewal) is a partnership of Western Theological Seminary, the RCA, and the Christian Reformed Church in North America that helps leaders develop the tools to confront unhealthy models that hinder personal and congregational growth. Ridder is comprised of two intensive 30-month modules; congregations commit to one module at a time. Each module consists of five retreats, each about six months apart, with coaching and homework between retreats. Participating congregations choose a leadership team of four to six congregants plus the pastor. There are six regional centers in Ridder: Churches Learning Change supporting Modules 1 and 2 (Great Lakes, Mid-America, New York/New Jersey, Heartland, Eastern Canada, and Western Canada). With the end of the Lilly grant that funded the startup of Ridder: Churches Learning Change, the process has morphed into more regionally contextual expressions. Each region has its own leadership team, faculty, and format. A central learning organization, supported by the Reformed Partnership for Church Renewal, collects learning from the regions and provides ongoing training and focus.

### *Congregational Vitality Pathways*

Congregational Vitality Pathways (CVP) is a tool created by the Evangelical Covenant Church and utilized by the Far West Region to help congregations discern and live into God's vision for their church. Health and vitality are measured by ten markers. CVP uses assessment tools, events, and an empowered vitality team to help a congregation move toward its goals. RCA congregations engaging with CVP are intended to do so in a learning community format.

### **Progress**

2019-2020 was the year of the small church initiative, which resulted from a General Synod proposal in 2018. Much of the initiative's energy was working with the guiding coalition to generate a process for encouraging congregations worshiping around 75 people (the average in the U.S. and Canada). Communities were launched in New Jersey, Canada, and around the Regional Synod of Mid-America. Special events were held with California and Central Plains Classes. Pastors and lay leaders have reported feeling encouraged and hopeful, while also achieving goals designed to help the church sustainably increase its "ministry capacity," to borrow a term from Karl Vaters.

The First Call program also saw its first expansion. With leadership of the Albany group passed successfully along to Lindsey DeKruif, there was more energy to give to an emerging partnership with the Regional Synod of the Heartland. At the time of the writing of this report, there is recruitment happening for this two-year learning community. However, it will have launched by the time General Synod 2020 happens.

A new opportunity came up in the form of a Lilly Grant for Thriving Congregations. Thriving Leaders, Thriving Churches partnered with the Office of Special Projects to successfully write a \$1 million grant proposal to help foster innovation based on Christian practices. We look forward to rolling out this grant over the next three years.

Another new opportunity has been the Reformed Partnership for Congregational Renewal, which is funded by a grant from the DeVos Foundation. Now called Vibrant Congregations, the third space organization is designed to help congregations discern their next step in ministry, which may include RCA and CRCNA initiatives. (See the very end of this monitoring report for

more information on Vibrant Congregations.) The RCA and CRCNA gave staff time to help shape this organization, which has now launched under the leadership of Larry Doornbos.

Finally, Andy is a new student at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in the Doctor of Ministry program in Christian Spirituality. His focus of study is the relationship of trauma to spiritual practices, and he will be integrating this work into the overall equipping process of Transformed & Transforming.

### **Current Goals**

In 2020-2021, we will be continuing the forward momentum of 2019-2020. The work around small (or normal-sized) congregations will continue in California with one learning community. The work in the Heartland with new pastors will continue through a leadership collaborative and the ongoing process of empowering local leadership for that work. The Lilly grant will result, at this point, in at least three learning centers in the RCA. Thriving Leaders, Thriving Churches will be taking a great deal of leadership in facilitating those three hubs and connecting ministry leaders with amazing content providers and trainers. Lastly, spiritual directors will be lifted up through Transformed & Transforming. In difficult times, listening for the voice of God can be challenging amid the noise of fear, pain, and anger. Providing this resource will serve all of us.

### **WOMEN'S TRANSFORMATION AND LEADERSHIP**

Women's Transformation and Leadership has been established as part of Transformed & Transforming to help the Reformed Church in America pursue a vision for the full inclusion of women's gifts and influence in all areas of the church and beyond. Liz Testa leads the Women's Transformation and Leadership team. Lorraine Parker serves as part-time administrative partner, and Lesley Mazzotta is the part-time education and facilitation specialist. A cross-sector group of RCA leaders serves as the guiding coalition and as regional facilitators for Women's Transformation and Leadership, helping to champion the mission, create and lead new processes, and provide critical insights and advisement.

As part of Transformed and Transforming "2.0," our guiding coalition is embracing a Holy Spirit-given vision to go "deep and wide." We are deepening engagement and resources within our ministry initiative, and at the same time, expanding our ministry to engage with other Transformed & Transforming initiatives, RCA Global Mission, and ecumenical partners. This multiplies and strengthens our commitment to encourage, equip, and empower women and girls of all generations, geographical, and cultural contexts to experience Christ-centered transformation, develop leadership skills, and live vibrantly into their God-given gifts and callings as they, in turn, invite others to do the same (disciples who make disciples). An essential component of this endeavor is that we come alongside congregations as they seek to welcome the gifts that women bring and invest in healthy, flourishing ministry partnerships between men and women. By doing so, we usher in a vision of God's reign where brothers and sisters serve together to build and strengthen the body of Christ for mission in the world. Indeed, we are better, together.

Women's Transformation and Leadership lives out its vision by:

- Ensuring all women have barrier-free access to RCA resources and opportunities.

- Celebrating the rich history of women in the RCA, past and present, through the “RCA Women: A Legacy of Leadership” booklet, women’s Sankofa journeys, and the She Is Called campaign.
- Being an innovation incubator for new ideas, such as the She Is Called/Ella es Llamada social media campaign and the We Are Speaking call to action statement.
- Encouraging and equipping women through regional connection events, such as the newly launched Rekindle: Sisterships in Mission gatherings as well as the Honoring Our Stories transformational story-sharing process.
- Equipping congregations and other contexts to welcome the gifts women bring and to nurture thriving ministry partnerships between men and women through Building God’s Church Together, a process which includes workshops, webinars, coaching, and Bible studies to support leaders in understanding how to lead gracious, intentional change, address inequities, and create healthier ministry environments.
- Supporting established and emerging female leaders through our She Is Called leadership collaboratives (currently available in English and Spanish) as well as the newly forming She Is Called Women’s Network, which helps create pathways for women to be better connected and have access to opportunities for transformation and leadership.
- Offering global mission experiences that are women-focused. Trips to Oman, Israel/Palestine, Italy, and South Africa have been taken so far.
- Providing tuition assistance to part and full time, in-residence and distance learner female seminarians through the historic Beth E. Marcus Scholarship Fund.
- Connecting virtually through Facebook groups, other social media, and a quarterly e-newsletter.
- Curating a dynamic web resource featuring blogs by women; historical, biblical, and theological support about women in ministry; and practical tools for men and women to thrive together in ministry.
- Collaborating with RCA seminaries, the Commission for Women and other commissions, other Transformed & Transforming initiatives, and GSC staff to empower women in ministry and intentionally include their gifts, influence, and leadership in our assemblies.
- Helping to create lasting change via the We Are Speaking statement, a call to the church to end harassment, abuse, and sexual violence against women and girls (and others), in partnership with Local Missional Engagement.

## **Progress and Future Goals**

### *Connection Events for She Is Called and Building God’s Church Together*

- Chicagoland Honoring Our Stories Retreat, co-hosted with Jewel Willis Thomas, Marge Vander Wagen, and Caryn Baham, Christ Community Church, Lemont, Illinois (Oct. 5)

- Pacific Northwest Honoring Our Stories Retreat, co-hosted by Ruth Norman and retreat planning team, First Reformed Church, Lynden, Washington (Oct. 18–19)
- Rekindle inaugural gathering, South Orange, New Jersey, highlighting the Setshabelo Project, co-hosted with Denise Kingdom Grier (Oct. 25)
- Rekindle gathering, focus on Advent Hope and Longing, hosted with Marcia Bosma and local clergy small group, Zeeland, Michigan (Dec. 6)
- Canoeing the Mountains, GLRS, Building God’s Church Together Workshop with Rob Dixon, Corinth Reformed Church, Byron Center, Michigan (Dec. 7)
- Northwestern College, Building God’s Church Together/She Is Called chapel preaching and student, faculty, and staff meetings, organized by Mark DeYounge, Barb DeWald and Cambria Kaltwasser, led by Liz Testa with Tim Breen, Orange City, Iowa (Jan. 14)
- NYC-based women’s dinner and regional event welcoming mission partner Keabetsoe Sekoboto of South Africa, co-hosted with the Classis of New York and African American Black Council North East (Jan. 24 and 26)
- Rekindle gathering, New York City, celebrating women serving locally and globally, co-hosted with Patricia Johnson, Marilyn Correa, and NYC leadership collaborative cohort (March 3)
- Ella es Llamada Estudio Biblico, Iglesia Lincoln Avenue, Pomona, California, hosted with Anyaly Alonso and Maribel Romero (March 20)
- Fourth Annual Women’s Stories Day: The Courage to be Honest, sponsored in partnership with James Brumm, Reformed Church Center, New Brunswick Theological Seminary (March 21)
- She Is Called Lenten Worship Series, The R.O.C.K, Los Angeles, California (March 22)
- Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics XXXV Crossroads Retreat, organized by Claudette Reid and team – 4/17-18
- Hudson Valley Honoring our Stories Retreat, organized by Virginia Young and team, co-facilitated with Alisha Riepma (April 24–26)
- Honoring our Stories retreat (in development), Japanese American Union Church, New York City (Spring 2020)

The following one-year She Is Called/Ella Es Llamada leadership collaboratives and “prequel” ten-week mini-collaboratives have taken place; we anticipate new cohorts will launch from these:

- Midland Reformed Church, Midland, Michigan, cohort led by Cheryl Heal (completing Feb. 2020)
  - A third generation congregational cohort and a clergy cohort are being considered as a next step

- NYC area multicultural cohort led by Marilyn Correa and Lesley Mazzotta (completing March 2020)
  - Two to three third-generation congregational expected to emerge from the six congregations represented
- Regional Synod of Canada cohort led by Jennifer Lucking (completing May 2020)
  - Second generation “Ela é Chamada” cohort expected to emerge, led by Graziela Segovia in Portuguese
- Central Plains Classis cohort led by Andrea Godwin (launched Oct. 2019)
- Chicagoland cohort led by Jewel Willis Thomas (launched Jan. 2020)
- Pacific Northwest cohort in development (launching spring 2020)
- West Michigan cohort in development to be led by Marcia Bosma (launching Sept. 2020)
- “Prequel” ten-week mini-collaborative is piloting in Arizona in Spanish, developed and led by Karla Camacho and Asbei Sonia Loera Castro (launched Feb. 2020)

#### *She Is Called Global Mission Experiences*

- She Is Called: Holy Land took place November 6–17, 2019. This biblical and current women’s stories trip, in partnership with Sally and Josh Vis and biblical scholar Dustyn Keepers, took 20 women and men on a journey across Israel and Palestine. Travelers have brought back the passions stirred up in them and are sharing their learnings with their congregations. This trip is a “multiplier” experience, building on an initial 2016 trip with RCA ministers Dustyn Keepers and Megan Hodgkin.
- Mission 2020 wrap up
  - Lorraine Parker and Liz Testa attended and had collaborative meetings with En Young Kim, Gerri Yoshida and CPAAM executive committee women, Deepika Srivastava and Velore Christian Medical College staff, and Bob Oliveira, and learned the stories of and offered encouragement to women missionaries/mission partners in attendance.
  - She Is Called theme rose up on Saturday as emcees Denise Kingdom Grier and Lindsay Small wore their #SheisCalled T-shirts.
- Explore new opportunities
  - Nicaragua with the general secretary, Dec. 2020
  - Brazil with Bob Oliveira, Lia and Thiago Dantas, 2021
  - She Is Called Holy Land “multiplier” trip, 2021

#### *She Is Called Women’s Network*

- Women encouraging women - Rekindle: Sisterships in Mission gatherings and mini-collaborative virtual small group offerings
- Develop pathways for women to have access to leadership development and ministry opportunities that include mentoring, coaching, sponsoring, and spiritual direction from

women and male allies, in partnership with Transformed & Transforming initiatives Next Generation Engagement and Thriving Leaders, Thriving Churches, RCA Ministry Services, regional synods, classes, and seminaries and MFCA.

- Enhanced Facebook page and Instagram presence that celebrates biblical and RCA women's gifts, callings and ministries, curated by April Fiet and Alisha Riepma. Podcast in development, in collaboration with Transformed & Transforming special projects.
- Honoring the women who came before, honoring our rich history so we can move bravely and nimbly forward via the Legacy of Leadership booklet being updated for General Synod 2020; 16–18 new women being added from across the RCA.
- Newest T-shirt debuted for She Is Called Holy Land trip; new design initiated by Lauralyn Vasquez, and biblical names chosen by other guiding coalition members.
- Building God's Church Together #ShelsCalled Giving Circle - honoring the legacy of women and building a strong future, campaign to launch in 2020, supporting Women's Transformation and Leadership via the RCA Ministry Fund. Partnering with Michele Quick, Grace Ruiter, and Laura De Vries.

#### *Building God's Church Together #ShelsCalled Bible Study: three-volume series*

- April Fiet, editor; Travis West, advisory board chair; written by a diverse group of RCA and ecumenical pastors and scholars.
- Takes biblical women's stories deeper, creating a study for everyone, not just women. Meets a need in the church for fresh, accessible studies for all.
- First volume in production and will be released in advance of Women in Ministry Sunday, May 17, 2020.
- This series is a companion to the four-part BGCT study that is being used in many churches and is helping congregations embrace women and men serving together in healthier, vibrant ways.

#### *We Are Speaking*

- Ongoing response to General Synod recommendations and the brave work unfolding across the RCA.
- Online worship resources launched in the fall of 2019.
- We Are Speaking Sunday: date in development but will be in the fall of 2020.
- Collaborating with Commission for Women as they focus on domestic violence resources to be shared at General Synod 2020.

#### *Intentional Focus on the Multicultural Future Freed from Racism*

- Native American ministries, ongoing 2019–2020: retreats and video conferences on story sharing and dismantling unconscious bias, done in partnership with Next

Generation Engagement and Global Mission. Team leader is Lesley Mazzotta, working closely with Anna Radcliffe and Luis Ruiz.

- Guiding Coalitions meeting, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Sept. 2019: Unconscious Bias prework training webinars led by Lesley Mazzotta and Rob Dixon.
- Leading the development of an equity-based hospitality framework for Transformed & Transforming that will help us to embed cultural agility around gender, race/ethnicity, generations, and disabilities into our initiative areas and leadership. Team includes Terry DeYoung, Earl James, and Stephanie Soderstrom.

## **VIBRANT CONGREGATIONS**

*Note: Vibrant Congregations is a joint ministry of the RCA and CRCNA.*

Vibrant Congregations is a relatively new work. Its first full time director, Larry Doornbos, was appointed in November 2019. He is presently the only full-time employee but receives assistance in his work from staff at both the RCA and CRCNA.

Vibrant Congregations exists to help congregations take fresh steps in ministry and mission. We invite congregations into a hopeful and welcoming space where they can discern a pathway to God's given future. In this space, they find hope rooted in God's will for their congregation.

We also provide behind-the-scenes research and work to make this possible.

Central to this work is taking a congregation through a discernment process to discover the best partner to journey with them to God's given future. This is done through the Vibrancy Pathway and its Pray.Discern.Pursue process:

## Vibrancy Pathway

Pray.Discern.Pursue

Discernment Prayer —  
- Congregation  
- Outside prayer team

Five Fold Discernment —  
- Leadership Readiness  
- Listening to God in Scripture  
- Listening to the Congregation  
- Life Cycle  
- Discernment Tool

— Pursue Appropriate Pathway

### \*CSI<sup>3</sup> Measures

If the congregation goes down a fresh steps in ministry and mission pathway we would look at measures to discern their success. Presently Vibrant Congregation is exploring CSI<sup>3</sup> measures:

- \*Congregational Growth: new people are received into the faith community and there is financial stability
- Sending Capacity: The ability of a church to plant a new congregation or join with others to plant either locally or internationally
- Institutional Growth: the church is stronger as an institution and interacts with its community and other institutions in healthy ways
- Individual Growth: each member is growing in being a passionate follower of Jesus
- Incarnational Growth: each member impacts every sphere of society they are in with the full orb ed gospel

Vibrant Congregations typically connects churches to outside organizations (e.g., Ridder: Churches Learning Change, Center for Church Renewal, Vibrancy Pathway) to pursue their appropriate pathway.

Behind the scenes, Vibrant Congregations works to connect partner organizations to each other in order to learn, to grow, and be strengthened in our work with congregations. It also sets tables of conversation. These tables are around critical issues such as leadership for renewal. At these tables, Vibrant Congregations will draw on people from both the RCA and CRCNA to learn how to better empower churches and their leaders for their fresh steps.

### Progress

- Appointment of full time director.
- A discernment instrument for congregations is in process and will be ready for all congregations by June 1, 2020.
- Name change to be more congregation focused from “Reformed Partnership for Congregational Renewal” to “Vibrant Congregations.”
- Building relationships with approximately 20 organizations that can help congregations take fresh steps in ministry and mission in a variety of ways.
- Putting in place Vibrant Congregations’ web and social media presence; this should be accomplished by mid-March (the Facebook page is already launched).

- Joining with a number of partners to sponsor “Church Next: Doing Church in a Rapidly Changing World” at Pillar Church (Holland, Michigan) this summer (June 10–11); Ed Stetzer is the keynote speaker.
- Exploring the kind of leadership that is necessary for churches to do well in pursuing renewal.
- In the beginning steps of working with Classis Red Mesa (CRCNA), a Native American classis, to discover best ways to pursue fresh steps in a non-Anglo culture.
- We are in the beginning steps of creating a prayer network to pray for and with congregations discerning their pathway to God’s given future.

Visit us on Facebook @VibrantCongregations.