

Report of the General Synod Council on Multiplication

POLICY WORDING

The RCA will foster a sustainable movement of church multiplication through starting new congregations and equipping church planters both locally and globally.

GENERAL SECRETARY'S INTERPRETATION

New churches—micro churches, fresh expressions, missional communities—reach new people in new ways with the good news of Jesus Christ. The commitment of the RCA is to start new churches that further the gospel, reaching the spiritually disconnected, bringing them into fellowship, and introducing them to the God of grace who transforms lives and eternities.

An environment for church multiplication is created through an intentional system and process. It begins with prayer and empowering through the Holy Spirit. It grows as new leaders are called and developed and emerge. It is built on a solid foundation of assessment and evaluation of church planters and church planting locations, then strengthened through training and equipping. It is life-giving in the ongoing ministry of church planters and new churches in providing coaching relationships and networks of planters for learning, support, and accountability. It expands as new churches reproduce, and healthy, parenting churches catch a vision to partner and multiply in the starting of additional new churches.

The benchmarks for new churches are to see a newly planted church become:

- Self-sustaining in being able to support the cost of ministry for that congregation.
- Self-governing in being able to produce and provide spiritual leadership capable of being discerning, giving direction and conduction discipline.
- Self-propagating in being able to reproduce new followers of Jesus Christ, new ministries, and additional new church starts.

A sustainable church multiplication system is developed in partnership with the assemblies within the RCA. The General Synod Council (GSC), regional synods, classes, and consistories work cooperatively and collaboratively to start new churches and to provide a resourced system that is capable of raising new church planters and launching new congregations.

CHURCH MULTIPLICATION

Planting new churches is the most effective way to make new disciples and fulfill the Great Commission. This has continued to be true since the first-century apostolic expansion of the church. Therefore, the Church Multiplication team is devoted to planting 1,000 new churches by 2038 with the desired outcome of making 100,000 new disciples of Jesus Christ.

To accomplish this goal, we work with classis and regional synod teams, and more recently, international partners, equipping them to start new churches. Strategic partnerships are being formed to increase our capacity to plant an average of 50 churches per year, or one every week.

Church Multiplication team members are Mike Hayes, church multiplication catalyst; Tricia Leistra, operations manager; Dawn Muller, administrative assistant; Tim Vink, senior church multiplication catalyst; and Randy Weener, director of Church Multiplication.

Progress

To increase the effectiveness and efficiency of our planting systems and reduce costs, we have formed partnerships with organizations who specialize in planter assessment, training, fundraising, and project management. Other partners assist us with background checks, psychological assessments, and marriage evaluations. These strategic partnerships provide increased capacity, specialized services, access to more resources, financial savings, and real-time deliverables anywhere around the world.

During this past year, we also developed three lanes for church planting, recognizing that no longer does one size fit all. While we will continue to start classic church plants that will be led by a full-time pastor with an eventual facility and typical programming, other strategies are also emerging and they require different leaders, training, and resources.

A second lane represents plants that are likely to start larger and become self-supporting and self-governed more quickly. Often these plants are seeded with a large core group from a sending church, have access to multiple resources, and are located in a setting that is ripe for rapid growth.

The third lane is being built for fresh expressions of the church. While they are new models in the twenty-first century, they look much like church plants in the first century. Typically, these are smaller, nimbler churches that fit into the nooks and crannies of society not often reached by other churches. They are led by co-vocational or volunteer leaders who also are called to work in the marketplace. They meet in apartment community rooms, restaurants, living rooms, and a variety of other settings. The focus is on mission, community, and more informal worship. In particular, fresh expressions are forming with immigrant groups and in rural villages and urban centers. They often address the uniqueness of specific subcultures: those presently or previously incarcerated, those living in a particular neighborhood or apartment complex, those in recovery, for example.

Our multiple partnerships referenced above reflect the unique needs of these three lanes.

During the past year, we have also made advances in international planting. This is a new arena for us in partnership with RCA Global Mission. In January, we hosted the All Nations Summit prior to Mission 2020 with 11 planters from all over the world. We celebrated what God is doing, especially in the Southern Hemisphere, and discussed ways for the church in the north to be influenced, challenged, trained, and inspired by these new partners. We were encouraged to see planting coming from everywhere and going everywhere. While we have partnered with the Presbyterian Church in Manaus, Brazil, to plant churches in the Amazon, they are now helping us plant Portugese-speaking churches in Florida, and exploration has begun to plant churches together in Portugal. Planters have come to North America and now those planters are becoming liaisons for us to plant in their home countries in South America, the Caribbean, and Nepal. New efforts are being explored in Europe as well.

In March, we hosted our annual Hispanic Summit with over 80 people attending a conference specifically addressing the needs and opportunities for church planting within Hispanic culture.

Research by the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) has revealed the stresses and strains that planting is placing on planter families. In August, our two denominations hosted a gathering of planter spouses to explore ways to better support them

and their families. A task force has been formed to proactively address these concerns in an ongoing fashion.

Since General Synod 2019, we approved new congregation plans (NCPs) for seven new congregations all over North America.

Current Goals

- Celebrate 50 new churches around the world
- Fully function within our new lanes, systems, and partnerships
- Help classes who are not actively planting churches develop vision, strategy, and resources
- Change from a fishing to farming model of planter recruitment; develop more future planters from our existing plants and congregations
- Facilitate fresh expressions of the church in a variety of new contexts
- Recruit and train more coaches, planters, and sending churches
- Implement models for apprenticeships, internships, and residencies
- Mobilize prayer
- Improve and expand communications: share our resources better, share our stories better, share ways to support church planting that are within reach of any church

PRAYER MOBILIZATION

Jim Harrison serves as coordinator for prayer mobilization, a newly launched position in March 2019 on a half-time basis. He serves the Reformed Church in America denominationally and ecumenically in matters related to the prayer life of the RCA. As a member of the GSC staff, the coordinator for prayer mobilization works to assist the RCA in moving from being churches who pray together during worship services to churches who have trained and empowered intercessory teams meeting during days of the week and able to minister in effective prayer for healing, deliverance, and guidance through the Holy Spirit.

Progress

- Personal interviews were initially conducted to determine both strengths and vulnerabilities of prayer ministries in a number of RCA congregations. While some congregations currently have thriving prayer and healing ministries, a majority of RCA churches are significantly lacking in intercessory prayer teams that know how to pray outside the limited sphere of Sunday worship services.
- Prayer equipping seminars and workshops are being developed for churches, classes, and special events, such as the Hispanic summit. Conferences such as “Growing the Church in the Power of the Holy Spirit” and “Empowered for Witness” are being offered and promoted.

- Joined with classis leaders in the Classis of Southwest Michigan on a prayer strategy called “Furnace Prayer,” which involves every other week onsite visits with pastors and key congregational leaders at the local setting for intercession and strategic spiritual warfare. The team of intercessors is comprised of members from several different congregations and visit churches within the classis on an invitation basis.
- Partnered with an RCA and CRCNA “Strategic Prayer and Empowerment Team” comprised of a dozen prophetic intercessors and equipping leaders for Holy Spirit-empowered ministry in the churches.
- Weekly gatherings for prayer and worship are being coordinated for RCA staff in the Michigan Regional Center, with ongoing efforts to expand this to include other RCA offices.
- Weekly conference prayer calls were launched in October 2019 for RCA church planters across North America.
- An online Facebook prayer page called “RCA Prayer Community” was created in May 2019 to foster greater prayer support for requested needs within the RCA.
- Prayer resources for RCA churches and members are being posted online (e.g., Listening Prayer for God’s Guidance on Faithward.org) and articles published (e.g., “How to Hear the Voice of God” in the winter 2020 edition of *RCA Today*).
- Prayer is being mobilized for General Synod with supportive ministry to delegates during General Synod meetings. “Operation Prayer Mobilization” will include online sign up for massive prayer coverage for General Synod in June 2020.

Current Goals

- Create a prayer mobilization guiding coalition to provide wisdom and assistance toward the long-term goal of mobilizing dynamic prayer ministry in hundreds of RCA congregations, raising up and empowering intercessory prayer teams who are able to minister in effective prayer for healing, deliverance, and guidance through the Holy Spirit. This guiding coalition will be composed of three to five prayer practitioners from RCA congregations and will be facilitated by Jim Harrison.
- Partner with six diverse local churches in the RCA willing to serve as a test pilot for prayer mobilization initiatives at the ground level.
- Offer four prayer equipping workshops for RCA churches, and initiate prayer coaching for RCA seminary students.
- Building off the momentum of Mission 2020, provide increased prayer support for RCA Global Mission missionaries and projects, including creating a platform for RCA missionaries to connect and pray for each other.