

Report of the Commission on Christian Worship

The commission last met in person on February 7–9, 2020, in Phoenix, Arizona, just as word of the pandemic reaching the continent was hitting the news. Since that time, the commission has met on October 22, 2020, and January 21, 2021, via Zoom, and has held a collaborative meeting with representatives from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship digitally on April 28, 2021.

Prior to the pandemic, the commission was working on two items which did not lose their significance but rather lost their prominence as things around the RCA and the world changed quickly and dramatically. Prior to General Synod 2020, the commission was planning on sharing with the denomination guidelines to help make the Lord's Table more welcoming, especially to those with gluten sensitivities or intolerance. The questions shifted to: is taking the sacrament even possible virtually? And then, how do congregations prepare and share the elements in ways that minimize risk of infection? The commission decided it was best to wait on releasing these guidelines. This work continues, and the hope is to provide more on this topic to General Synod 2022.

The commission has been working at analyzing and drawing helpful insights from the two-denomination-wide survey (Reformed Church in America [RCA] and Christian Reformed Church in North America) on worship which was completed in 2019. An overview and initial impressions were presented at General Synod 2019 with the intention of continued integration of this data into our work over the coming year. While the data is still valid and helpful, every single congregation within the RCA has had their worship impacted in ways that could not have been foreseen. The results of the survey are not invalidated, but the realities in the congregations of the RCA are now very different.

While the number of congregations that have an online way for people to connect with their worship service has increased to levels which would have been unfathomable two years ago, it is not clear what practices and patterns will be adopted long term. However, the worship within the congregations of the RCA remains central in the lives of the congregations and is a unifying element within the RCA.

An example of this unity can be seen in the celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper throughout the RCA. The vast majority of congregations come to the table at least once a month, and a reassuring 90 percent base their observance on the RCA liturgy (many word-for-word, and many with adaption to fit their context). As a commission, we desire to support unity within our worship, while recognizing the different cultures, histories, and styles within our denomination which seek to disciple an ever-widening diversity of people loved by God.

Thank you

The commission expresses gratitude to Lisa Hansen and Robert Fretz for their service on the commission. Additionally, we are grateful for Ricardo Velazquez, who served as our staff person for almost two years and provided a helpful perspective and a wonderful servant's heart, and before that, Dann Stouten, for his years of service to the commission.