Report of the General Synod Council on Church Multiplication

Note: General Synod Council ministry reports contain updates and progress reported to the General Synod Council in March 2021 for the calendar year 2020. 2021 updates and progress will be reflected in next year’s report.

POLICY WORDING

The Reformed Church in America (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. 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 conducting 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.

The Church Multiplication staff team consists of Mike Hayes, church multiplication catalyst; Tricia Leistra, operations manager; Dawn Muller, administrative assistant; and Randy Weener, director of Church Multiplication.

**Progress**

- Reducing expenses by restructuring plant grants.
- Strengthening our investment by providing psychological and marriage evaluations for the planter and spouse as well as a project management app.
- Expanding the donor base.
- Connecting: an RCA Women Planters online group meets monthly for prayer, encouragement, and sharing resources. The RCA has more than 20 women planters at present.
- Stimulating new plants:
  - Locally Grown is a hybrid digital and in-person cohort to identify and train the next generation of church planters from within church plants that are between two and five years old. Eight planters are going through the process.
  - To stimulate Fresh Expressions of church ([freshexpressionsus.org](http://freshexpressionsus.org)), Church Multiplication has hosted an introductory webinar and vision days in both English and Spanish in conjunction with the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA). In addition, 14 churches are in learning cohorts that we anticipate will lead to new Fresh Expressions of church.
  - Church Multiplication has hosted informational seminars with students and faculty at Western Theological Seminary and New Brunswick Theological Seminary.
  - Three phygital (physical + digital) plants are being launched.
  - Twenty-six domestic New Congregation Plans (NCPs) were approved from January to December 2020. Another nine NCPs received approval between General Synod 2019 and the end of 2019.
- Expanding communication:
  - Weekly news and resources communications are sent to planters.
  - Monthly news and resources communications are distributed to sending churches, classis multiplication teams, stated clerks, and other planting catalysts.
  - In January and February 2021, church planting was spotlighted in RCA communication as part of an evangelism communication focus.
  - The RCA website is being updated with current information and resources related to church planting.
- Celebrating the expanding diversity of recent plants:
  - Since October 2019, 35 domestic NCPs have been approved. Eighty-three percent of these plants (29 of the 35 total) are led by planters of color.
  - We are adding people of color to our church multiplication teams and task forces.
- Planting internationally:
  - Through our partner Jibit Asha in Nepal, 34 new churches have been planted and another 72 apprentices are being trained. RCA Church Multiplication provided training equipment.
Seven new pastors were commissioned in the Dominican Republic to plant churches. RCA Church Multiplication provided planter assessments and is making training material available.

Goals

- Develop strategic, sustainable funding sources for planting, including business-as-ministry and co-vocational models.
- Empower sending churches and planters of color by creating places for them to influence the RCA’s future.
- Advance Fresh Expressions of the church:
  - 25 per year toward our goal of 200 in 8 years.
  - Increase disciple-making focus to the third and fourth generation of disciples.
- Advance prayer for and by planters.
- Protect the well-being of planters and their families amid the stresses, risks, and isolation of church planting.