

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 other, 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, and 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.

OVERVIEW

Transformed & Transforming is part of the RCA's 15-year strategic initiative to equip RCA congregations in discipleship, leadership, mission, and next generation engagement. The chief operating officer is responsible for the oversight of this team. The following ministry areas are included in this report: Discipleship, Leadership Development, Next Generation Engagement, Disability Concerns, Women's Transformation and Leadership, Local Missional Engagement

and Strategic Ministry Initiatives, and Interreligious Relations. In 2021, the Transformed & Transforming team fulfilled its ninth year of service to the RCA.

Shifts

This year, General Synod Council (GSC) staff work around Transformed & Transforming experienced multiple shifts that continued to shape and re-shape its identity within the RCA. On top of the challenges and impact of Covid-19 and the impact of decisions made at General Synod 2021, the way that staff have been structured around Transformed & Transforming was reviewed as part of the general secretary's plan to reorganize the GSC denominational staff. This resulted in three key shifts:

- Rev. Dr. Jill Ver Steeg was transferred to a new leadership role, chief advancement officer, at the end of summer 2021, and Rev. Sung Kim was appointed as the new chief operating officer (COO) and leader for equipping, including oversight of Transformed & Transforming.
- The Office of Advocacy and Race Relations was formed, moving the advocacy work out of Transformed & Transforming and into a new, dedicated department. Women's Transformation and Leadership (particularly the equity-based hospitality work), Disability Concerns, and Advocacy were moved into this new department. The idea was that the Office of Advocacy and Race Relations would focus more heavily on advocacy work, while the Transformed & Transforming team would continue to focus more heavily on equipping work.
- Short-Term Mission (led by Stephanie Soderstrom) was moved to Global Mission, as a means of better integrating mission experiences and best practices.

As this report covers calendar year 2021, it will include information for Disability Concerns as well as Women's Transformation and Leadership, particularly in their work focused on congregational equipping. Short-Term Mission is included in the Global Mission report in this reporting cycle.

In the spring of 2021, Jill Ver Steeg and Eliza Cortés Bast conducted listening sessions with available regional synods to discern the observed and expressed needs of the ministers in their region. Many regional synod executives hosted space either via email or facilitated Zoom sessions for these two GSC staff members to hear the needs of ministers and local leaders. Heard in those conversations was the need for additional sabbath and mental health resources for ministers, the need for training on adaptive leadership and innovation processes, the pain of mid-pandemic challenges, the desire for advocacy and anti-racism avenues, the fear of churches not being able to sustain and remain open beyond the pandemic, and the need for resources for ongoing next generation work. Jill and Eliza are grateful for the concerns, stories, and celebrations that many church, classis, and regional leaders shared with them. In spite of their concerns for the future of the RCA, local leaders were both vulnerable and hopeful.

To that end, Jill committed to the following explorations: promoting a common space for advocacy work to live and flourish and developing even more nimble and responsive ways for the Transformed & Transforming team to provide quality services for both the present and future RCA. Within those explorations lived the general secretary's commitment to more integrated equipping models within the staff structure, with an emphasis on providing increased opportunities for deeper discipleship that leads to flourishing ministry and churches.

In the summer of 2021, Peter Watts was named the director of Advocacy and Race Relations, with the work of Women’s Transformation and Leadership and Disability Concerns under its purview. (Reporting around his work falls under the ends policy titled Multiracial and Multicultural Future Freed from Racism.) In September 2021, Sung Kim transitioned from coordinator of Leadership Development to the role of COO for the GSC staff, which includes oversight of Transformed & Transforming work. He has been working with general secretary Eddy Alemán, Peter Watts, and Randy Weener, director of Church Multiplication, to craft a new structure for the work of Transformed & Transforming in the future.

Goals for 2022

As part of the ongoing Transformed & Transforming goal mandated by General Synod, as well as general secretary Eddy Alemán’s commitment to a restructured staff, Sung Kim will initiate a new integrated vision for equipping in 2022 and beyond. This new structure will honor both the spirit and goals of Transformed & Transforming, while also embracing the Spirit’s movement toward a new global future for the RCA. Sung will work closely with Church Multiplication and Global Mission staff to house a new center for global leadership and ministry. This center will offer training for discipleship, leadership, mission, and next generation engagement, as well as holistic discipleship work for church planting locally and around the world.

SPECIFIC MINISTRY REPORTS

The rest of this report contains more detailed reporting on individual ministry areas housed under Transformed & Transforming for the 2021 calendar year.

Disability Concerns

The vision of RCA Disability Concerns is to welcome and engage the gifts of all people in Christ’s ministry, becoming fully welcoming, inclusive churches where everybody belongs and everybody serves. This is a bold and compelling vision that aligns with Scripture: God’s reign as 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 about disability require even greater transformation. Ministries to and for people with disabilities are grounded in compassion, but such ministries are called then to mature into ministries with and by people with disabilities, recognizing everyone has gifts to serve the purposes of God’s kingdom mission. True belonging and the transformation that God seeks will be realized only when everybody belongs and everybody serves, regardless of ability.

A covenant with CRC Disability Concerns between the governing boards of the RCA and the Christian Reformed Church (CRC)—in place since 2009—has multiplied effectiveness and continues to deepen ministry impact in both denominations and beyond, welcoming all the partners that God provides. The Disability Concerns partnership models how the RCA and CRC can serve collaboratively and in mutually interdependent ways to do more together than they could accomplish independently, while also leveraging fiscal and programmatic efficiencies. In December 2021, Mark Stephenson retired from his role as director of CRC Disability Concerns after 16 years. He was instrumental in helping to forge the CRC-RCA Disability Concerns working agreement in 2009 that remains in place. A testimony to the value of the Disability Concerns partnership was the invitation extended by CRC executives for RCA

Disability Concerns coordinator Terry DeYoung to be the lone non-CRC member on the committee to select Stephenson's successor, Lindsay Wieland Capel. A licensed master social worker with a background in mental health, Capel has several years of experience as a disability advocate in the CRC and as a longtime member of the RCA-CRC Disability Concerns guiding coalition/advisory team. Following Stephenson's long tenure, her orientation into this key staff role and the RCA-CRC partnership is expected to continue through much of 2022. DeYoung is honored to play a key role in this onboarding, just as Stephenson did after DeYoung was hired in 2009.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the massive change underway in the RCA related to Vision 2020 have taken a toll on the work of Disability Concerns staff and the volunteer network it supports. The 100 or so disability advocates serving congregations and classes have struggled to provide basic support to their constituents during this time, much less make advances in removing barriers to participation or becoming places of welcome and belonging. Much of the work of advocates has been placed on hold, moved to a back burner, or simply neglected as churches find their way to resuming in-person gatherings or evaluating whether to remain in the RCA at all. In many respects, disability advocates have felt like collateral damage of priorities beyond their control or capacity to manage.

Progress in 2021

At the local grocery store today a young man who was deaf waited on the customer ahead of me. There was a pad and paper to write a question for him if he was not able to read your lips. I watched the exchange. When it was my turn, I was so touched to think of him in this role of cashier. He responded to me in words, "Thank you," and then said the same using sign language. He had a big smile.

As I walked out, I looked back at the busy store with its lines of people and this young man fully part of the flow. It made me think of the intent of the new Disability Concerns resource (*Everybody Belongs, Serving Together*) for:

- more incorporation and belonging
- being part of the body more fully
- ideas and encouragement for giving people time to adapt, to train, to risk and welcome...

The book groups you have hosted have been such good experiences. Thank you to you and others to spur on everybody belonging and serving together.

—Jane Brown, RCA regional disability advocate, Central Iowa Classis

- Staff leaders of RCA and CRC Disability Concerns continued to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on church and society in general, and people with disabilities in particular—many of whom are in higher risk categories than the population in general due to pre-existing conditions. Most events and gatherings were done virtually again in 2021, with attention given to providing accommodations for a wide range of impairments and speaking into timely issues impacting people with disabilities, who make up 20 percent of the North American population.
- The RCA-CRC Disability Concerns guiding coalition/advisory team vision adopted the following vision, called a "horizon storyline," for the next five years and beyond:

By ongoing discovery, training, and support, Disability Concerns will deepen its impact throughout the CRC and RCA, cultivating a thriving network of resilient, passionate leaders who advance the vision of “everybody belongs, everybody serves”—giving priority to advocates 30 and younger to lead us into a future marked by equity-based hospitality, discipleship, and servanthood.

The summer launch of this vision began with a Year 1 milestone that focuses efforts on mobilizing 25 new leaders younger than 30 by summer 2022—mentored and supported by seasoned advocates—who engage in disability advocacy efforts in their context and are invited to share their influence in a network of existing advocates where everybody belongs and everybody serves.

- In collaboration with the RCA’s Next Generation Engagement staff, RCA-CRC Disability Concerns embarked on the Disability Advocacy Journey, an eight-month virtual experience for young people in their 20s to study the disability rights movement in North America and apply their own advocacy skills in community-based initiatives. Young people under 30—sometimes referred to as the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) Generation in the United States—understand inclusion to be a birthright. Those born since the ADA’s adoption in 1990 expect public spaces and institutions to be accessible in every way, yet that is not the case in many churches. Through events like the eight-month Disability Advocacy Journey and the annual two-day Disability Concerns Leadership Training in August, this theme was highlighted in multiple events with a goal of engaging the next generation of church leaders and advocates.
- After two reprintings of the second edition of the *Inclusion Handbook*, a primary resource for churches published in 2013, an updated and expanded third edition was completed in June 2021 and retitled *Everybody Belongs, Serving Together*. Two partners joined RCA and CRC Disability Concerns in this venture: Christian Horizons, a large faith-based provider of services for people with disabilities in Canada, and Elim Christian Services, a faith-based provider located in the Chicago suburbs with deep ties to the RCA and CRC. The practical resource is in multiple formats: printed handbook, ebook, audiobook, and online resource (hosted on the RCA’s Faithward.org). Spanish, Korean, and French translations will be available in 2022.
- Disability Concerns also seeks to normalize mental health conversations throughout the RCA. One way this work is prioritized is through a network of RCA regional mental health consultants—established as a pilot in early 2020, spanning four regional synods (Albany, Heartland, Mid-Atlantics, and New York). These consultants are RCA members who have significant experience, training, and connections in a variety of mental health specialties. On a quarterly basis, they advise on ministry initiatives related to mental health and the church. The rising incidence of mental health challenges during the pandemic has elevated the importance of this work.
- RCA-CRC Disability Concerns hosted several book groups online for disability advocates but open to anyone. The groups met weekly for three to four weeks and included these books: *Finding Jesus in the Storm* by John Swinton; *No Cure for Being Human* by Kate Bowler; and *Everybody Belongs, Serving Together*.
- Late in 2020, Disability Concerns coordinator Terry DeYoung was invited by executive leadership from the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC)—a key ecumenical partner of the RCA—to serve in a yearlong virtual discernment process, “COVID-19 and Beyond: What Does God Require of Us.” Meeting by Zoom every one to two months, “COVID-19 and Beyond” brought together numerous church leaders from around the world to shape the WCRC’s response to the global pandemic and what this

means for the WCRC's work in the future. A small number of people with disabilities were among the marginalized people groups that contributed to these conversations throughout 2021. Early in 2022, DeYoung was invited to serve as guest editor of an upcoming issue of *Reformed World*, the WCRC's theological journal, that will focus on the theme of disability.

Goals for 2022

- In seeking to become a church where everybody belongs and everybody serves, disability advocates and RCA staff are working to overcome ableist practices that discriminate personally and systemically. With sensitivity, courage, and consistency, we are challenging ableist practices in the CRC and RCA. The issue of ableism—attitudes, actions, and circumstances that devalue people because they are disabled or perceived as having a disability—continues as an area of focus within Disability Concerns, other ministry initiatives, and other GSC staff groups.
- RCA-CRC Disability Concerns is creating an online training module to equip new and existing disability advocates, working with CRC partners, and using tools that include the *Everybody Belongs, Serving Together* resource.
- In its goal to mobilize 25 new leaders younger than 30 by summer 2022, the Disability Advocacy Journey has been a primary focus, but that eight-month virtual cohort is supplemented by a significantly shorter approach called the Equipping Pathway to Engage Young Adults in Disability Advocacy. In cohorts of four to five, a seasoned disability advocate guides young people through three one-hour sessions to learn the basics of advocacy. At the conclusion, participants are invited to engage in advocacy efforts through the Disability Concerns network.
- RCA Disability Concerns is pleased to now serve alongside various racial/ethnic councils in the new Advocacy and Race Relations office established by general secretary Eddy Alemán in 2021.

Women's Transformation and Leadership

Women's Transformation and Leadership has been established as part of Transformed & Transforming to help the RCA pursue a vision for the full inclusion of women's gifts, influence, and leadership in all areas of the church and beyond. Rev. Liz Testa leads the Women's Transformation and Leadership team. Lorraine Parker serves as part-time administrative partner. A cross-sector group of RCA leaders serves as the guiding coalition, helping to champion the mission, create and lead new processes, provide critical insights, and contribute as regional facilitators, teachers, and organizers. Lesley Mazzotta, part-time education and facilitation specialist, completed her tenure on February 15, 2022. Women's Transformation and Leadership is grateful for Lesley's more than seven years of faithful service, during which she helped develop and grow this ministry using her considerable gifts of creativity, compassion, and wisdom.

Midway through the 15-year Transformed & Transforming ministry plan, it is exciting to see how God is bringing the increase to our faithful labor as many diverse women, laity and clergy, from within the RCA and beyond are being encouraged, equipped, and empowered for Spirit-led, missional ministry inside and outside the church, alongside their brothers, and how a culture shift toward healthier equity in leadership is starting to emerge.

Women's Transformation and Leadership's mission has been informed and enriched by working alongside the office for Advocacy and Race Relations and the Equity-Based Hospitality ministry collective. Together, we bravely, intentionally work toward the vision of an intergenerational, multicultural, multiracial future freed from racism, sexism, and ableism, where systems of oppression can be dismantled and transformed, where people with disabilities can belong and serve, and where the gifts and influence of women of all ages, stages, and cultural backgrounds are fully included in the life of the church and beyond.

Progress in 2021

Virtual Gatherings: As pandemic concerns curtailed and continue to curtail in-person events, Women's Transformation and Leadership has continued to create sacred spaces that foster community and combat isolation. Over 450 women from across the RCA and beyond have been encouraged and equipped by:

- Monday evening Lament with Hope small group, created by certified spiritual director Lesley Mazzotta
- Thursday evening She Is Called small group with Rev. Liz Testa and Pastor Pam Otten
- *Sacred Pulse* book study with Rev. April Fiet
- Rekindle: Stir it up! virtual mini-retreat with Rev. Donna Owusu Ansah
- Rekindle: Sisterships in Mission Advent gathering with Dr. Ramya Raman and Dr. Anu Rose, co-hosted with RCA Global Mission and the Vellore Christian Medical College Foundation
- Annual Women's Stories Day with Rev. Anna Jackson, Gnade Fellow, co-hosted with New Brunswick Theological Seminary's (NBTS) Reformed Church Center
- Dismantling Racism prayer movement and the General Synod prayer gatherings on the third Friday of each month

She Is Called Vida con propósito / Purposeful Living ten-session learning journey, the RCA's first-ever Spanish-native study guide, written by pastors Karla Camacho and Sonia Asbei Loera Castro, has been launched on the RCA Store (store.rca.org). Designed for women who are new to leadership and to Reformed theology, this process is welcoming and empowering and is a great preparation for the one year She Is Called Leadership Collaborative. These resources are available in both Spanish and English.

The **Building God's Church Together (BGCT) Bible study**, helping leaders and communities explore God's plan for women and men to serve freely and fully, has been expanded and newly launched on Faithward Learn as an online course complete with companion videos, Dr. Rob Dixon's model for flourishing mixed-gender partnerships, pre- and post-surveys, and a facilitated discussion group option.

She Is Called Women of the Bible (WOTB) study series, a Building God's Church Together resource, has been created as a companion to the BGCT study that helps congregations embrace women and men serving together in healthier, vibrant ways. As of February 17, 2022, WOTB Volume 1 has had over 221,650 site visits and 257,795 page views on Faithward.org. Especially exciting is that the main age demographic is 18–44-year-olds and that 35.5 percent of the readership is men. This resource is available in English and Spanish print editions, digitally on Faithward, and as an online course complete with companion videos and pre- and post-surveys. Editors Rev. April Fiet and Dr. Travis West, artist Crystal Wright, and a diverse

group of writers have just finished Volume 2 of this series that takes biblical women's stories deeper, creating a study that is meant for everyone to engage in and meeting an articulated need for fresh, accessible studies for all, coming from a Reformed perspective with relevant practical application.

Lavish Hope, Stories of Resilience and Overcoming Podcast, hosted by Rev. Liz Testa, is now in Season 3, with over 4,280 listens as of February 17, 2022. This podcast is part of our focus on going “deep and wide”: deeper within our RCA circles and wider to a broader audience of churched and unchurched people, many of them in the 18–35 age bracket. Each episode's guests share their compelling story and offer tips and tools to help listeners embrace lavish hope and build resiliency as Christ-followers in today's world.

Women's Transformation and Leadership's partnership with New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS) to create **She Is Called cohorts for NBTS's fully online two-year certificate program** in Church Leadership and Theological Studies is now in its second year. More than ten women are in the program or have moved up to the master's program. All are exploring their callings to become preaching elders or commissioned pastors, go further in their seminary studies, or simply become better equipped ministry leaders.

Goals for 2022

- Deepen and expand our pathways and processes (listed above) to continue equipping leaders for ministry, mission, and multiplying of new disciples.
- Coach and catalyze women to embrace their gifts and live into their God-given callings through networks centered in mutual encouragement, support, and sustainability.
- Engage in-person events focusing on spiritual self-care, discipleship, and leadership development (given it is safe to do so). These include an Eastertide Sabbath Rest Retreat at Warwick Conference Center in New York, a She Is Called Holy Land Global Mission Experience, a Women's Sankofa Journey through Upstate New York, and an Equity-Based Hospitality trip to the Caribbean Christian Centre for the Deaf in Jamaica.
- Educate the body of Christ on equity-based hospitality and the importance of gender equity for the flourishing of all people.
- Equip faith communities to create healthy environments where mixed-gender ministry partnerships can thrive and everyone's gifts, women and men, of all backgrounds and abilities, can be used freely and fully.

Discipleship

The Transformed & Transforming Discipleship guiding coalition defines a disciple as somebody who looks like Jesus (character) and who does the things that Jesus does (competency). 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 leadership team and the Discipleship guiding coalition is to help RCA churches to define a discipleship pathway that develops and deploys disciples who look and live like Jesus.

The Discipleship guiding coalition, led by Rev. Jeff Allen, Rev. Pat Dirkse, and Ruth Langkamp in 2021, is a collaborative team of discipleship practitioners from across the denomination. The coalition includes practitioners who are male, female, pastors, lay leaders, from the east and west, of various ethnic backgrounds, and 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.

Progress in 2021

The following services were provided for churches and leaders:

- Eight Discipleship “lightning lessons”: these quick, short lessons took place once per month, and between five and ten people participated in each lesson.
- Eight Discipleship webinars, each attended by 15–30 participants.
- Pilot coaching processes: Rev. Jeff Allen met with six leaders for six sessions that took place over the course of six weeks.
- Six leaders participated in a nine-month “Discipleship Begins with You” online coaching process that began in November 2020.

Goals for 2022

The work of discipleship will be reimaged in the work of the center for global leadership and ministry.

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 was led by staff member Sung Kim in 2021. He served part time in that role from November 2018 to September 2021, with support from leadership specialist Eduardo Rodriguez, who served in that role from 2019 to 2021.

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. The 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” (Frederick 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” (Patrick Lencioni). At the same time, they understand that to lead others, they must first lead themselves.

How: Leadership Development aims to accomplish this 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 church in the Reformed Church in America.

Progress in 2021

Online training was offered for hybrid ministry, digital ministry, and a post-COVID landscape.

Several leadership cohorts took place in 2021:

- A nine-month cohort for solo pastors from eight churches in Florida, Iowa, Michigan, and New Jersey.
- A nine-month cohort for senior pastors from six congregations in New York, Michigan, Iowa, and California.
- A six-month cohort for church leaders centered around “Flourishing through Change and Disruption.”

As Sung’s role began to be re-envisioned in summer 2021, plans for other offerings in fall 2021 were put on hold.

Goals for 2022

Leadership Development’s short-term goals are still being determined in light of Sung Kim’s change in role as well as the upcoming creation of the center for global leadership and ministry that will bring Transformed & Transforming and church planting into one collaborative and synergistic team.

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. This ministry initiative seeks to empower young leaders and congregations to serve one another into future ministry endeavors. Anna Radcliffe is the coordinator of Next Generation Engagement. Her team includes Ruth Langkamp, Next Generation Engagement specialist; Erika Fleming, administrative assistant; Becky Getz, communication coach; and Shelley Henning, KidMin facilitator (children’s ministry).

Progress in 2021

- In mid-2021, in partnership with Disability Advocacy, Next Generation Engagement launched the Disability Advocacy Journey, targeted at elevating the passion of young leaders and equipping them into advocacy roles right where they are. Presently, ten young people have been selected to develop grant-funded projects toward advocacy work that will help their communities better love and serve those with disabilities.
- In early 2022, Generation Spark launched with ten participating congregations. Generation Spark is funded out of the generosity of the Lilly Endowment Inc. and seeks to partner youth with mentors in their congregations.
- In early 2023, Next Generation Engagement will launch its first online course for children’s ministry leaders. The course has been developed by Shelley Henning as a way to better serve and prepare children’s ministry leaders for the shifting reality of congregations post-pandemic as well as shifting generational dynamics.
- In December 2021, Next Generation Engagement launched a podcast called *Re:Forming*, with the goal of generating a younger audience in connection with the denomination. The podcast focuses on popular next generation topics including climate change, advocacy work, spiritual formation, and more. In addition, Next Generation

Engagement continues to build awareness of generational shifts and development through its online newsletter. This resource is currently distributed to over 600 readers.

- Beginning in the summer of 2021, Next Generation Engagement began a partnership with five young leaders, elevating their voices on Faithward.org as regular content contributors on issues pertaining to finances, environment, spiritual formation, and more. In addition, Next Generation Engagement regularly produces resources targeted at expanding theological and generational equipping. Prior to U.S. Thanksgiving, Next Generation Engagement worked with numerous partners to produce the Thanksgiving Toolkit to create awareness and holistic Thanksgiving Day practices that honor Native and Indigenous leaders. It was the highest-performing Next Generation Engagement-created resource to date.
- Next Generation Engagement continues to partner with TenX10, a collaborative partnership fostered by the Fuller Youth Institute, as a way to determine the best resourcing for youth ministry leaders, volunteers, and high school students as they look to make faith matter more.

Goals for 2022

- Over the next five years, Next Generation Engagement will work to establish a joint denominational leadership team with the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) to fulfill the work of the Generation Spark grant. This includes partnering with 100 congregations over the next five years, elevating young leaders into key denominational, regional, classical, and congregational roles, and providing ongoing leadership development training for young and emerging leaders.
- 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 RCA through generous support by giving financially, starting new churches, fostering vocational ministry, and more.
- 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.

Local Missional Engagement and Strategic Ministry Initiatives

Local Missional Engagement

Local Missional Engagement helps churches discern what God is doing in their church and in their communities and helps explore ways to bring those things together. Local Missional Engagement focuses on five pillars for its work for coaching and equipping:

- Faith sharing: the work of evangelism in corporate and individual settings.
- Christian community development: best Christian practices for community renewal, including asset-based community development and robust community partnerships.
- Good neighboring: practicing the art of neighboring as both congregation and individual, in the church and home community.

- Advocacy: the work of biblically centered justice, giving time, talent, and treasure to spaces that are working to dismantle unjust systems.
- Missional imagination: reigniting the idea of possibility and hopefulness for the church's engagement with their community and neighbors, inspiring courageous action and out-of-the-box thinking for kingdom impact.

As part of Transformed & Transforming, Local Missional Engagement exists to help churches have dedicated pathways to be agents of change and renewal in their communities. Through 2021, it was led by Eliza Cortés Bast, who also stewarded the Strategic Ministry Initiatives. Local Missional Engagement also houses two part-time staff people: Rev. Laura Osborne, coordinator for interreligious relations, and Eduardo Rodriguez, specialist for Leadership and Local Missional Engagement. Eduardo finished his work with the RCA in 2021, after serving both Church Multiplication and Transformed & Transforming. Eduardo also served as the staff liaison for the Commission on Christian Action. The Local Missional Engagement team is grateful for the incredible talent, passion, and experience Eduardo brought to the local mission work.

Strategic Ministry Initiatives

Strategic Ministry Initiatives encompasses the collaborative and innovative work for equipping in the RCA. Throughout 2021, it has included the stewarding of the Lilly Endowment's Flourishing Churches grant, titled the Renovations Project, which is currently convening its first full "phygital" (physical + digital) cohort.

It also includes the development of Faithward.org as a digital equipping space, including development and implementation of the online learning platform and podcasts. The Faithward work has been a collaboration between members of the GSC Communication and Production Services (CAPS) team and the Transformed & Transforming team. We in Strategic Ministry Initiatives would be remiss in not naming the efforts of Grace Rüter, Becky Getz, and Erik Fikkert from CAPS for their amazing work and collaboration on crafting and curating spaces for digital discipleship to happen. Thanks also goes to Barb Ellis of Transformed & Transforming and Matt Seybert and Eric Sowers of IT for their incredible contributions to the building and updating of Faithward Learn. This truly has been a sterling example of interdepartmental cooperation that highlights the best of what staff departments can do for the local church when they work together.

Progress in 2021

- Food for Faith was developed as an online blog for Faithward.org that uses the intersection of food, hospitality, and faith as a means for increasing the community-building and faith-sharing opportunities for individuals and churches.
- Webinars, Facebook Live events, and live events covered topics ranging from defining evangelism to new strategic uses for traditional church spaces. Two roundtable sessions were hosted in conjunction with Vibrant Congregations, a joint ministry of the RCA and CRCNA, and one with Rooted Good.
- Practitioners, theologians, and ministers speaking on topics of justice, innovation, leadership, missiology, and spiritual practices recorded online content for Renovations. This information is available on Faithward Learn.

- Updated resources and individual consultations continued for churches who were looking to develop new practices in Local Mission, particularly in a mid-pandemic reality. This included updates to the prayer walking guide, the use of demographic analysis reports from MissionInsite, and individual coaching calls with pastors and consistories.
- Faithward experienced explosive growth: it had over 1 million page views by the end of 2021, with 740 registered users on Faithward Learn (the online learning platform), and over 6,000 downloads of Faithward-initiated podcasts. Strategic Ministry Initiatives is grateful for the voices and leadership of Liz Testa (Women's Transformation and Leadership) for *Lavish Hope*, Terry DeYoung (Disability Concerns) for *Faith and Mental Health*, Peter Watts (Advocacy and Race Relations, African American Black Council) for *The Black Church Still Speaks*, and the leadership of Anna Radcliffe (Next Generation Engagement) in the production of the podcast work.

Goals for 2022

Local Missional Engagement, as part of the Transformed & Transforming equipping team, will have its structure re-configured as part of the center for global leadership and ministry. As the restructuring is being finalized, Local Missional Engagement anticipates still providing services geared toward re-imagining the future of ministry space and the diversifying of building purposes for greater community impact, evangelism and faith sharing resources, and aligning internal church ministries with their outreach programs and processes.

In addition, Strategic Ministry Initiatives commits to:

- Launching two Renovations cohorts through the online learning platform; these cohorts will inspire churches to innovate around a treasured tradition.
- Providing digital access for additional content from ministry and outreach experts as we expand the Faithward Learn offerings.
- Developing the digital discipleship capacity of the RCA in conjunction with the Faithward team and CAPS.
- Innovating new ways and expressions of ministry, particularly those geared toward those far from God.
- Continued partnership with agencies who serve the local church and her desire to be the hands and feet of Jesus wherever she is established.

Interreligious Relations

This year brought great challenges and also deep connection. The work of interreligious relations in the RCA is done through many people. In conjunction with the Commission on Christian Unity's interreligious subcommittee, the Rev. Laura Osborne works to connect churches and individuals to their neighbor of another faith. This takes shape in many ways: through partnerships, rich history of interfaith work, and new initiatives.

Progress in 2021

- **Scriptural Reasoning and Interfaith Photovoice:** These are tools to help people engage with their neighbor of another faith. In partnership with the Al Amana Centre and Rose Castle Foundation, there have been a few trainings around scriptural reasoning. We have been able to train campus pastors from around the world in scriptural

reasoning. Interfaith Photovoice is another amazing tool for groups to use to get to know their neighbors.

- **Interreligious Subcommittee:** The interreligious subcommittee of the Commission on Christian Unity (six people) works in different parts of the U.S. and the world to help share their faith and to connect with their neighbors of another faith through chaplaincy, counseling, teaching, preaching, bridge building, and so much more. This team met with the interfaith subcommittee of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) and will continue to do so two to three times a year, as our values and mission are quite similar.
- **Global Partnerships:** The coordinator for interreligious relations shares a lot of the load with RCA Global Mission. There is a great connection with the Al Amana Centre in Oman, and there are a few intercultural trips planned for 2022, though these trips may get shifted because of the COVID-19 pandemic. We partner with the Al Amana Centre through scriptural reasoning and share a few interns that work on similar projects. There has also been much collaboration with the refugee ministries coordinator on an online workshop to help RCA members reach displaced people in their neighborhood during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **RFPUSA:** We have formed a new partnership with Religions for Peace - USA, an organization that helps with awareness of other faiths and also justice issues related to other faiths. RFPUSA has monthly gatherings to get people involved in this work.
- **National Council of Churches:** The RCA has a spot on the Interreligious Convening Table of the National Council of Churches. This table coordinates dialogues with other faiths to raise awareness.
- **Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign:** This campaign works to stop bias against our Muslim neighbors. The RCA has been a longstanding member with this campaign and has a seat on the steering committee. We are working with two interns (shared with the CRC and the Al Amana Centre) to bring two Faith over Fear trainings to Grand Rapids and Northwest Iowa. The dates for the trainings in Grand Rapids and Northwest Iowa have been set; there are also virtual options for these trainings.
- **Journey Into Friendships:** This collaborative network with the CRCNA was started almost four years ago. Journey into Friendships invites people in to walk together with others who work with displaced people groups and those who need a place to start. Our focus has been on immigrants and migrants, refugees, international students, and Muslim-Christian relations. There are monthly network meetings on different topics and a larger consultation in the summer. The focus for 2022 is in the Heartland area.
- **Learning Communities:** Three learning communities have been happening around loving our neighbor of another faith. One community is focused on campus pastors and interfaith work, one on Journey into Friendships, and another is specifically for Michigan campus pastors who work with international students.

Goals for 2022

- Develop and expand content for Local Missional Engagement, a joint website with the CRCNA, and the Journey Into Friendships website.
- Continue partnership with RCA Global Mission in work with displaced people, seeking new ways to reach that group and add more people and churches to it.
- Offer monthly opportunities for RCA churches and ministries to learn about and connect with resources near and far.
- Help more churches reach their neighbor of another faith for Christ.

- Continue the work of loving our neighbor of another faith by connecting with colleges and universities.
- Arrange the two planned Faith over Fear trainings.
- Make arrangements for two planned intercultural trips through the Al Amana Centre.