



ROCHESTER
CHRISTIAN REFORMED
CHURCH



2017
Church Profile



Our Vision

As a growing, multi-generational community of Christians, we are called to faithful obedience and holy living; we offer our hearts and lives to do God's work in our world.

We dedicate ourselves to worship God joyfully, proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, and transform lives and culture by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We want to become like Jesus Christ in all we think, say, and do.

Rochester Christian Reformed Church

"Reflect on your strengths/gifts as a church."

Our congregation has highly committed members and families, people dedicated to extending God's kingdom and to loving one another even when we have disagreements. The strong ties that bind us are evident in a well-attended Wednesday night fellowship, for example, but also in how individual members care for each other in times of need.

We benefit from a long tradition of Reformed faith. The congregation itself is 140 years old, many of us grew up in it or in the Christian Reformed Church more broadly, and our denomination gives us valuable opportunities for shared outreach and service while keeping us anchored as a confessional church. We also benefit from the presence of members who have come to us from other denominations and broadened our perspective.

Our worship is reverent and well-planned, with strong biblical preaching, extensive lay participation, hearty congregational singing and a variety of music.

Our education program develops biblical knowledge and encourages Christian living for people of all ages, from preschoolers through adulthood.

Our youth ministry for middle school and senior high groups has dedicated leadership and is regarded by the congregation as a high priority. It has attracted young people from outside our membership.

Our facilities are expansive, relatively new, well-maintained and entirely adequate for ministry.



CONTACT INFORMATION

Rochester Christian Reformed Church
2750 Atlantic Ave.
Penfield, N.Y. 14526

Classical church counselor:

Rev. Nick Monsma
East Palmyra CRC

Search committee contacts:

Gary Harris

9 Holli Ln.
Rochester, NY 14625
(585)734-9095

Andy Elliot

48 Crosman Terr.
Rochester, N.Y. 14620
(585)442-4604
andy@psych.rochester.edu

“Reflect on your passions as a church.”



If churches have passions, then let it be said that our church has only one: to love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind. Individual members with distinctive gifts and varied circumstances will display their devotion in different ways, sometimes acting within church programs and activities, sometimes independently. But the single shared focus is what enables us to call ourselves a church.

Within congregational life, the activities we tend to prioritize most highly include sincere and vibrant worship, inspired and inspiring preaching of Gospel truth, close fellowship, and training our children to follow Jesus. We also place high importance on prayer. And we have a strong sense of being called to serve others, supporting and working through local groups, missionary organizations and denominational ministries.

**ECUMENICAL
OUTREACH**

Our congregation serves alongside other local churches in ecumenical outreach efforts:

- ◆ Flower City Work Camp, which unites more than 50 churches to involve young people in home renovation and in sharing Christ’s love with some of the neediest areas of our city.
- ◆ Cameron Community Ministries, an urban outreach center in Rochester. Our church leads a brief time of worship and serves a meal there one Sunday evening per month for half the year.
- ◆ Penfield Habitat for Humanity, a coalition of suburban churches that supports Flower City Habitat for Humanity by financing and constructing homes for low-income people in Rochester.
- ◆ We have a longstanding relationship with Heritage Christian Services, an agency serving people with developmental disabilities. Members of our congregation founded the organization as a single group home in 1984, and it has grown to serve more than 1,700 people in western New York.
- ◆ Other organizations we support financially, hear regular reports from and often have individual members working in: Rochester Family Mission, Rochester Institute of Christian Education (we fund a scholarship for needy students), Open Door Mission, Good News Jail and Prison Ministry, Penfield Ecumenical Food Shelf, Compass Care crisis pregnancy service, Bethany Christian Services, Dimitri House for homeless men, and an InterVarsity chapter at the Eastman School of Music.
- ◆ In addition to these, our young people have been involved in SERVE mission trips, Stop Hunger Now and other ecumenical organizations.
- ◆ Finally, our pastors have for many years participated in a Penfield interfaith ministerial association.



“List major goals that this congregation has set for itself or opportunities the congregation anticipates.”

- ◆ Developing a vital, authentic relationship with God through prayer and Bible study.
- ◆ Reaching out to young adults within the congregation and community. Our goal is to enfold young adults by making them feel welcome at church, engaging them in worship and activities, and providing biblical teaching that will help them build solid Christian foundations.
- ◆ Revitalizing and expanding small group ministry. We would like to encourage personal relationships that foster spiritual engagement and mutual accountability.
- ◆ Engaging in both local and global discipling and justice. Congregants are challenged to actively engage in the local and global community with their minds, prayers, time and contributions.

A Season of Prayer...



“What has been the most interesting and challenging event in the life of your church in the last 3 years?”

Along with the denomination as a whole, our church has struggled through discussions of homosexuality and the challenges our adults and, significantly, our young people encounter in their varied cultural contexts. Recognizing the struggle, lay members led an 8-week Sunday school class on homosexuality and the Gospel in which they encouraged Bible study and a lot of dialogue. Additionally, the council addressed the issue by bringing in two leaders within the denomination to provide guidance and discussion. We have been challenged to articulate guiding principles of biblical sexuality and marriage for adults and young people; we continue to struggle toward some resolution.



While there are a variety of viewpoints within our congregation, it is important to a majority of our membership that our pastor is committed to upholding denominational positions in leadership, teaching and counseling. We desire biblical teaching and training on this premier cultural issue of our time as we strive to minister effectively and find common understanding so we may correct our missteps, live in submission to Christ and show love to all.

“What have been the three most important events in the history of your church?”

The congregation is 140 years old, and each era of its existence has included events of particular significance to the people who were part of it, such as church splits, premature deaths of pastors and the planting of a second congregation nearby.

Perhaps the most important event in the memory of many current members was a 1982 fire that destroyed the previous church building in the city of Rochester. Throughout the history of our congregation, the trend had been for each new building to be farther from the center of Rochester than the previous one, but the fire resulted in a decision to become a metropolitan congregation with a new building in the suburban town of Penfield. Significant growth occurred as the congregation expanded beyond its “Dutch family” roots to welcome and establish a more diverse community of believers while remaining committed to its Reformed heritage.



In 2001, the death of Pastor James Van Tholen in his 30s from aggressive cancer after a short pastorate resulted in a challenging time of questioning within our church. During an extended disability and vacancy period, there was significant consideration within the church of varying worship styles and approaches to ministry and leadership.

Our membership has declined noticeably since the turn of the century. Among the factors involved, the decline of Eastman Kodak Co. and other large manufacturers was an important one; it caused some members to move elsewhere for work, prompted others to retire and move, and caused a drop in the number of people who move to our region.

“List specific problems with which your congregation struggles.”

Our congregation struggles with growth. We need to welcome new people, center our lives in Christ, and provide adequate counseling and support to members in need (we have an uneven history of pastor and elder visitation). A high-priority challenge is to retain younger adults and to engage them and our young people to live lives responsive to the joys and challenges of the Gospel.

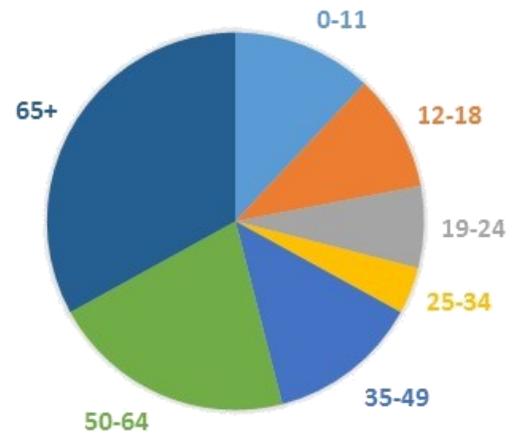
While there are many active and healthy ministries in our church and many local ecumenical ministries that we avidly support, we need a common, expansive vision that incorporates the whole congregation. We worry that if our congregation ages and becomes smaller, it will lack the people, talents and resources to continue operating as it has in the past. We feel stretched thin; We need hope and clarity and a common vision so we can become a vital, sacrificial community, dying to ourselves and living for Jesus as a light to the world around us.

While we are called to sacrificial living and to conform ourselves to the image of Christ, we tend to mirror the culture around us. We find it difficult to envision and accept change. One example is in our use of wealth and our attitudes about it. A disproportionately large share of the financial contributions needed to sustain our church comes from a minority of our membership. The suburban lifestyle tends to insulate us from the needs of the poor.

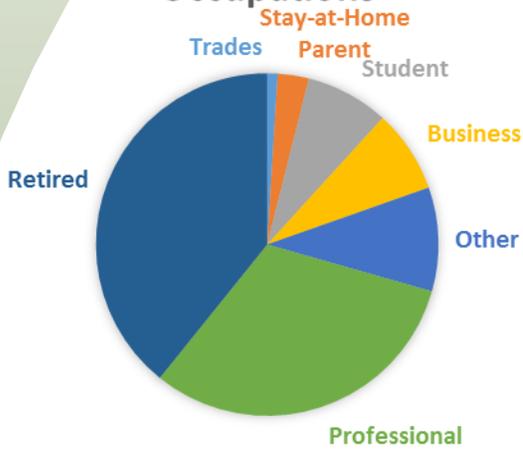
We need to be more accountable to each other. We need to model discipleship and be more open to spiritual growth and discipline. At times we have avoided conflict to the point of neglecting compassionate church discipline. Earthly comfort and happiness are not our ultimate goals. We struggle to embrace intentionally what it means to be the joyful body and bride of Christ.

THE NUMBERS

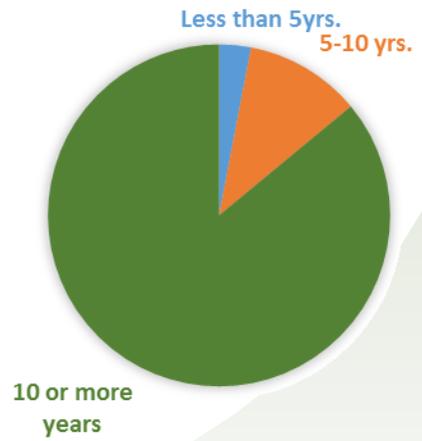
Ages of Members



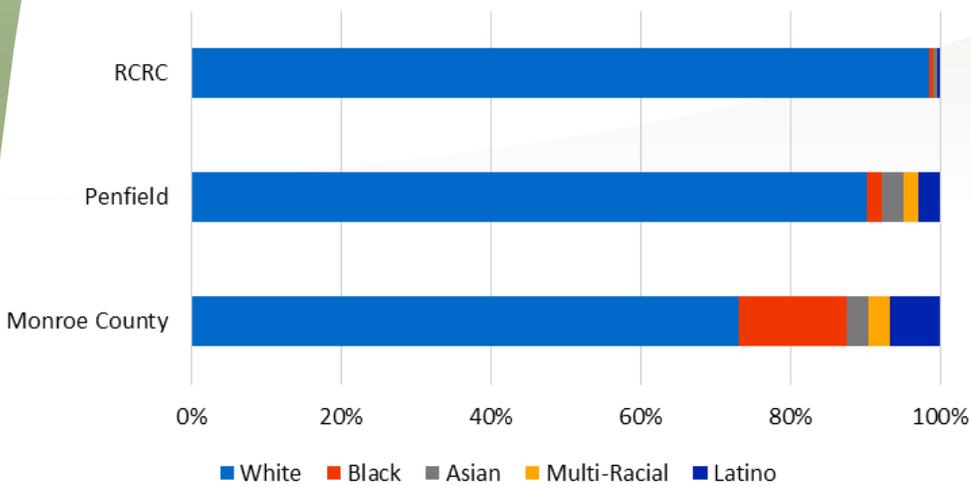
Occupations



Length of Membership



Diversity



“Describe what being Christians of Reformed accent means to you.”

We believe in a sovereign and loving God who has revealed himself to us through his Word, has called us to redemption and deserves our praise and obedience. Our thoughts, desires, and even our reason are fallen. But we cling to God’s promises, understanding that the story of God’s people since the time of Abraham is our story as well. When Jesus came to earth, the Kingdom of God descended into the darkness of our hearts, showing us our sin, offering us salvation and calling us to live in the light, as he is in the light. Because the Holy Spirit is at work from generation to generation, we are part of Christ’s church down the ages. We seek to live faithfully as we await his return. Assured of God’s love and care, we act as agents of renewal, recognizing that his kingdom and law transcend all cultures and nations.

We acknowledge that our Reformed heritage, like any tradition, sometimes produces in us an unquestioning acceptance of our own emphases, a suspicion of the strengths of other traditions and a blindness to our own weaknesses. However, we value our tradition for placing God at the center of our lives and worship and for its healthy emphases on confession, on scripturally centered preaching and on missions.

As we follow the teaching of Scripture, we look to understand it more fully through the words of the creeds and Reformed confessions. Our faith should permeate every area of our lives and inform our words, actions and decisions. Our worship should be an honest dialogue with our Creator, whom we praise, pray to, listen to and see at work in the mundane as well the traditionally sacred. We order our lives according to the five solae: Scripture, faith, grace, Christ, glory to God.



“Describe your understanding of the relationship between the local church and the Christian Reformed denomination.”

Historically, our congregation has had a tradition of strong awareness of and loyalty to the denomination. Our relationship with the denomination is one of mutual support and accountability. The denomination enables our congregation and others to accomplish tasks together that we could not do individually. We pray for it, provide financial support and participate in its governance.

We also are guided by the denomination. Synodical pronouncements on doctrinal and ethical matters are considered binding, and officebearers and members are expected to abide by them even if they object.

However, our members have a wide mix of backgrounds, and many are unfamiliar with and unable to articulate what it means to be Christian Reformed; thus some would not consider denominational ties important. And while the denomination does a good job of communicating with us about its activities, our congregation inadequately disseminates that information among the members.

WORSHIP AT RCRC

“How are members involved in planning and participation in the liturgy/worship?”

Typically, after the pastor has determined the Scripture passage and sermon topic for a given service, the Worship Planning Team—the pastor, the worship coordinator, the adult choir director and worship band leader, and two members of the congregation—meets to plan the service as a whole.

Oversight is provided by the Worship Committee and ultimately by the elders. The role of Worship Coordinator was created to facilitate lay involvement in the service without adding the work of planning participation and prepping participants to the pastor.

In any given year, about half of the members of the congregation, including children and young people, have worship roles such as liturgist, choir member, vocal or instrumental soloist, giver of the children’s mes-



“Describe the worship services in your church.”

For the most part we are a liturgical church; we follow an order of worship (call to worship, opening praise, confession and assurance, hearing God’s Word, responding with gratitude, departing to serve) that may change depending on the circumstances of the week. Various lay liturgists (one or two per Sunday) and the pastor lead us through these elements of worship. Our order of worship is printed fairly completely in the bulletin. Sample bulletins posted at www.RochesterCRC.org give examples of our order of worship and its content.

Our music reflects a blended style of worship, leaning toward traditional hymnody and classical music. In our pews we have the *Psalter Hymnal* and two other songbooks, *Sing! A New Creation* and *Contemporary Songs for Worship*. The primary criterion for selecting congregational music is that the text be suitable for the service as a whole and accomplish its purpose at a specific point in the order of worship—in addition, of course, to being biblically and theologically sound.

Our members are very willing to use their talents in worship. As often as possible, we hear both adult and student musicians in our worship services for worship services for prelude, offertory, solos

and ensemble playing. Our organist is a student at the local Eastman School of Music.

Our developing worship band (consisting of a guitarist, occasional box drummer and

singers) accompanies some of our congregational singing approximately once a month.



“Describe the discipleship practices in your church for all ages of members and attenders.”

Discipleship requires discipline and applying what we learn from the proclamation of the Word of God. We want to be challenged to make Jesus pre-eminent in our lives. In our statement of vision and values, we remind ourselves that “we want to be a community characterized by spiritual growth and accountability.” We recognize this as an area that needs improvement, and we dedicate ourselves anew to our vision to “worship God joyfully, proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, and transform lives and culture by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Besides youth and adult Sunday School, our Cadets and GEMS clubs (for grades 1-5) meet twice monthly for Bible study, games, badge projects, outings, etc. Our youth groups for junior high and senior high (joint with Webster CRC) meet weekly, and our discipleship model emphasizes relationships. Through prayer, conversations on faith and life, service in the inner city, SERVE mission trips, youth retreats and events to build community, we hope to nurture our young people in serving God outside the walls of the church, even as they are also part of a multi-generational community of Christians.



Part of discipleship is building community through encouraging financial support and involvement in designated missions (local, national, and international) and special offerings. For both youth and adults there are outreach opportunities through Flower City Work Camp, Cameron Community Ministries, Haiti mission trips, etc.

Besides the weekly Koinonia fellowship on Wednesdays (with dinner, fellowship and programs for various ages), we have expanded the small groups to include one for young adults. Since in our society it is easy to become insulated from each other, we have tried to be intentional about including new members and visitors in the small groups. We need to increase our level of spiritual accountability to one another, and small groups facilitate this. The men’s Bible study on Saturday mornings, Prime Timers (for retired members), the prayer chain, the church softball team, small groups and church retreats all build fellowship and hopefully spiritual growth and unity as well.

“Describe the Leadership structure in your church. How many Council members? How often do they meet? What subgroups of Council exist? How do they function?”

Our church is governed by a traditional council that includes the pastor, seven elders and six deacons. An elder or, less frequently, a deacon serves as president, and another is clerk. An elder-deacon pair is assigned to each of the congregation’s five districts.

Elders and deacons are elected at a yearly meeting and serve three-year terms. The full council meets once a month.

The pastor, council president, vice president, clerk, chairperson of elders and chairperson of deacons serve on the executive committee, which often sets the agenda for the council and acts on its behalf when that is necessary.

Under the supervision of the council, much of the church’s work is done by committees. Leaders of the committees are approved by the council; an elder or deacon usually serves on each committee and acts as its liaison to the council.



“Describe RCRC’s Ministry Focus.”

- ◆ At present, the FOCUS OF OUR CHURCH’S MINISTRY is current members/participants.
- ◆ In our church, the WORSHIP SERVICE IS DESIGNED with an emphasis on believers.
- ◆ In our church, the STYLE OF MUSIC used in the worship service is blended with some weighting toward the traditional.
- ◆ Our church seeks to ENCOURAGE SPIRITUAL GROWTH through ministries for most groups.
- ◆ In our church, EVANGELISM STRATEGIES AND METHODS are generally unplanned.
- ◆ Our church is moderately representative of the ECONOMIC DIVERSITY of Rochester’s suburbs but less representative of the city itself.
- ◆ Our church is moderately representative of the ETHNIC DIVERSITY of Rochester’s suburbs but weakly representative of the city itself.



RCRC MINISTRY STAFF

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| ◆ Senior pastor and minister of the Word (full-time): | Vacant |
| ◆ Minister of invitation and inclusion (part-time): | Rev. Jantina Cornelison |
| ◆ Director of youth ministries (part-time): | Julie Vande Brake |
| ◆ Worship coordinator (part-time): | Kathy Quinn |
| ◆ Organist (part-time): | Jiaqi Shao |
| ◆ Administrative assistant (part-time): | Greg Skizim |
| ◆ Sexton and administrative assistant (part-time): | Reba Veenje |
| ◆ Custodians (part-time): | Linda King and Dawt Sung |

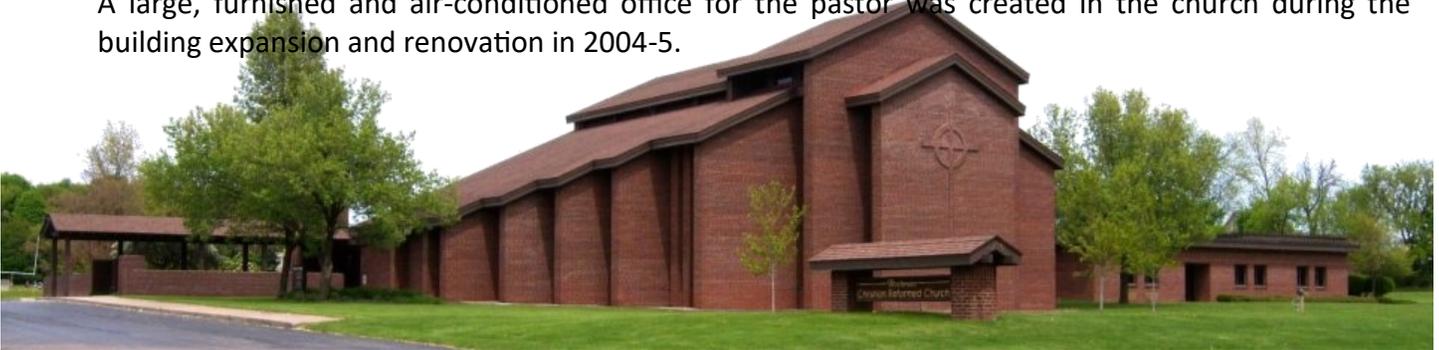
“Describe your facilities.”

The church building, constructed in 1984-5, includes a sanctuary with a capacity of 300 to 325, narthex/welcome areas, church staff offices, a library, a lounge, two kitchens, classrooms, a nursery, bathrooms and two large fellowship areas. An addition with classrooms, expanded office space and ministry areas was completed in 2004-05. Photos of the facility may be viewed at www.RochesterCRC.org.

our buildings are adequate for our ministries, and currently there is no building program projected.

As far as a parsonage, after studying the issue of maintaining a parsonage versus providing a housing allowance to assist a pastor in purchasing a home, we sold the church parsonage in 2000. The proceeds were placed in a housing fund, and interest earned on the fund is used to defray the cost of the pastor’s housing allowance. A portion of the fund may also be used in a loan to help a pastor make a down payment on a house.

A large, furnished and air-conditioned office for the pastor was created in the church during the building expansion and renovation in 2004-5.



“Identify some of the cultural challenges facing Christians and Christian churches today”

Churches in the modern West are tempted to modify the Word of God to meet the expectations of the culture. We as Christians are challenged to be distinctive; otherwise we simply dissolve into the surrounding culture. Will we hold to God’s revelation in Scripture and to the historic creeds? Will the idols presented by our culture win out, or will we live in worship and obedience to God? Materialism, comfort and personal happiness are the values of our culture, but following Christ calls us beyond a life of seeking personal happiness. Traditional Christian views on sexuality, abortion and divorce are anathema to the surrounding culture. The church will need to adjust to living in a world that does not look up to Christianity. A central challenge of the church is to speak with truth and love, encouraging its members to follow the biblical mandates on these matters.

Another challenge is the isolation increasingly felt by members of our society. We should reach out as a loving family to those who are outcasts and should embrace with the love of Christ all who feel far away from the church. The church is challenged to witness to the good news of Jesus Christ and the powerful truth of God’s Word.

Worldwide persecution of Christians and the willingness of many Christians to suffer for the sake of the Gospel should be a witness to us in the West. Are we willing to sacrifice? Does the cross of Christ shape our lives? Christ lived, died and has risen so that we will no longer live for ourselves but for God’s glory. In following the one who sacrificed all for us, we realize that obeying Jesus’ words is really what brings greatest joy in the long term. The early church had a compelling vision that made it willing to suffer for the sake of the Gospel and that led directly to its flourishing. The church universal is called to follow Christ by faith at great cost and to find at last the greatest joy, one that is not fleeting but eternal.

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Penfield, NY 14526

