



## Reflection Guide

The Gather initiative was inspired by Synod 2023's call for a comprehensive strategy to address denominational membership decline and to foster growth. Gather events were structured around the Emmaus Road story (Luke 24:13-35), emphasizing spiritual discernment, storytelling, and aligning with God's mission. This guide will invite you to reflect on several renewal principles.

### The Gather Initiative

Here's brief reminder about Gather:

- Gather was a series of events held in 2024 and 2025 at ten locations across North America, bringing together leaders across the CRC to inspire, encourage, and discern where God is leading the church in mission.
- It was a first step in listening to church members, and it gathered people from the Council of Delegates, classes, and congregations across the denomination. In total, 633 CRC members from 367 congregations participated.
- The purpose was to discern what God is doing, by prayerfully following the Emmaus Road story.
- One core value was to foster meaningful contribution from every attendee, regardless of church size, role, or ordination status.

### Principles of Renewal

Gather identifies several supporting principles for the renewal of our congregations. Spend approximately 30 minutes discussing three of the principles. Share with each other and with denominational staff through the feedback form how these principles are reflected in the practices of your congregation.

#### 1. Discernment

Gather revealed a hunger among leaders for more dedicated spiritual discernment.. The Gather initiative was specifically designed to model one approach to spiritual discernment with church leaders. It emphasized discernment as a complement to decision-making, creating space for meaningful participation from all attendees. Small group exercises followed a rhythm that included prayer, Bible Study, personal reflection, and sharing, all contributing to an openness to recognize how God is working and leading beyond whatever preconceived notions one brought into the meeting.

For example, a Gather participant shared this story: *“Fifteen years ago, the church felt stuck in worship wars and was losing members. A group of people began to pray weekly for renewal and Spirit-led growth. New leaders were called to serve. The church entered a multi year renewal process. Today there are many new members and families who are united in a common mission and vision. We are excited to see where God will lead the church.”*

- What specific practices has your church engaged in to prioritize prayerful discernment alongside decision-making? What specific practices would you like to see your church adopt in order to prioritize discernment?
- How do you create space for these faith practices in your council meetings and communal life? In what ways do they or could they impact the culture and effectiveness of your council?

## 2. Discipleship

The renewal of the church is directly connected to the personal renewal of its leaders, including pastors, elders, and deacons. Leaders must first begin experiencing renewal as disciples of Jesus Christ before attempting to implement a renewal strategy for the wider church. Stories shared by Gather participants emphasized the importance of nurturing believers into deeper faith and maturity through practices such as Bible study, small groups, mentorship, and giving and receiving care. God is seen as actively involved in making and growing disciples, focusing particularly on discipling the next generation for service, leadership, and sharing the gospel, and creating innovative ways for people to grow spiritually.

An elder who attended Gather shared: *“Our council spent a day in repentance and prayer as we reflected on the history of our church. God brought healing to our congregation through the leaders and God began to bring new people to our church.”*

- What practices have you personally engaged to nurture your faith in Jesus? What specific practices would you like to see your council adopt in order to prioritize discipleship?
- How are you actively involved in making and growing disciples, particularly among the next generation, and fostering innovative ways for spiritual growth?

## 3. Learn and Experiment

Church renewal goes beyond just counting numbers; it's about actively engaging in a process of learning and growth. The Gather initiative exemplified this by fostering interactive learning through dialogue. Instead of simply delivering information, we created a space where we could listen to and learn from members across the denomination. The significant increase in optimism and confidence among participants after Gather is a testament to the power of this transformative learning experience. This wasn't about teaching specific strategies; it was about the act of coming together, sharing, and reflecting, which in itself became the catalyst for change and renewal.

One congregation leader shared, *“God had been working in the leadership of the church (pastors, staff, elders) to grow in dependence upon the Holy Spirit. We prayed regularly, ‘come, Holy Spirit, come.’ I think we all expected some mass outward example of the Holy Spirit, but what happened was personal transformation and new gifts of the Holy Spirit. As this grew within leadership and small groups of members like the prayer team it became clear that God was calling us to give time and space in Sunday morning services to listen to God for ourselves, for each other, and for the community.”*

- What practices has your church engaged in to foster a culture of continuous learning? What specific practices would you like to see your church adopt in order to prioritize learning?
- How do you intentionally capture lessons learned from your experiences, and how do these insights inform your future plans and the ongoing spiritual growth of your congregation and its leaders?

## Prayer

Use “A Prayer of Preparation” at the conclusion of this time of reflection and feedback, pray through the guide together.

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## Host Gather in Your Classis

You are invited to host a one-day Gather event to engage in spiritual discernment for the future of your congregation or classis. Together we will enter the Emmaus Road story found in Luke 24:13-35, acknowledge our expectations and desires to God, tell stories of the redemptive work of Jesus, and renew our vision for ministry.

The Gather event is designed using a dialogue education pedagogy with an emphasis on discernment. Curiosity for what God is doing in the local congregations of the Christian Reformed Church frames the experience. The process creates space for the meaningful participation of every invested attendee regardless of the size of one’s church, the role they hold in the church, or whether or not they are ordained.

Classis Gather events increase participant awareness of what God is doing in and through their congregations. The event will spark renewal, infuse new energy, increase collaborative relationships and inspire new ministry. It is our prayer that Gather will have a similar effect in your classis as it did in the ten gatherings hosted by the CRCNA throughout the United States and Canada.

### **To Schedule, Contact:**

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