

Creston Christian Reformed Church  
Profile – Fall 2020



**CRESTON**  
CHRISTIAN REFORMED  
**CHURCH**

Church Information

Creston Christian Reformed Church  
 238 Spencer Street, NE  
 Grand Rapids, MI 49505  
[crestoncrc@gmail.com](mailto:crestoncrc@gmail.com)

Classical Church Counselor: Rev. Pete Byma, Westend CRC

Search Committee Contact

Name: Sheryl Van Eck  
 Address: 1265 Derby Drive, NW  
 Grand Rapids, MI 49504  
 Phone: 616.460.4507  
 Email: [crestonsearchcommittee@gmail.com](mailto:crestonsearchcommittee@gmail.com)

General position description:

**Position available:** Senior Pastor

**Date of vacancy:** January 2020

**We are open to:**

Male and female pastors  
 Co-pastors (the equivalent of one full-time pastor but with two people sharing the responsibilities—either related [married team] or unrelated)

**Bi-vocational position:** No, except in the case of co-pastors

**Number of years preferred of ministry experience of potential candidate:** Pastoral experience preferred, but not required. Other applicants will be considered.

**Required languages:** English

**Reports to:** Church Council

**Status:** Full Time

**Summary:**

As pastor(s) of Creston Christian Reformed Church (CRC), they will participate in leading worship services and promoting Creston's ministries. They will help and encourage leaders to carry out Creston's vision of Christ centered diversity, honest worship and prayer, relational witness and serving those in our community. Through mentoring and equipping, the pastor(s) will help create a strong community of believers that love one another and our neighbors. This is a full-time position, but Creston CRC is open to two co-pastors who would share this role.

**Essential Duties and Responsibilities:**

- **Preaching and Sunday Worship**
  - Collaborate with the worship planning committee to plan Sunday services.
  - Under the elder's supervision, administer the sacraments.
  - Prepare and present teachings and sermons that challenge and encourage Creston Church through scripture and Reformed doctrine.
  - Lead weddings, funerals, and other special services as needed.
- **Providing Pastoral Care**
  - Support shepherding elders in providing pastoral care; personally visiting members in special circumstances (as determined by pastor, administrative and shepherding elders).
  - Offer spiritual support and guidance to members of the congregation and community.
- **Equipping and Mentoring**
  - Manage discipleship programming for all members of Creston Church.
  - Support and encourage church members in their faith walk and equip them to grow in their relationships with God and each other.
  - Mentor members and church leaders, helping them grow leadership abilities to serve Creston Church and the neighborhood.
  - Model servant leadership with staff, council and committee members.

**Additional Requirements:**

- Collaborate with staff to promote Creston Church's Vision, Mission and Ministries
- Promote Creston Church as a neighborhood partner by building and maintaining relationships with other neighborhood churches, organizations, and individuals.
- Administrative responsibilities
  - Attend council and elders' meetings.
  - Attend classis meetings as Creston Church's pastoral delegate.
  - Under the guidance of council, hold staff accountable for their responsibilities.
  - Complete further education at least once, annually.

**Opportunities for Spiritual renewal:**

- Prayer and fellowship with other North East Side pastors.
- Annual retreat for spiritual reflection and renewal.
- Sabbatical time available based on Creston Church's sabbatical policy.

Thank you for taking the time to learn about Creston Church. We hope through this profile you will see how God is at work both in and through us to carry out his mission in northeast Grand Rapids. We hope to introduce you to our fellowship and give you a sense of who we are as we worship and work together.

### Church Demographics

We have experienced a resurgence of new members over the past 10 years and enjoy a congregation with strong representation in most age groups. The majority (more than 60%) of adults have been part of our congregation for less than 10 years. During this time we've also had a baby boom, with nearly a quarter of our congregation being less than 12 years old (45 children and youth). Our average Sunday attendance is 90 and we currently have 84 adult professing members.



An interesting demographic to note is that 22% of those who call Creston their church home are regular attenders but for various reasons have not taken the step to become members. We welcome this type of relationship, and people are often quite involved in the life of the church before becoming members. Our congregation is fairly heterogeneous when it comes to faith formation experience, ranging from little to no religious upbringing to being seminary-educated with many coming from faith backgrounds other than Reformed.

While not diverse ethnically (89% are Caucasian, with African-Americans, Africans, and those of biracial descent making up the remaining 11%), we have wide-ranging diversity in socio-economic status, political views and faith background, as noted above. For comparison, the Creston neighborhood (zip code 49505) race/ethnicity composition is 78% Caucasian, 14% black or African American, 5% Hispanic, Asian 3%, with 4% identifying as multiracial. The neighborhood within a half mile of our church building is much more diverse than 49505 as a whole.

Information contained in the following paragraphs was collected from the congregation during a large group event as well as via questionnaires. Our intent was to have two additional congregation-wide events, but that plan changed due to the stay-at-home restrictions of COVID-19.

### Worship

Creston Church has met at the corner of Spencer and Buffalo for more than 100 years. We are a neighborhood community church and describe ourselves as intentional Christ-followers whose purpose is to love and serve God and our neighbors. Currently 42% of the households represented in our congregation live in the Creston neighborhood.

Our worship services begin with this greeting: "Welcome to Creston Church. We have been praying for this time and place, that all who gather here will have an encounter with the living God. The good news for us this morning is that the living God is here. And he greets us with these words:

“Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come. And from the fullness of the spirit which is before his throne. And from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from among the dead and the ruler of the rulers of this earth. And all God’s people say together, ‘Amen.’”

Worship services generally follow a liturgy that includes being welcomed into God's presence, a time of praise, followed by confession and acknowledgment of God's forgiveness, children's blessing, prayer time, bringing offerings, teaching from God's Word, and sending out for service in the world.

That being said, the music varies from traditional to contemporary, and we enjoy a wide variety of musical talent, both vocal and instrumental. We encourage children and youth to be involved. This is demonstrated as they follow the order of service with items in their liturgy bags, collect the prayer request cards, and use instruments and ribbons as we sing.



Members are involved in planning and participation in many ways: Five worship teams composed of members and regular attendees plan and lead Sunday morning worship services. Working collaboratively with the pastor, each team generally leads one service per month. Members of the congregation lead the opening prayer. We have an extended time of prayer that includes sharing prayer requests and God stories. Children are encouraged to participate in various ways by bringing wooden sheep to the sheepfold, with the use of age-appropriate instruments and

by blessing the congregation before going to Children's Worship. Participation is intentionally intergenerational.

The Worship Planning Committee (pastor, accompanist, Children's Ministry Coordinator or the Youth Director, and up to 4 additional members) is responsible to recruit, train, empower, oversee, and provide practical guidance to the worship teams.

We are intentional in discipling those who meet with us.

Specifically, volunteers lead Children's Worship for those ages 3 years through 5th grade using a curriculum produced by Faith Alive. We use the curriculum “Young Children & Worship” which uses wooden figures to tell the Bible story, a way of being in worship with children to *experience* God as opposed to a classroom setting where they are being ‘taught about’ God. Nursery, provided for those younger than 3 years, includes a short Bible story and song time.

Sunday school is designed for children age 3 years—middle school with three different classes in a more traditional setting of being taught. We use the “Dwell” curriculum from Faith Alive and meet in small groups where leaders can get to know the kids on a deeper level.

Our youth group for 6th through 8th graders is called Roots and typically meets every other week. We use our Roots program as a space for our students to create meaningful relationships with each other and with Creston's youth leaders. It is our hope that out of these relationships we will see spiritual growth and discipleship. Our Roots program also gives us space and time to maintain our Anam Cara program (soul friend with an adult in the congregation) with our students taking time to write in their

binders. Roots normally has one of two focuses: connecting our students with the rest of the church body (encouraging those constellations of adults) or digging deep into peer relationships in our small groups. Both are meant to create an environment where we are listening to and sharing our stories of faith, loving and encouraging one another, and growing in our understanding of what it means to be a Christ follower.

Ladies meet weekly for Bible study and prayer. We follow the Coffee Break format of inductive study. The groups are intergenerational, and the one that meets in the morning also includes nursery and Little Lambs for ages 2-5.

Creston 101 / Reformed 101 are groups that meet on an as-needed basis to introduce regular attendees to our congregation's history, faith practices, mission and vision and theological base. Creston 101 includes: a bit of church history, including that of the Christian Reformed Church; Creston's mission and vision; a basic description of the theology, creeds and confessions we profess; and the process of moving toward membership. Reformed 101 delves more deeply into what is distinctive about Reformed theology.



Shepherding elders connect regularly with members in their flocks (including children) in order to meet their pastoral needs and understand their faith walk. Annually, the shepherd along with the Children's Ministry Coordinator or Youth Director meet with families to understand their needs related to faith formation. Shepherds encourage members of their flock to use their gifts and seek out opportunities to share their faith. Flocks include members and regular attendees.



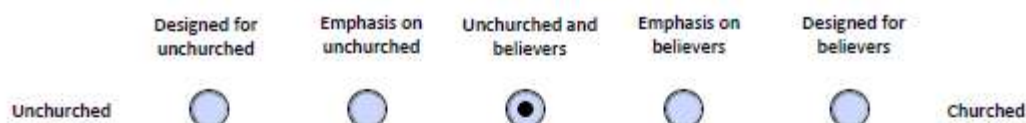
## Characteristics

The following is a list of multiple-choice questions from the church profile form. The Transition team feels these answers best fit with characteristics of our church at the present moment.

Presently, the FOCUS OF OUR CHURCH'S MINISTRY is



In our church, the WORSHIP SERVICE IS DESIGNED FOR



In our church, the STYLE OF MUSIC used in the worship service is



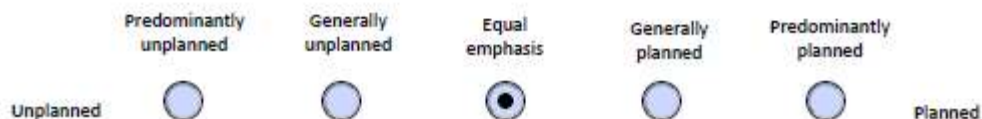
In our church, LEADERSHIP is generally provided by the



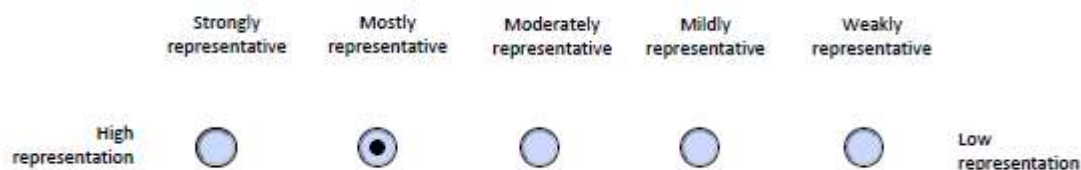
Our church seeks to ENCOURAGE SPIRITUAL GROWTH through



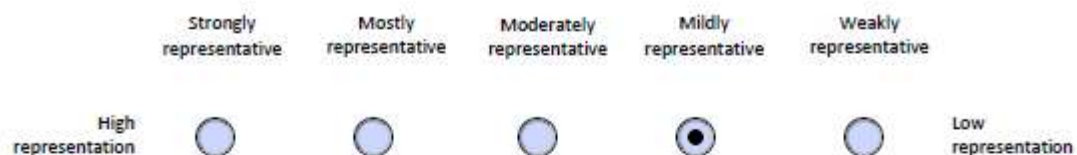
In our church, EVANGELISM STRATEGIES AND METHODS are



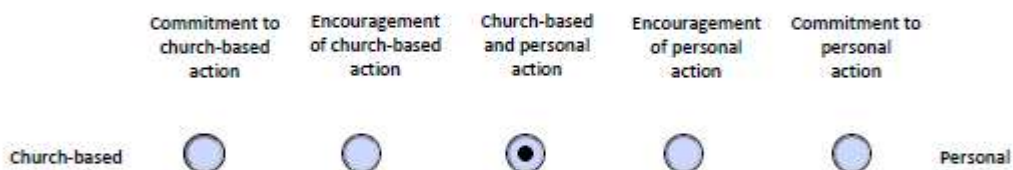
Our church is representative of the ECONOMIC DIVERSITY of our community



Our church is representative of the ETHNIC DIVERSITY of our community



Our church's RESPONSE TO COMPASSION, MERCY, AND JUSTICE NEEDS is



Our church's MISSIONAL FOCUS is





## Mission/Vision Statement

Creston last reviewed and updated the mission statement approximately 2 years ago. Council and the congregation spent considerable time with the process and, while we acknowledge it may be amended at some point in the future, we believe it characterizes our congregation well.

Creston Church is becoming  
an intentional community of disciples, living  
in Christ,  
all together,  
with our neighbors,  
to follow Jesus in every part of life.

Creston Church is growing in  
Christ-centered diversity,  
honest worship and prayer,  
relational witness,  
and serving each other.

## Narrative

While small in size, Creston has many gifts and strengths. We are a welcoming community and thoroughly enjoy one another's company during coffee time after worship services, at community dinners prepared together with our neighbors, Coffee Break Bible study, and Roots youth group that includes opportunities for congregational involvement. On a Sunday morning, we share our concerns and what we've learned about God and ourselves recently through prayer requests and God stories.

We encourage members and attendees to become involved in ministry and put them to work as soon as they are willing to participate. We welcome volunteers of all ages and provide opportunities for children to participate by ushering, collecting prayer cards, and being part of worship teams. We enjoy a wide range of musical talent and styles.

We describe ourselves as relational and spend time loving and caring for those in our congregation and neighborhood. One of our sayings is that "we work to develop relationships that are strong enough to bear the weight of discipleship." That means being involved in the messiness of life and stretches us out of our comfort zones.

Creston is a place where we have a willingness to learn, listen and grow together. We are authentic and are willing to share the good and bad of our lives together. We have met together to do visioning for our congregation, to work through differing beliefs related to baptism and the Lord's Supper, and recently to talk about human sexuality using the Colossian Way process. We acknowledge there is room for us to grow as we continue learning and listening together.



Creston has a love for God and God's kingdom and believes that the good news of that kingdom is meant for everyone. We enjoy worship services where we hear and feel God's presence through the participation of a variety of people leading in song, prayer, scripture, sacraments, and sermons. Sermons consist of solid Biblical teaching with application to today's culture and to all age groups. We are a praying church, lifting our gratitude and petitions to God on Sunday mornings and throughout the week.

We have a passion for community and building relationships with one another that encourage spiritual growth and challenge us to abide in God's word and act accordingly in God's world. We've enjoyed hosting community meals over the years with neighbors where they have had a chance to showcase their cooking skills. There is a special care for the earth through rain gardens and community gardens. Creston is a place for authenticity, which includes openness to questions about faith.

### Ecumenical Activity

Because we are a neighborhood church, we value connecting with churches, non-profits, and businesses in the neighborhood around us and being actively involved as good neighbors. We have partnered with the Creston Neighborhood Association (CNA) by hosting block parties, supporting local events and festivals, utilizing their community organizer, and hosting Living Green/Vegan potluck events and other community forums. The director is also a Creston church member. Around 2010, we partnered with



them to start two community gardens, one that is directly connected to the church (managed and run by us) and sits on our property. We also partner with CNA and a local Catholic church to provide free income tax preparation for low to middle income families, seniors, and the disabled.

We have supported a parachurch organization called New City Neighbors (NCN) since it began, and our congregation supported the establishment of New City Urban Farm in 2011, including a substantial financial donation. Not only have we supported New City Neighbors as a congregation, New City Neighbors has

been integral to the individual lives of many of our attendees: we've been staff, volunteers, board members, donors, farm share members. New City Neighbors' joys have been our joys, its burdens have been ours.

We provide volunteers and donations to North End Community Ministries—a shared ministry whose mission is to provide practical assistance to those in need on the Northeast side of Grand Rapids, including client choice food pantries, the Supper House program that serves hot meals for neighbors twice a week, and school supplies drive each fall.

These connections allow for more direct ecumenical church ties as well. Over the years, local pastors have met weekly for prayer and to discuss topics of mutual interest and concern. We have collaborated with neighboring churches to plan and lead an annual Good Friday service that includes a shared meal, the Lord's Supper, and a worship service. We have held joint services with other churches in our community, and even met in the non-denom church down the road while our boiler was being fixed.

Our Youth Director frequently combines with churches in our neighborhood for retreats, mission trips, fundraisers, and other events. She also meets regularly with an ecumenical group of leaders from all over Grand Rapids through Grand Rapids Initiative for Leaders (GRIL) and has made connections with those from Young Life, Navigators, New City Kids, and Bridge Street Ministries.

Our church has been a member of the Christian Community Development Association and have had a significant number of people attend their ecumenical conferences in the past, both the national and West Michigan chapter.

Creston Church provides support to several missionaries through Resonate Global Mission and other missionary organizations. We have an ongoing relationship with these individuals and families and are eager to hear stories of their work when they are on home service.

### Current Opportunities for Creston to Continue to Grow

**Ministry Specific**—Being a neighborhood church and what that means: many members live in the community, while others live in different areas of the city. Some have concerns about how well we can relate to and be part of the community if we live outside it geographically. We also struggle with the desire to be a diverse church reflecting the neighborhood around us, while the majority of us, and particularly those in leadership, are white.

Knowing that we all find ourselves in messy life situations, we come alongside our neighbors demonstrating Christ's love by loving them as we love ourselves and encouraging them in God's way for their lives. We seek to live with a sense of mutuality, understanding that our neighbors have as much to contribute to the relationship as we do.

**Council**—Empowering people to take leadership roles: as in many churches, there are some who are consistently involved and leading various ministries while others stay on the sidelines. Creston experiences this in unique ways – more than 20% of those who meet with us regularly are attenders rather than members. This means that for certain leadership roles (administrative council and shepherding elders), there are fewer eligible to fill them than would seem apparent on the surface. Additionally, as is true in many other churches, Creston has a core group of people who cycle through leadership positions. We need to find a way to mentor and empower more members to take on these roles.



**Physical resources**—A continual struggle for our church has been meeting our annual budget. Despite feeling pressure to meet our annual budgetary needs, God has been very gracious to us and has kept our church open for over 100 years. While we would not describe the members to be wealthy, we tend to have a very generous congregation that has continued to give when most needed.

Our church building is another resource area where we have continually trusted that God will provide. It is an old building and at times we've put off repairs due to financial limitations. However, when specific needs like replacing our boiler or repairing the roof, God has provided and we continue to worship together in a comfortable space. We are very grateful for our church building and its location. We do

recognize there are many needs that continue to present themselves. In light of this, discussions to implement a capital campaign have continued. While these plans are put on hold at the moment, it is the belief that this work should continue.

**Equipping Worship Teams**—Not unlike other areas of church life and ministry, our worship teams are vulnerable to burnout. We have 5 worship teams and a Worship Planning Committee, but the Worship Planning Committee has struggled with strong central leadership. The worship teams are eager to welcome new members, but onboarding or training of worship team members has been lacking. We are ripe with the opportunity to train team members and coordinate a more cohesive worship planning process.

**Creston's Identity**—Creston wrestles with a kind of identity crisis, perhaps not unlike the CRC at large. Many of us grew up in the CRC and a good number of us have not. Many feel that we can define what the CRC 'used to be' but struggle to define what we think the CRC 'should be'— in light of modern practical, political, racial, and economical challenges. A good portion of us have faith backgrounds outside of the CRC and we struggle to reconcile that with our beliefs about God, the church, and our non-Christian and non-CRC neighbors. Despite these challenges, our church is still deeply committed to each other. This is an important factor, likely more than anything else (worship style, church affiliation, politics), that is keeping us together. These differences led us to the most interesting and challenging experience at Creston in the past three years, a discussion of the sacraments. Creston Church is home to many who grew up with faith practices outside the Reformed tradition. Over the past 8 years, we have had many conversations with families and the entire congregation related to baptism and the Lord's Supper. Following is the most recent communication to the congregation, which describes our journey and the conclusions reached.

Dear Congregation,

Since the elders of Creston Church took up the question of welcoming children to the Lord's Table, we have prayerfully engaged in many conversations about the impact of this change for our congregation. As we shifted practices to include young people who expressed their faith in a way appropriate to their age and ability, we recognized that some families experienced exclusion from church membership and from participation in the sacraments.



Creston, being a member of the Christian Reformed Church denomination, has long embraced a covenant theology that is evident in the practice of infant baptism. We have been blessed to welcome people into our fellowship who came to us from other Christian backgrounds with different understandings of baptism and communion. It was lamentable that these life-giving practices were causing alienation and pain.

The elders sought input from impacted families. We held a listening session to which the full congregation was invited. And we submitted a request for guidance from Classis Grand Rapids North, our regional network of Christian Reformed Churches. The response to our question from Classis Grand Rapids North was especially helpful in its pastoral approach, acknowledging that the questions we were struggling with are being faced by many other congregations. After listening to



these voices, the elders crafted and approved a document that will guide the administrative and shepherding elders in overseeing the sacraments.

This excerpt from the document summarizes the elder's approach going forward:

Creston Church practices the sacraments of baptism and communion as vital signs of grace in our community.

We believe that baptism is a sign of one's inclusion in the covenant family of God. Whether baptism takes place when one is an infant or a child, or when one becomes a believer, it demonstrates the grace of God given to us not because we have earned a place in God's family, but because God has chosen to enfold us.

We believe that communion (also called "The Lord's Supper" or "Eucharist") is a sign of our unity with Christ, through the Holy Spirit, as well as our unity with the church universal in all times and in all places. It reminds us of Jesus' suffering and sacrificial love for the people of God. It is a meal of thanksgiving for God's grace that is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. Participation in communion is open to those who express faith and a desire to follow Jesus that is appropriate for their age and ability. We hope that participation is not done out of custom or superstition.

While Creston is a part of the Reformed tradition, we are also part of the church universal. There are other understandings of the sacraments, derived from Scripture and held by fellow Christians, that may contradict some aspects of our Reformed teaching or practice. While these differences matter, we also value the inclusion and participation of our brothers and sisters in Christ whose views are different from ours.

Ultimately, when we celebrate communion, we gather at the Lord's table -- not Creston's table, not the CRC's table. The elders are entrusted with overseeing the administration of the sacraments. We are also charged with encouraging the ongoing growth and exploration of faith for each member of the community. We trust the leading of the Holy Spirit in the judgment of worshippers regarding whether or not it is appropriate for them to participate. In partnership with parents and guardians, we will encourage children to grow in their faith and to experience God's grace through the sacraments in ways that are appropriate for their age and ability.



Our plan is for our Children and Youth Ministry staff to partner with the Shepherding Elders in making contact with each family to discern and understand how parents would like their family to participate in the sacraments.

If you have any questions about this process, please reach out to one of the administrative elders: Sheryl Van Eck, Noah Kruis or Sharon Straight. If you would like to read Classis Grand Rapids North's response to our inquiry or the full document on the sacraments, contact Administrative Coordinator, Jen Puplis.

In Christ's service,

The Administrative Elders: Sheryl Van Eck, Noah Kruis & Sharon Straight

## Creston hopes to grow in the future in the following areas of ministry

**Continuing faith formation opportunities for all who call Creston home**—When asked about dreams and goals, our congregation ranked this very high. It is clear that deep spirituality is a prime focus as members suggested small group ministry, house church, Bible studies, opportunities to practice spiritual disciplines, programs to mentor young Christians and seminary students, and growing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Continuing the connection with our neighborhood**—We have always had a strong connection to our neighborhood, with many who attend Creston living within walking distance of church. We make it our business to get to know our neighbors, not as “projects” but as fellow human beings who may or may not know Christ as their Savior. Our goal is to develop relationships and then have the opportunity for deeper spiritual conversations. Opportunities we have identified are outreach/mentoring in local schools, developing a play space as part of the community garden, stronger connection with the neighborhood association, New City Neighbors, and other churches, and opening a drop-in center.

**Dealing with issues of human sexuality**—As a body, we have used the opportunity in between pastors to reflect on our past. In congregational discussions, we have realized that we have unsettled feelings about the way our community responded to sexual diversity in the past. Many members were not yet part of our church community when human sexuality was last a prominent issue, and so we recognize that events in our shared history have had different effects on different members, yet we all acknowledge that we need to be able to talk about it with love and care. A group of 10 members began meeting to discuss this topic through the Colossian Forum in early 2020 but recessed due to social distancing requirements during the coronavirus pandemic. They reconvened in-person meetings in September 2020.

**Continuing our anti-racism journey**—Creston has the goal of becoming a diverse, anti-racist, multicultural church. To that end, a large number of people have attended the Congregations Organizing for Racial Reconciliation (CORR) training and a small group meets to caucus once a month.

**New opportunities for the Nizhoni House**—Nizhoni House is an intentional Christian community that has been a partnership between Creston and Calvin University since 2007. It is a home to Calvin students and mentors who share food in common and participate in weekly rhythms, and they commit themselves to meeting neighbors and getting involved with local organizations. As of June 2020, the partnership with Calvin is ending. Creston will continue oversight of Nizhoni with plans to form a self-sustaining community house for graduates, alumni, and other community-oriented people and to re-evaluate in the spring of 2021.



## Creston as a Christian Reformed Church

We are a local church congregation of the Christian Reformed Church. We believe that all humans are created by God, that God empowered us to care for the world, that sin entered the world, and that God redeemed it. God restores his creation, and welcomes us to join in God’s work in the world. We seek God’s face and guidance through God’s Spirit—through prayer and through the Bible which we believe to be God’s reliable word. We are scaffolded by Reformed theology as expressed in documents like the Heidelberg Catechism.



We might be unique among other CRCs in that many in our community are particularly inspired by the reformed promise that our world belongs to God, and that through our love and care of the world, we join God in God's will on earth as in heaven. An observer could identify the very practical application of this theology in the life of our congregation as a whole—and in our lives individually. We pursue anti-racism, give money to neighbors in need, support local businesses because we want to see God's kingdom come. We build rain gardens, support New City Urban Farm, cultivate a community garden and plan a nature playscape because we want creation restored. We live in an intentional community, give to New City Neighbors, attend the Creston Neighborhood Association pancake breakfast, throw a block party because we want to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Creston is part of Classis Grand Rapids North and participates regularly with this body. The Classis provides structure and leadership for joint ministry in supporting existing churches and church plants. Classis also provides oversight and guidance when questions arise. Council recently sought advice as it worked through difficult questions regarding the sacraments. Belonging to the Christian Reformed denomination brings a variety of thoughts and emotions to the surface for our congregation ranging from believing it is very important with the statement that the doctrine is true and biblical to believing that belonging to a denomination holds us back from change. Some state it is more important to be part of a Christian church than to be part of the Reformed tradition while others have only ever belonged to a CRC and find it comfortable. As noted previously, many who attend Creston are from other religious backgrounds. Many find value in the shared ministries, opportunities and support that belonging to a denomination brings.



Just as it might be challenging for an individual Christian to pinpoint their firm beliefs in the flow of life's challenges, it might be difficult to nail down our specific corporately held theology. And yet we are held together by God's grace and sovereignty. We trust—and regularly affirm—that God is bigger than our doubts, and God's spirit leads us to join in God's work in God's world.

### Cultural Challenges our church is facing:

When asked about the cultural challenges facing the church and Creston in particular, our congregation ranked these as the top 3:

- Working through human sexuality/LGBTQ issues—this challenge has been noted earlier in the profile.
- Being a white church in a racially diverse neighborhood and the desire to be anti-racist and live well with our neighbors.
- Challenges to long-held beliefs regarding values and determining what is biblical vs cultural along with lack of interest in knowledge of the Bible and obedience to what is uncomfortable (understanding this statement could come from multiple points of view).

## Important Events in Creston's History

Describing the three most important events in Creston's history was an interesting experience for our congregation, considering that many have been at Creston for less than 10 years of its 100+ year history. The following are just a few that we feel have played an important role in shaping the church.

- Choosing on a number of occasions to remain open as opposed to closing our doors or moving to another location. Creston has been in the position in which many other churches find themselves as membership over the past 50 years has steadily decreased. Our anniversary booklet from 2015 relates these stories and the solid belief that God had a plan for his work and our ministry to continue in the Creston neighborhood. Long-time members relate conversations in about 2003 about continued prayer for 5 new members to join them in order for Creston to begin growing again. Beginning around 2010, Creston has enjoyed a resurgence in membership with young couples and families moving into the neighborhood, finding their way to Creston and choosing to join us in worship and work in our community.
- The decision to partner with Calvin College (University) and Inner City Christian Federation (ICCF) to become part of Calvin's Project Neighborhood program. Creston was a small, aging congregation struggling to meet its budget and yet confident in its vital neighborhood ministry. A few members of the congregation began working together to find a house that the church could use to partner with Calvin College in its Project Neighborhood program, a residential program for college students to live in intentional community together while serving and learning in its neighborhood. Just prior to the housing crash, Creston Church raised enough money to partner with ICCF to purchase and renovate a home very close to the church. Creston Church partnered with Calvin to bring mentors and students together to become involved in our neighborhood and church. Over the past 13 years, we have seen God's blessing through the lives of students, mentors, neighbors and church attendees. Many residents of the house have made Creston their church home long after graduating from Nizhoni residence. Calvin is now re-evaluating its commitment to Project Neighborhood as a whole, and our specific partnership with Calvin ends in 2020. Calvin alumni—former Project Neighborhood participants—will continue to occupy the house for the next year, and we are now seeking God's guidance for the future of this home and our presence in the neighborhood.
- The baby boom that began in late the 2000s. As noted earlier, Creston experienced a steady decline in membership in the late 1990s and early into the 2000s. During this time, there was no need for children's programming or a youth group because there simply were no kids to be involved in these ministries. Since about 2010, membership has increased steadily, many of whom are young couples and families with small children. The number of children has increased from 3 to 45, challenging us to restart Children's worship, Sunday school, youth group, and Little Lambs as part of Coffee Break. We hired a part-time Children and Youth Ministry Coordinator in 2013 and Youth Director in 2018. Our children and youth ministries are now vibrant with the goal of intentional faith formation for our youngest members.



### Identified desirable characteristics of a pastor

When asked to identify characteristics of a pastor that will help Creston continue to move forward in ministry and meet the challenges we will continue to face in our community and culture in general, these were the most common responses:

- Preaching that relates the goals of God, Creston, the Bible to our lives/delves into scripture/discusses difficult questions and shares insights in sermons
- Engaged in growing in his/her own faith, sound foundation of prayer and in tune with the work of the Holy Spirit
- Concerned about people on the margins—those Christ focused on in his ministry—with disabilities, social rejects, disillusioned, lost/involved with them/loves those in the neighborhood/inclusive
- Relates well with people/values everyone in the congregation—sees every age group as having gifts to share with all of us, empowering
- Regular discussions focused on spiritual needs and growth—group settings and one-on-one/lead in discipleship/enables and equips congregation/mentor leaders



### Creston's Leadership

Creston's leadership structure is led by an administrative council that meets monthly. The administrative council is made up of 7 serving members comprising 4 deacons, 3 elders, and the pastor who does not officially have a vote. We recently developed another group called shepherding elders. This committee provides pastoral care for our congregation. There are 7 people serving as shepherds. Administrative deacons and elders serve 3-year terms, while shepherding elders are installed for 1 year terms with the opportunity to continue. Most shepherds serve 3 years at a time.

Other than the pastor, Creston has three part-time ministry staff that regularly work in the church office. These roles are the administrative coordinator, a children's ministry coordinator, and a youth director. The church also employs a part-time custodian.

Creston also has several committees responsible for different areas of ministry within the church. Following is a list of all the committees, their function and regularity of meeting.

Name	Function of Group	Meeting Cadence
Administrative Council	Overall supervision of church's ministry	Monthly, more often as necessary

Elders	Serve by governing the church in Christ's name; responsible for the spiritual well-being of God's people	Monthly, more often as necessary
Deacons	Serve by showing mercy to the church and to all people; assess needs, promote stewardship and hospitality, collect and disburse resources for benevolence, and develop programs of assistance	Monthly, more often as necessary
Shepherding Elders	Provide direct care and discipleship in the congregation while also encouraging others to be care-givers and disciple-makers	Monthly, more often as necessary
Building Committee	Maintenance of church building, ministry center, and grounds	Bi-monthly
Children and Youth Ministry Advisory Team	Develop direction via short and long term goals for children and youth ministry; provide feedback on current programs; and advocate for CYM to the congregation by modeling welcoming environment for all children and youth	Quarterly
Christian Education	Promote Christian Education by encouraging families to send their children to Christian schools and work to raise funds so finances are not a hindrance to doing so	Quarterly
Community Garden Coordinator	Coordinate use of garden plots in space owned by Creston; plots used by congregation and neighbors; half of area is play space for neighborhood	As needed
Counting Committee	Count and deposit gifts received by Creston Church, record and track gifts, monthly report to treasurer	Weekly or bi-weekly

Creston Anti-Racism Team (CART)	Lead and hold the church accountable to the goal of becoming a diverse, anti-racist, multicultural church	Monthly plus North End Caucus as scheduled
Disability Advocate	Research and recommend ways to improve accessibility of worship, meetings and the buildings; first contact for disability concerns	As needed
Food	While this group does not have an official mandate, it serves the congregation in multiple ways – creating community by organizing dinners that we share with our neighbors, organizing potlucks for the congregation, and serving for a variety of congregational events	As needed
Human Resources	Annual review of work performance of employees; recommend changes to job descriptions; review staff salary and benefits	As needed
Transition Team	Invite the congregation into meaningful reflection on our past, present and future so that the search committee can have a clear picture of the church's present and desired future as well as have a clear sense of the issues to be considered in searching for a new pastor; complete draft of church profile	Bi-weekly
Worship Planning Committee	Recruit, train, empower, oversee and provide practical guidance to worship teams that plan and lead Sunday worship services	Bi-monthly

## Building/Financial

Below is the current financial budget of the church along with more details of our building and additional facilities.

Present annual budget: \$178,798

Last year's annual budget: \$165,590

Percentage of financial obligations met (last complete year reported):

Budget: 99.9%

Denominational Ministry Shares: 25% of requested; new guidelines now apply

Classical Ministry Shares: 100%

Amount contributed above budget and ministry shares: \$15,000 for missionary support and special offerings.

**Current Facilities.** Creston's church building was built in 1917 and has been in continual use since that date. The sanctuary seats about 200 people and is adequate for current worship services. The basement includes a kitchen, fellowship room, restrooms, nursery, family room, small library (books rotated on a monthly basis), and a classroom currently used for children's ministry. The elevator ensures accessibility to both floors.



The Ministry Center is a building adjacent to the church and houses offices for the pastor, administrative coordinator, children's ministry coordinator and youth director. It also contains a large meeting room used for various ministries and meetings that also serves as a library. There are 2 classrooms on the main level, a large basement room used by our youth group, and restrooms.

There is an extra lot behind the ministry center that contains community garden plots with parts of this area transitioning to a community play scape.

The Nizhoni House is located 2 doors south of the Ministry Center and houses Calvin students and mentors committed to an intentional Christian community in an urban setting. Beginning in June 2020, Nizhoni will continue as an intentional Christian community but for the 2020-21 school year will not be affiliated with Calvin University based on program changes and cuts at Calvin. The door remains open to return to this affiliation if the situation at Calvin changes in the future.

Our buildings are currently adequate; future consideration will be necessary if our congregation continues to grow. There are no plans to build or add to buildings at this time although we recognize the need for physical improvement to the current spaces, for example, the elevator.

Creston does not own a parsonage and we are eager to have our pastor live in our neighborhood. Office space is provided in the Ministry Center.



## Compensation

The salary range we are prepared to offer our new pastor is based on the CRC Minister Compensation Survey for our area. We have worked over the past 10 years to increase the pastor's salary to be in line with the prevailing salary range in Classis Grand Rapids North. We are now above the average total base salary for our classis. The salary has increased significantly over the past 3 years and we expect that to become more level in the future as we maintain compensation in the recommended range. Compensation will be commensurate with experience.

The specifics of the compensation package can be changed due to the needs of the pastor; however, the general package would include the following.

- Pension - Creston contributes to the CRC's pension package for pastors.
- Medical insurance - Our most recent pastor received a generous stipend and contributions to an HSA for their health insurance, which was purchased on the marketplace. This provided the least expensive and best care options.
- Social Security taxes are assumed by the pastor unless they would like to be considered an employee, which would then alter the total compensation package.
- Mileage, professional expenses, and money for seminars are all included in the budget.
- Sabbatical policy in place that is encouraged to be used on a 7 year basis
- Annual vacation will include up to 4 weeks of vacation time and a total of 12 Sunday services off based on the current pulpit supply budget.

Thank you for considering our church community. We prayerfully seek a pastor to lead our congregation into the next chapter of its ministry, and we hope you will join us in seeking God's will. For more information, contact Sheryl Van Eck, Search Committee Chair.