



Christian
Reformed
Church

our journey 2020

CHURCH AND COMMUNITY ▪ DISCIPLESHIP ▪ LEADERSHIP ▪ IDENTITY ▪ COLLABORATION

Our Faith

Like a great tree, our faith is a living, growing thing. It flows from the Father's great love for his creation, epitomized in the giving of his Son, who walked among us, was crucified, and rose from the dead to ascend and rule as the King of kings and Lord of lords at the Father's right hand. We now walk by faith in Christ through the ongoing work of the Spirit, a foretaste of what is to come: the finished, new creation.

Our faith is rooted in the Old and New Testaments, the inspired Word of God, an infallible anchor for our lives. Three creeds—the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed—grew from our biblical roots to form a sturdy trunk that unites us with brothers and sisters in Christ around the world.

The Reformed branch of our Christian faith has expressed itself for centuries in the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort. More recently the Christian Reformed Church adopted Our World Belongs to God and the Belhar Confession as contemporary testimonies to serve as dynamic statements of faith that speak to essential matters in our time.

Fed by the river of life, this great tree of our faith continues to send out branches and bear fruit. In the Christian Reformed Church in North America, we are experiencing that growth in transformed lives, transformed congregations, and a fresh vision for the future. Rooted and sturdy, we are becoming ever new.





Our Journey

There's something about a journey that's exciting and invigorating. A promise of new horizons; new possibilities; new challenges. The Christian Reformed Church is on such a journey. It's called *Our Journey 2020* — “*Our Journey*” because we're on it together; “2020” to remind us that this is just one stage of a journey that will see us living and growing together in new ways and new places.

Some of the most interesting journeys happen when you know where you are going, but not exactly how to get there. This is that kind of a trip. CRC members and leaders across Canada and the United States told us about the challenges their churches are facing. These challenges framed the goals, or “desired futures,” showing where we need to go. But how to get there — and where to go first — will be different for each congregation.

What we do know is that we've been called to step out in faith. And that by walking together, with the Spirit leading and guiding us, we will reach the futures that God desires for us. These goals will enable us to better assist each other in mapping out our unique routes, while drawing upon our shared resources and expertise.

It's a challenging undertaking, but our hopes are not tied to what we can do. Rather, in the words of 1 Thessalonians 5:24, “The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.”

As we walk together into these desired futures, we will become the people that we hear God calling us to be. This is *Our Journey 2020*.

Steven Timmermans
Executive Director,
Christian Reformed Church in North America
First CRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan



Desired Future 1

Church and Community: *Churches Flowing into Their Communities*

Our congregations will flow like streams into their communities. We will meet our neighbors at community events and gathering places, listening to each other, learning from each other, and serving each other. By our presence we will become channels for the love of Christ and the Holy Spirit's life-giving transformation.

Our Goals

Our congregations will

- explore their communities, learning from neighbors where a community's life is lively and fresh, and where it is parched and asking for help.
- discover where God's Spirit is moving, working through individuals, organizations, other churches, and businesses to meet needs and to bring health and freedom.
- joyfully join this work of transformation.
- discern, through community presence and partnerships, how lay and ordained leaders can offer the good news of faith in Christ in ways that connect to the needs our neighbors express, and to their cultures.
- as a result of listening and discernment, give birth to new churches and discipling communities.

“About 10 years ago we realized that we could be zapped off our property and our neighbors wouldn’t notice.”

“We began with a desire to figure out who our neighbors are. Right next to the church we have low-income housing, a building with lots of social issues. So instead of having our church picnic in a park somewhere, we put it on the front lawn to see who came. And a bunch of our neighbors from next door came. That gave us a clue: if we provided an opportunity for food and connection, we’d get a response.

“One of our home churches decided to host a dinner once a month and to invite the people from the immediate neighborhood. Our learning curve was, and is, *How do we move from serving people to welcoming them into the fabric of our social lives and our day-to-day living?* It’s one thing to serve someone and be hospitable. It’s another thing to become friends.

“Building friendships across cultural boundaries takes energy. It’s intimidating at first too. *Will I say the wrong thing? Am I being hospitable, or am I offending?* But over time we are realizing how rich and fun and empowering it is to lean in, to get to know our neighbors’ stories.

“We also discovered that there were organizations in our neighborhood where God was already at work and that God was inviting us to jump in and join that work. So every Tuesday night a group of volunteers

distributes perishable food with two community food organizations. There too we are learning not just to serve those who come but also to hear their stories and create relationships with them.

“God has put us in this neighborhood. So now we’re asking, *How is it that the neighbors sense that we’re truly neighbors, that we’re for them and that it’s an interwoven relationship?*”

Kevin DeRaaf is the pastor of Faith CRC in Burlington, Ontario, a middle-class bedroom community between Hamilton and Toronto. Over the past decade, the congregation has increasingly moved its ministry beyond its church walls.





Desired Future 2

Discipleship: *Churches Nurturing Disciples*

Our churches will be vibrant communities, radiating grace. As we preach, teach, and live out the gospel within and beyond our walls, we nurture people of all generations as they grow into the likeness of Christ Jesus.

Our Goals

Our congregations will

- speak mercy and offer hospitality to all.
- create a welcoming home where people of all ages, ethnicities, genders, and abilities learn to love and to help each other grow into the likeness of Christ.
- search out resources and model practices that nourish our members and ministries so that all may strengthen their bond of love to God, to each other, and to neighbors everywhere.
- put children, youth, and young adults at the heart of the church's life and value their contributions to church ministries.
- worship in ways that are both sensitive and stirring, encouraging people of all ages to participate.

“When my wife and I first came here, we really wanted to do community intentionally. And we didn’t want that community to be about Bible study only. We wanted to eat together and have fun together and serve others together. A handful of us were the youngest people in the church by 20 years, but we started inviting anybody we met to our house. Within four years we had 12 missional small groups meeting around the city.”

“We always try to start new groups by hiving them off of existing groups so that we replicate healthy culture. Healthy culture is nearly impossible to teach—it has to be experienced and internalized. We try to start new groups with at least 10 adults, and we encourage high-school-age students to go to a group apart from their parents. When teenagers are brought into the real life of discipleship, we see zero falloff when they become young adults. They catch the healthy culture.

“What we desire for people is to have fellowship and community. We really believe what AA has known for years—that community will socialize people into the kingdom. Believing rarely comes without belonging first.

“So our groups have a hefty sharing time when people confess and ask for prayer. And they’re held accountable for growing. Another accountability piece is that group members work together to serve others. There’s a lot of accountability in our groups.

“We tell people that if they have to choose between Sunday worship and a small group, they should go to a small group, because we actively believe that the primary discipleship mechanism is intimate community. We’ve found that people who are connected in a small group grow a lot faster than people who just come and sit in church.

“Culture has power. With a healthy discipleship replication culture, people can’t help but be swept in, and then they replicate good healthy things.”

Mark Hilbelink pastors Sunrise Community Church in Austin, Texas, which bills itself “The Weirdest Little Church in Texas.”





Desired Future 3

Leadership: Churches Cultivating Leaders

Our churches and ministries will grow new leaders of many kinds. At all levels—local, regional, denominational—we discover the talents, skills, and strengths in our ordained and lay people. We cultivate those gifts through education, hands-on ministry opportunities, and guidance from mature leaders in order to raise new leaders who have deep roots and yield abundant fruit.

Our Goals

Our congregations and ministries will

- discern the particular kinds of skilled leaders their people and neighborhoods need.
- choose as leaders men and women who are filled with the Spirit and who are skilled at bringing creativity to old problems, seeing conflict and change as opportunities, and empowering others to use their gifts.
- search out the gifts and skills in members of all genders, ages, abilities, and ethnicities, and help them grow and strengthen those gifts through education, ministry opportunities, and deep relationships with experienced leaders.
- join partners throughout the world to seek out and cultivate innovative local leaders who can bring effective and Spirit-filled responses to needs they know best.

“The church has always been my second home. Growing up, I heard Bible stories but never knew there was more behind those stories. I wanted to know more about those stories, which led me to enroll in the LDN (Leadership Development Network) program. After three years of study I was examined and received my license to exhort. But I didn’t preach in my own church until three years later. I did preach in other places, though.”

“I usually preach like I’m teaching. Since I used to be a school teacher, I become a teacher and the congregation becomes my students. This also helps me not to get nervous. In addition, I use visual aids to get the message across.

“I’m very interested in people growing. The Scripture talks about growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. I know Christ wants us to grow. Going through the LDN program has really expanded my growth. I feel more confident in my presentations, whether I’m preaching or leading Bible study. I see that in other LDN graduates too when I watch them preach or lead worship.

“We have over 20 LDN graduates who are licensed to exhort. That really says a lot about our churches. People want to step up when given a chance. We are finally feeling ownership of our churches. We are beginning to take care of our churches too.

“One of the things I do when preparing lessons for a small group is not to follow everything the manual says but to adapt or adjust it to my Navajo audience. I ask myself, ‘How would our Navajo people do this or address this?’ To the group I’ll say, ‘The book might say this, but we Navajos don’t do it that way.’ The action plans for Timothy Leadership lessons have steps to follow, but sometimes the steps don’t work for us. Sometimes we don’t have the Navajo words for the words used in the lessons. In the end, though, we all accomplish what God has set for us to do, and he gets all the glory.”

Darleen Litson is a member of Four Corners CRC in Teec Nos Pos, Arizona. She and her husband are graduates of the Classis Red Mesa Leadership Development Network. She now serves the LDN as its Dean of Students.



Desired Future 4

Identity: Churches Telling Our Story

We will grasp—and be grasped by—a richly Reformed world and life view so that we are able and eager to express what it means to belong to God's diverse and unified family. Transformed by that story, we will learn to tell it so compellingly that people from many cultures and experiences are drawn to see and know themselves as God's beloved ones, entrusted to bring the good news to others.

Our Goals

Our congregations and ministries will

- learn to tell, in ways that are clear and compelling, the story of God's grace and restoring love, and of God's call to join him in renewing all creation.
- live out that story so that our churches radiate welcome and a sense of belonging to people of all ages, abilities, genders, and ethnicities.
- joyfully answer the call to do justice and walk humbly with our God (Mic. 6:8).
- see, affirm, and robustly carry out the unique role that God has called us to fulfill in his church worldwide.

“My father was a Jewish immigrant from Germany. My mother was raised Episcopalian; then her parents became Christian Scientist. As a child I went to a Lutheran church with neighbors and to a Catholic high school.”

“One day I was driving around completely lost, and I passed this little school, Calvin Christian School. My son was having difficulties in his school at the time, and I thought, ‘Let’s try something totally different.’

“He entered in the fourth grade and told me, ‘Mom, I finally have a teacher who likes me.’ We met a family there who invited us to their church, Cottage Grove CRC. The rest is history.

“I’ve worked with cancer patients for over 30 years. I don’t think I could keep doing this work if I didn’t have the worldview I picked up in the CRC, one that keeps the Bible at the center. I know that there is a God and that although we are sinners, there is hope in Jesus and a life after this one. And the only way we make headway in this sinful world is to spread that message by serving others.”

*Stephanie Williams, M.D.
Division Chief, Adult Blood and
Marrow Transplant Program, Spectrum
Health Loop Church, Chicago, Illinois*



“I was born and educated in Nigeria, in the CRC. After college I was a missionary for over 12 years, engaging a lot of cultures. That journey shaped my view about how to do church with people of many different cultures.”

“Something I love about Reformed theology is the message of irresistible grace. In our church we’re constantly reminding people that although we’re broken, although we all are burdened by so many expectations, there is hope, there is freedom, there is rescue. That’s a message that crosses cultures, that everyone wants to hear.

“The other side of that grace is our Reformed understanding of costly discipleship. We’re invited to carry the kingdom into every sphere of society. We invite people to see themselves in that bigger story. And when they begin to see that they have a part to play in the bigger story, that they have a mission they’re not scared by the cost. They’re excited!”

*William Karshima
Pastor, Oasis Community Church,
Winter Garden, Florida*



“I grew up in a Reformed church. In that church we were the only ones to go to Christian schools. When I got married, I joined my husband in the Christian Reformed Church because we both were teaching in the Christian schools. So I’ve been Reformed for 90 years.”

“I’ve known people with the view that this life isn’t so important as long as we have our eye on heaven. The Reformed view is that every square inch of this life is important. So we should teach young people that if you want to be a mechanic, be a good mechanic. Be a caring mechanic. Take part in your church and community. And vote! Whatever you do, do it for the glory of God.

“It’s all in God’s hands—we emphasize that. It’s hard to remember always that everything is in God’s plan and that the little things we do count in life. But I believe they do.”

*Phyllis Boonstra
East Paris CRC,
Grand Rapids, Michigan*





Desired Future 5

Collaboration: *Churches Working in Partnership*

Our churches and ministries will work hand in hand with each other, and with partners in our own communities and around the world, to faithfully fulfill Jesus' command to make disciples of all people.

Our Goals

Our congregations and ministries will

- understand that we are uniquely gifted parts of one body, each doing what we do best but all working together for God's kingdom.
- connect with each other to discover the services, resources, and opportunities each one needs for the tasks, at home and around the world, to which God is calling them.

“We’re in a rapidly changing world where leaders need to build relationships among all the parts and generously share the learning. It’s collaborative leadership.”

“In 2009 I went to the Korean Coffee Break Conference and saw leaders from all over the world. Coffee Break had gone global on us when we weren’t looking! We in Home Missions realized that God was doing something in Coffee Break through a lot of people learning from each other.

“Our posture is no longer ‘We’re the experts, and we have what you need.’ Now we’re asking ourselves, ‘How do we build a learning community, a network, where people are connected, sharing their ideas, and learning from each other?’ We want to be brokers of best practices.

“For example, Diane Averill on the East Coast has two clusters of Coffee Break leaders, from New England to Florida. They meet on the phone every month for an hour. First they pray for each other; then they take a topic and brainstorm. The clusters have shared missional ideas with one another and have put them into practice, which has produced tremendous fruit. About their connections with each other, some leaders are saying, ‘This is our lifeline.’

“We’re developing coaching clusters for adult discipleship ministry leaders on the same model. The coach comes with questions. The discipleship ministry leaders—who know their local contexts—listen to each other and discover the answers they already have, how they’ve seen God at work.

“Yes, we still need experts for some pieces of our ministries. We’re figuring out what pieces are still more efficient and practical for the denomination to do—but always in service of the larger network of leaders and local churches.

“Home Missions is becoming more adaptive, like a gardener. A gardener has to be both proactive and adaptive. He has a plan, but he also has to be in tune with the soil, the conditions, the weather. He’s always watching and ready to change. We’re stepping back and watching to see what springs up. Then we respond to that.”

Sam Huizenga coaches and trains leaders of small groups as well as Coffee Break leaders. She’s a member of River Rock CRC in Rockford, Michigan.



Thoughts and Reflections

"We're not a multicultural church because we have to be or because it's what everybody is doing. We're a multicultural church because these are our neighbors and we need each other to grow in Christ."

Tito Venegas

Copastor,

The Intersection Ministries,

Holland, Michigan



"In the Christian Reformed Church I learned how to pursue a career that's an extension of the Beatitudes. Before, I had always felt I should be doing more to help people. But I learned the Reformed view that God has a big plan that meets all our needs. It's not my ultimate responsibility to correct all the suffering. That was such a relief for me! I can do my part in that big plan and trust God to take it in the right direction."

Mona Van Kanegan,

Cofounder, codirector,

Chicago Community

Oral Health Forum,

Heartland Health Outreach,

Heartland Alliance

Loop Church,

Chicago, Illinois



"I find the Reformed world and life view compelling. It's a gift to us, but not just to us. We're in a post-institutional, post-Christian, multicultural world, and we now have to learn to translate the Reformed world and life view to people who are suspicious of institutions and religion."

Trevor Vanderveen

Copastor,

First CRC, Vancouver,

British Columbia



“The most foundational thing we do in developing leaders is to be vulnerable with each other in the presence of the Lord. We ask each other, ‘How are you listening to the Lord; what is he up to?’ Then we go where he asks us to go. If we short-circuit that part and make it all about a ministry goal, then we’re cutting ourselves off from the vine, and nothing we do will bear lasting fruit.”

*Joy Bonnema
Pastor,
Madison Square CRC,
North Campus,
Grand Rapids, Michigan*



“Given their rapidly growing population, Hispanics have a strategic place in the United States. We need to be ready. In the Certificate for Hispanic Ministry program, we are sharing with Hispanic pastors from many kinds of churches the resources of Calvin Theological Seminary, and it is very rewarding to see how they immediately apply what they learn. If we identify, equip, and empower Hispanic leaders in our *own* CRC churches—and that means funding their education—in 10 years we will be very happy we’ve done that.”

*Mariano Avila
Professor of New Testament,
Calvin Theological Seminary
Director, Certificate for
Hispanic Ministry
Boston Square CRC,
Grand Rapids, Michigan*



“We know that God is passionate about discipleship for every generation and every kind of person because the picture that is painted for us of heaven in the book of Revelation describes all the collected ages of saints in pure worship: ‘from every nation, tribe, people and language’ (Rev. 7:9).”

*Darren Roorda
Canadian Ministries Director,
CRCNA
New Life CRC,
Guelph, Ontario*



“The CRC places a high value on stewardship. That value has promoted forming partnerships in our development work overseas, because partnerships give us a higher return on our investment. Plus, we’re pioneers in church-to-church partnering. We help people in our North American churches form significant, reciprocal relationships with the churches we’re working with overseas. Each helps the other to flourish.”

*Ida Kaastra-Mutoigo
Codirector, World Renew
Immanuel CRC,
Hamilton, Ontario*



“If we begin an intentional process of developing leaders who come from the local community, our churches will change. And as our churches change, our denomination will change. But that takes work. Sometimes it will even feel like going against our own self-interest for the growth of the kingdom.”

*Reggie Smith
CRC Pastor
Grand Rapids, Michigan*



“The Connections project has identified people in various regions of Canada and the U.S.—local people who know local challenges and local resources for local churches. These ‘regional resourcers’ connect churches that are working on the same idea or questions within a region—and across different regions. When churches connect with other churches facing the same questions, they’re empowered.”

*Lis Van Harten
Director of Sustaining
Pastoral Excellence and
Sustaining Congregational
Excellence,
Pastor-Church Resources
Grant CRC, Grant, Michigan*



“Our church has been a union church from the beginning. That’s normal to us—a union between the CRC and the RCA. Every African American who attends is first-generation Reformed. And we have a lot of seekers. To us the differences between the two denominations aren’t important. The analogy I give is this: You have fraternal and maternal grandparents. And you love them both. Both denominations have nurtured us in different ways and have given us things we need to do ministry here.”

*Jeffrey Hough
Pastor,
Angel Community Church,
Muskegon, Michigan*



“I’m pleased about the new ministry plan because it ‘leans into’ the ministries of local churches. The plan was developed in consultation with CRC church leaders across North America specifically to address areas of greatest challenge that churches face today. Its ongoing implementation will happen with the same collaborative process so that denominational ministries will stay focused on what churches need most to serve our Lord well.”

*Mark Stephenson
Director,
CRC Disability Concerns
The Intersection Ministries,
Holland, Michigan*



“As someone who was welcomed, embraced, nurtured, and disciplined in a local church, Madison Avenue CRC in Paterson, New Jersey, I am greatly encouraged by the tone, direction, and content of the new ministry plan *Our Journey 2020*. If we are to be obedient to Jesus’ call to ‘make disciples of all nations’ (Matt. 28:19), we need to uplift local congregations who each minister in the rich diversity of ‘nations’ present in their local contexts . . . and to do so in a way that honors the unity that Christ desires for us (John 17).”

*Colin Watson
Director of Ministries and
Administration, CRCNA
Madison Square CRC,
Grand Rapids, Michigan*



“Regardless of the longevity of your journey, God has prepared the way for you. God has called you to follow him, and God is going before you. May we all hear and answer this call and travel this path together so that it becomes a highway even in desert places. May we never get ahead of Jesus but always seek to follow his way, for it is full of beauty and blessing.”

*Carol Bremer-Bennett
Codirector, World Renew
Madison Square CRC,
Grand Rapids, Michigan*



“I once heard a young woman say, ‘I long to belong to a church that smells like Jesus.’ Her longing has become my calling. When a congregation sings a duet that combines ‘Amazing grace . . . that saved a wretch like me’ with amazing Grace that transforms our communities toward the glory of Jesus, well, that’s Holy Spirit music that expresses the power and joy of faith formation ‘until Christ is formed in [us]’ (Gal. 4:19).”

*Syd Hielema
Team Leader,
Faith Formation Ministries
Meadowlands Fellowship CRC,
Ancaster, Ontario*



“*Our Journey* is the result of much prayer and listening in community with the confidence that the Holy Spirit is guiding us and shaping us—together. I am grateful for the emphasis on local church ministries and how we have been called to be salt and light to the world that God so loves.”

*Jul Medenblik
President,
Calvin Theological Seminary
Brookside CRC,
Grand Rapids, Michigan*



Watch the new videos



Our Journey: Identity

“What does being Christian Reformed mean to you?” In the first video of the Our Journey series, a cross-section of CRC members and leaders respond to that question in ways that will help you understand more deeply, embrace more fully and express more freely what it means to be a part of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.



Our Journey: Church and Community

The second video in the Our Journey series explores how two Christian Reformed churches are responding to new ministry opportunities in their communities. You will be inspired to discern where the Spirit is working in your community, bearing witness to Christ's presence in ways that invite others to accept him and become part of his family.



Our Journey: Discipleship

The third video in the Our Journey series presents compelling stories of people coming to a deeper walk with Jesus through the work and worship that is happening in Christian Reformed churches, so that we may become even more vibrant, grace-shaped communities of winsome welcome and lifelong discipleship.



Our Journey: Leadership

In the fourth video of the Our Journey series, three people describe how their churches helped to shape them as leaders. You'll be further committed to the continued development, training, and empowerment of leaders — lay and clergy — who can lead effectively in today's diverse and challenging contexts.

Watch or download these videos at crcna.org/OurJourney

To learn more about Our Journey 2020, the ministry plan of the
Christian Reformed Church visit: crcna.org/OurJourney



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