

Transformed and Transforming Radically Following Christ in Mission Together

Jesus said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5, NIV). Let’s start with prayer. Please find one other delegate and share:

- A “God story” in your life or the life of your church family.
- A difficulty in your life or the life of your church family.

Then conclude by praying with and for each other.

Deep and Heartfelt Thanks

I thank God for the gift of Amy, my wife, who is also faithfully serving Christ Jesus. Amy is my best friend. She’s a mother, a grandmother, and a mentor to women who seek to grow in service to God. Amy, I thank you and our daughters and their spouses, Heather and Josh Van Leeuwen and Kim and Jamie Dykstra, for your sacrificial love and prayers.

I thank Jesus, who called me into ministry through my parents, Case and Jessie Boersma; and my home church, Emmanuel Reformed in Springfield, South Dakota, which the Holy Spirit used to draw me to faith in Christ. It’s been a joy to serve Silver Creek Reformed Church in Silver Creek, Minnesota; Peace Reformed Church in Eagan, Minnesota; New Life Reformed Church in Sioux Center, Iowa; and now Faith Reformed Church in Brookings, South Dakota.

I also thank those who have co-labored with me. I appreciate my long-time friend, past-president of synod Tom Smith, who raised the leadership bar as my mentor; current synod vice president Greg Alderman, who called me weekly for prayer and leadership accountability; Rodger Price, former coordinator of revitalization and leader development for the RCA, and a discerning spiritual coach; and Paul Boice, the RCA’s chief operating officer, who inspired me with his gracious servant’s heart. Thanks also to Faith Reformed Church and all of Dakota Classis, praying diligently for Christ’s church and those in leadership.

And thank you to general secretary Tom De Vries, who has an evangelical heart that beats fast for the lost and a deep compassion for social justice. I am also grateful to our denominational staff, who are often under-appreciated and overworked. We’ve seen your faithfulness and your effectiveness as you implemented deep change to align with the RCA’s new strategic priorities.

Reformed Church in America, it has been an honor and privilege to serve in this role. The Holy Spirit has worked in and through you to inspire, guide, and encourage me in ministry.

Road to Transformed and Transforming

I am grateful for the RCA members, leaders, and congregations who intentionally and prayerfully listened to the Holy Spirit concerning ministry after “Our Call.” Since March 2010, thousands of RCA members—including leaders from hundreds of congregations and delegates

to two General Synods—took part in a prayerful process that led to the new vision for the RCA, “Transformed and Transforming: Radically Following Christ in Mission Together.”

An often heard reaction to our new vision is: “Oh, just another top-down initiative.” To this I respond, “Yes! For over three years the Holy Spirit has (top down) been guiding and directing us toward God’s preferred future for the RCA through the people of the Reformed Church in America!” Yes, it was top down! I repeatedly sensed the Holy Spirit leading us through the multitude of ways we sought as a church to discern the Lord’s leading. They include the initial Congregational Discovery Workshops. At Conversations in 2012, over five hundred people gathered with an open spirit to discern “Where does God’s work in our past, and our present point us into our future?” General Synod 2012 devoted two all-synod discernment experiences to listen to the Holy Spirit and work toward greater focus. At twenty-four Discovery events, over fifteen hundred RCA members convened to name three areas they saw as God’s preferred future for the RCA.

A General Synod Council small group committed to biblical reflection, prayer, fasting, and review of feedback from the Discovery events before generating an initial document. After prayer and revision, GSC unanimously affirmed *Transformed and Transforming: Radically Following Christ in Mission Together*, with three strategic priorities: transformation, leadership, and mission. General Synod 2013 joined hands in celebration and together sang the Doxology after approving *Transformed and Transforming*.

A highlight of being vice president was being a part of the discernment team that reviewed all of your input. We were amazed and overwhelmed by the consistency of the themes that emerged from across the denomination from east to west, from small and large churches, and even from liberal to conservative. This all confirmed our conviction that the Holy Spirit was leading!

Let’s say in unison the title, introduction, and three priorities of *Transformed and Transforming*:

Transformed and Transforming: Radically Following Christ in Mission Together

Being led by the Holy Spirit, serving with each other, embracing our diverse world and striving for a multicultural future freed from racism, and working with all the partners that God provides, as we move toward a fifth century of mission and ministry, the Reformed Church in America commits to focus its efforts for the next fifteen years on the following three interconnected priorities:

- Cultivating Transformation in Christ
- Equipping Emerging Leaders of Today and Tomorrow
- Engaging in Christ’s Kingdom Mission

This vision is a coming together as God’s people, committed to the purposes of Christ. It is taking a step of faith in moving forward into a future that we did not design nor create, but discovered in submission to the Holy Spirit’s leading. The fingerprints of many, many RCA people are visible in Christ’s vision for the years ahead. I pray this will further lead to ministry that reaches out to our world with the love of Jesus Christ in tangible and effective ways.

Implementation of Transformed and Transforming

Implementation of Transformed and Transforming brought a season of deep change for our denominational staff as they aligned with the direction in which the Spirit is leading us. This quite literally means that we are in a season of new wineskins for the new work that God is doing in our midst. Every church leader knows that structure serves mission. As our mission has become focused on our new direction, we have been asked by God to align to this vision. I commend and thank Tom De Vries and our executive leadership team for their faith and courage.

Last September, Tom De Vries wrote:

Our efforts...to lay a foundation for Transformed and Transforming have included defining the three interconnected strategic priorities, laying out goals and objectives, identifying a structure that will best achieve the goals and realize the priorities, determining the necessary positions of staff within the new structure, and aligning resources to form a balanced budget. These efforts have been challenging, and honestly, painful. It would be much easier to return to the known, the previous, and to continue to engage in it and pray for different results. I do not believe this is an option open to us.

Understanding the current and new reality, we are moving forward into a new sea, with a different composition, requiring altered navigation techniques, and with a significant learning curve. All the decisions we make will not be perfect; the choices will not be without disruption and discomfort. Together though, as a fleet of ships, we sail forward.

RCA staff, be assured of our appreciation, support, and prayers. After last year's General Synod, we turned to you to lead us in the implementation of our new, fifteen-year vision. We passed the baton of implementation into your hands and asked you to lead, inspire, and resource us in moving forward. As a token of our gratitude to God, I have asked Marijke Strong, Noreen Williams-Gibbs, Ruggles Church, and James Nakakihara to present T&T batons to Eddy Aleman, Tony Campbell, Tom De Vries, and Ken Eriks. Please give one to each of your ministry team members and share with them:

- Our gratitude for their ministry and work for Christ.
- The assurance of our support and prayers.
- Our commission to them to continue to lead, inspire, equip, and resource us in the implementation of Transformed and Transforming.

Decline in Membership

An often discussed concern and deep burden is our continual decline in membership. Not only are there fewer churches; there is also a decline in average worship attendance. We are experiencing a continual downward spiral in confessing members, baptized members, and total membership. There is a continual decrease in the number of infants being baptized, people making profession of faith in Christ, and new members being received by transfer.

This reality calls us to rise up to a new day of seeking renewal in Jesus and commitment to multiplication and revitalization. The RCA can no longer just “follow Christ in mission” but instead must commit to “*radically* follow Christ in mission *together*”! Maintaining status quo is not an option. Business as usual and the usual business will not reverse our steep downward spiral. Half-heartedness is not acceptable!

The Holy Spirit has given us *Transformed and Transforming: Radically Following Christ In Mission Together* “for just such a time as this” (Esther 4:14). I wholeheartedly embrace and endorse *Transformed and Transforming*! Three questions continue to inspire and challenge me to “radically follow Christ in mission together” with you:

1. What resources and strengths do I bring to this vision?
2. How might God use me in leading in the *Transformed and Transforming* journey?
3. What does the Holy Spirit need to change in me to prepare me for what Jesus wants to do next?

Three “God stories” have enriched my past ministry and point to limitless opportunities ahead:

- *Cultivating Transformation in Christ* reminds me of Xuwen, who came to Faith Church as a new graduate student from China. She knew virtually nothing about Jesus. Christ worked through the prayers, love, and fellowship of many to lead Xuwen to accepting Christ’s forgiveness and transformation in her life. What a baptism celebration!
- *Equipping Emerging Leaders of Today and Tomorrow* brings memories of serving at New Life Reformed Church and having the privilege of coaching and mentoring more than a dozen students who are now in full-time gospel ministry.
- *Engaging in Christ’s Kingdom Mission*: the church has always existed to bring the grace of Christ to everyone outside her walls. A recent mission opportunity called “Expose the Darkness” helps churches plan a tour of their community to educate people about human trafficking and pray for its victims. Expose the Darkness is based on a pilot project launched by Jennifer Lucking, the RCA’s coordinator of human trafficking outreach.

Another example is the RCA’s long partnership with Native American ministries. Warm hospitality welcomed all to the retreats for Native Americans and Aborigines in Oklahoma these last two years. It was a privilege to worship, pray, study Scripture, and share “God stories.” May God bless and empower each Native American church family as they envision being the light of Christ in their community.

Friends, I can’t imagine life getting more meaningful and significant than this! What a privilege in watching Christ grant forgiveness from sin; in converting people from the old into a new creation, and in transforming them into change agents for God and for good. Past experiences and future opportunities are why I embrace and endorse *Transformed and Transforming*. It is an invitation from the Holy Spirit to move into God’s preferred future for the RCA. I urge you to join in radically following Christ in mission together!

I appreciate that General Synod 2013, in R-10, included RCA boards, agencies, institutions, and commissions in its charge to the General Synod Council to develop a clear implementation plan with measurable ends and goals for Transformed and Transforming. I now urge members, consistories, churches, classes, and regional synods to join with us in accomplishing Christ's vision for the RCA. As we read in Ephesians 4:16 (NIV): "From [Christ] the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."

In similar fashion, the board, administration, and coaches in any school cannot assemble a winning track team without athletes. Athletes are essential for the team's success. Even the most resourceful board, gifted administration, capable athletic director, and talented coaches can't anticipate a winning season without athletes. So too, the RCA boards, agencies, institutions, and commissions need all members, consistories, churches, classes, and regional synods in order to succeed in accomplishing Christ's mission and ministry.

Delegates, I urge you to consider how you, your church family, consistory, and classis can participate in this exciting new adventure as the RCA prepares for our four hundredth anniversary. Return home and revisit the direction of your church. Prayerfully discern:

- Purpose (why you exist)
- Mission (what you do)
- Core values (who you are)
- Aspiring values (who you, with Christ's empowering, hope to be in the future)

West Sioux Classis has rewritten its bylaws in order that its purpose, mission, and approach to business will align with Transformed and Transforming. Central Plains Classis plans to allocate part of its annual classis meeting for training in one of the RCA strategic priorities, covering each priority every three years.

Every church recently received a packet with resources designed to help you gain clarity around living out Transformed and Transforming in your context. The resources are intended to guide your consistory and church through a journey of prayer and discernment as you explore and engage in radically following Christ in mission together.

Recognizing the importance of a team effort in order to fulfill God's directive for us, would each member of the General Synod Council please hand a baton to a delegate near you?

In 2 Timothy 2:2 (NIV), we read Paul's encouragement to Timothy and the Holy Spirit's challenge to us: "...and the things that you have heard me say...entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others." Delegates, please accept this baton as a reminder of the following:

- Of our gratitude for the "faith lap" you are on for Christ.
- Of God's invitation to surrender to Christ's transforming work so you finish well.
- RCA leaders are committed to pray for, equip, and resource you in ministry.

- Batons were made to pass to another. Please mentor/coach/disciple and pass this baton to next-generation believers, who will mentor/coach/disciple, and pass this baton to the next next-generation believers...and the next...and the next... In the giving of this Transformed and Transforming baton, we commission you to pass on the gospel of Christ to a growing disciple who will hand it on to another.

General Synod Council, revise our score card. Since “bodies, bucks, and buildings” are a secondary emphasis in Christ’s work, let’s rewrite the score card. On the annual Consistorial Report Form, let’s invite consistories to first pray, evaluate, and set goals around questions such as:

1. Where are we radically following Christ in mission together?
2. How are we cultivating transformation in Christ? Do we have a passion for changed lives?
3. Who are we equipping as future leaders? How are we equipping others to serve?
4. With whom are we engaging in mission? Does our heart beat fast to share God’s love with others?

Living into new strategic priorities is a great time to revise the Consistorial Report Form to align with the vision God has given us for the future.

General Synod 2014 Opportunities

I’d like to briefly highlight four opportunities for us to radically follow Christ in mission together as delegates to the 2014 General Synod.

1. CRCNA/RCA Collaborative Ministries: Please celebrate and pray for the many collaborative mission and ministry opportunities that will be presented throughout this General Synod. While we are grateful for all our ministry partners around the world, this year we celebrate meeting simultaneously with the Christian Reformed Church in North America’s Synod to acknowledge that collaboration continues to deepen and increase our effectiveness as we partner together.
2. Benefits (medical and health-related insurance for ministers, lay personnel, missionaries, and retirees): Adapting to ongoing changes in healthcare, the RCA and CRC benefits offices have joined forces as the Reformed Benefits Association in order to continue the vital work of resourcing our leaders and their families in their health needs. (Thank you Ken Bradsell and RCA benefits staff for faithfully navigating with us through the ever-changing healthcare ministry.) Please pray for vibrant churches with healthy, thriving leaders. Healthy leaders and families lead to vibrant, thriving churches, which is central to radically following Christ.
3. Way Forward Task Force: Ministry with LGBT people is front and foremost for many. Within the RCA, our biblical understandings and theological perspectives can feel like polar opposites. In the midst of our diversity, I trust we are praying and seeking to live and love like Christ. Through the Holy Spirit’s leading, we will discover a pathway to unity, purity, and peace while faithfully presenting the gospel of Jesus Christ.

4. Biennial General Synod Meetings: A number of pastors shared that gatherings like Sabbath Rest, Mission 2000, One Thing, and Conversations richly blessed and encouraged them. Please prayerfully consider and seriously discuss biennial General Synod meetings tomorrow afternoon. This could open up opportunities to plan events during off years to gather participants to worship, reflect, discuss, pray, and experience rest, renewal, and fresh ministry vitality.

Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5, NIV). In the Holy Spirit's power, let's rise up to radically follow Christ in mission together!

Closing Prayer

Please close by returning to your prayer partner to discuss: "What might God want to change in me in order for me to radically follow Christ in mission?" Pray with and for each other as we are commissioned to radically follow Christ in mission together.