

REPORT OF THE JOINT CRC/RCA ADVISORY COMMITTEES

TOPIC 1: COLLABORATION

For the first time ever, on the morning of June 9, 2018, all of the delegates of the RCA and CRC synods were divided into 29 committees to meet for three hours of discussion.

During synod registration, delegates selected one of four topics to discuss: Collaboration, New Creation, Congregational Renewal, and Interfaith Engagement.

Three functions guided each committee:

1. Understanding—reflect on the topic to see how it could affect the life of the church.
2. Community—create space in order to listen closely to each other and to the leading of the Holy Spirit through the presence, voice, and Word of God.
3. Teamwork—work together and create a report from the feedback and ideas on the topic.

On Sunday afternoon, 17 advisory committee moderators gathered to review all of the data and reports generated by each committee in order to produce a statement on each of the four topics.

This report is a snapshot of the statements of the five advisory committees that discussed collaboration.

At last year's synods, a video was presented that gave several possible new ways in which our two denominations might work together in the future. One proposal was about "collaboration."

Future collaboration is envisioned as a jointly developed and owned "centralized service center" in which responsibility, authority, accountability, and resources can be shared.

The idea is to collaborate as deeply as our theological convictions and synodical structures allow. This will likely require realigning some of our denominational staff and structures to support the shared mission.

The video proposed particular types of collaboration. It was suggested we include church multiplication, church renewal, congregational leadership, joint synod meetings, and minimized duplication of services.

We discussed this proposal in our advisory committees on Saturday. The framework for our conversations was that of the creative tension model. This model is well known to leaders who have journeyed through the Ridder Church Renewal process, and contains three component parts:

- Current Reality asks, "What does it look like now? What is true now?"
- God's Emerging Future is defined as the best outcome that the Holy Spirit and God's Word and the community of believers are striving for.
- Default Future is defined as what will happen when we don't move into the desired future.

The reports of the advisory committees indicated that delegates perceive the Current Reality of collaboration to be good but limited mainly to the denominational level, with less work occurring at the grassroots level. Many delegates indicated that their congregations were unaware of the cooperation already happening between our denominations.

The Default Future was perceived as “If we don’t change, the default, at best, will be status quo.” Many of the images the groups produced represented decline or death of the two separate denominations, including a poignant image of the grim reaper. There was a sense that no change, or failing to work together, would lead to further decline and possible death.

God’s Emerging Future was perceived as being united in Christ, working together for kingdom expansion, and building God’s kingdom. God calls the church to unity, and collaboration is a way of working toward a common mission. The groups seemed to envision our emerging future as collaboration across all regions and classes and especially at the grassroots level.

Some groups affirmed the focus areas for collaboration suggested in the video proposal, which included church renewal, church multiplication, and congregational leadership. Though all the advisory committees on this topic suggested that collaboration must also take place at the local level. Several groups suggested holding our classis meetings concurrently and one group even suggested considering how we might cooperate in theological education more fully.

Other common themes included learning about and honoring our differences, histories, traditions, and strengths. This calls for getting to know each other better at the local level by meeting and worshipping together to build trust, fellowship, and community. One group suggested that a pathway toward collaboration could begin with reconciliation and repentance of our common schism.

The collaboration proposal also invites us to lean toward increasing frequency of joint synods. However, each group desired more local and regional meeting opportunities for partnering in local ministries. Future collaboration should be at the grassroots level alongside of denominational structures in order to gain congregational buy-in.

These results will occur only when all of us enter into these conversations and relationships with great humility and a willingness to confess past divisions, having hearts open to the unity to which the Holy Spirit is calling us.

Some fears that were expressed had to do with loss of staff positions because of duplicated services. There were also concerns about unknown accountability, feedback, and metrics through collaborative initiatives, as well as apprehensions about a loss of congregational and denominational identity.

Overall, the experience of the groups seems to have been very positive. There was a high level of engagement and excitement. People were very open to conversation and sharing. There was consensus throughout the generated reports from each committee. One individual expressed that he was touched that his committee’s report was able to so completely and accurately capture the thinking, ideas, and experiences of the group.

One group stated: “We dream to do these things together as a unique mosaic that celebrates differences and distinctions while working toward oneness.”

The general desire from the committees was to encourage and promote the denominations to work toward deeper and more numerous collaborations locally and globally.

REPORT OF THE JOINT CRC/RCA ADVISORY COMMITTEES APPENDIX TOPIC #1 - COLLABORATION

Summary used in committees that met about topic #1 from the video shown at the CRC and RCA synods in 2017 (<https://vimeo.com/219702901>)

Advisory Committee Topic #1, Collaboration (Described as “Scenario 2” in the video, at 12.20)

Imagine that by the year 2027, the RCA and CRC could celebrate a new collaboration between our two historic denominations.

This would require us to begin now (2018), with a common goal: to more intentionally and frequently collaborate with one another in key areas so that we become increasingly excellent in how we function and deliver ministry services. **We envision a jointly developed and owned “centralized service center” where responsibility, authority, accountability, and resources could be shared.** Cross denominational coaching processes would be developed to help RCA and CRC congregations discern their ministry needs, and then to discover and access the shared initiatives and services to meet those needs.

This plan would require us to evaluate everything each denomination does, so that the centralized service center could focus on mutual high-impact leverage points. Additionally, we would need to develop a new set of metrics to determine whether this new partnership is actually better-resourcing congregations and multiplying our impact in the kingdom of God (compared to the previous model in which our two denominations worked separately).

Three priority services that might be identified as having the potential for increased effectiveness by using a collaborative model are:

1. **Church Multiplication** (e.g., a new, single process for planting RCA and CRC churches),
2. **Church Renewal** (e.g., new collaborative learning opportunities and collaborative approaches to community development and transformation),
3. **Congregational Leadership** (e.g.: various types of cross denominational learning/equipping events and processes).

After our two denominations have experienced the benefits of collaborating in this way, it is possible that by the year 2022 we might identify additional shared priorities such as:

1. **Twice yearly experiences** for bi-national, regional, international and service center staff of both denominations to engage in worship, dialogue, discernment and empowerment.
2. **Synods increasingly being held at the same location**, fostering more opportunities for formal and informal fellowship, equipping, and community building running concurrent to activities related to denominational business.
3. **Both denominations making a commitment to avoid duplication of services.**

The goal of this plan is that through a new “centralized service area,” the RCA and CRC could commit to mutual discernment, increasingly shared resources and initiatives, careful change management, and trust building... which would create a new common culture where collaboration could flourish and enrich our impact in the kingdom of God.

Feedback on “Collaboration” model from the delegates of General Synod 2017

The groups were asked to identify what they affirmed about this option . The top responses were:

- 38% (40) More efficiency/ cost savings / better stewardship / less duplication
- 23% (25) Ease of sharing resources / greater access to resources from both denominations / builds on strengths of each denomination
- 12% (13) We are already doing this
- 11% (12) Benefits of scale are realized quickly / can do more together than apart / increased opportunities together especially in areas of advocacy
- 10% (11) Moving from business together to ministry together / allows for deeper partnerships / has greater impact
- 6% (7) Would be an example of Christian unity to others

The top challenges that were identified were:

- 33% (34) mentioned the current cultural differences between the two denominations and the difficulty in resolving those, and in working together when those exist
- 28% (29) talked about the difficulty in management when neither denomination “owns” the ministry. Who would make decisions? Who would set the vision? To whom would they be accountable? Would a power struggle ensue with one denomination feeling like they were run over by the other?
- 16% (17) mentioned the loss of identity, tradition, and autonomy that would result from changing ministries into collaborative ones
- 11% (12) cited the staff and program cuts that would result and the difficulty in figuring out what to do with educational institutions
- 11% (11) mentioned that getting buy-in from local congregations for this kind of change would be difficult. Would this potentially result in the loss of members and congregations?