

REPORT OF THE JOINT CRC/RCA ADVISORY COMMITTEES

TOPIC 2: NEW CREATION

This report focuses on the idea of creating an entirely new denomination. Before we begin our report, let us say we are thankful to the denominational staff of both the CRC and RCA for their tremendous leadership and dedication in this process. Thank you for helping us have these exciting conversations!

Five advisory groups met to discuss Topic 2: New Creation. Our process involved watching a clip from a video that was shown to our two denominations in 2017. The video clip described a proposal for the creation of one new denomination out of two.

Our basic question was this: Is it a good idea, and what would it look like for the CRC and RCA to start a completely new denomination? The advisory groups interacted well and enjoyed a strong collegial spirit. We discovered that each denomination brought unique ideas and perspectives, and the groups gathered steam and excitement as we discussed possibilities. There was an overwhelming sense of appreciation and encouragement for one another, and participants expressed genuine gratitude for the time to work and dream together.

When looking honestly at our current reality as denominations, we saw a mixed bag. On the negative side, we saw tension, lethargy, and downward trends in many areas of the church. We saw that our current reality and our default future point to predictable decline.

But, on the positive side, there is much to celebrate! There are growing and thriving congregations, there is increased collaboration between our denominations, and there is kingdom growth. There is hope and joy in both the CRC and the RCA.

As the groups talked and shared and imagined a bold and courageous restructuring, some common themes emerged:

First, our future must be rooted in an unflinching commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ. This theological priority must shape our future even as we struggle to reconcile our divergent understandings of the gospel's implications.

Second, unity, collaboration, and cooperation were the values named and celebrated in each of the groups. We desire unity in Christ with collaboration and cooperation around the church's mission to make disciples. We imagined how prayer, grace, humility, and intentional Christocentrism can help us on this road.

Third, we looked at a proposal that included three affinity synods, leaving the option for a church to decide which synod they wanted to belong to. While some found hope in the idea of affinity synods, a strong majority found them problematic, and all had questions about whether affinity synods would really bring us together or if they would just divide us further.

Fourth, we imagined a denominational structure that exists to train, equip, and resource local congregations for mission. We imagined this structure to be deeply collaborative, with wiser use of resources and decreased bureaucracy.

Fifth, we envisioned a denomination in which people at all levels felt invested, engaged, and excited. There was some fear about a “top-down” approach, which might only replicate current experience. Groups were excited about the idea of a new denomination that wasn’t viewed as a chore or as a duty, but one in which they felt they belonged.

Regarding how we might actually move forward with this, the groups generated many ideas. Here is a representative sampling:

1. Be brave! Let’s go all in! Let’s boldly name this idea of one denomination as a future reality. Once we do that, let’s come together as denominations to figure out our path forward.
2. Let’s make sure, whatever we do, that our change is centered on resourcing and blessing our local congregations. Let’s keep the Great Commission as the impetus for any change we make.
3. Let’s collaborate more and do more together. The more we can work together, the more it will make sense for us to one day create one new denomination.
4. Let’s increase our communication on all levels: congregations, pastors, classes, synods, and other institutions.
5. Let’s make this process a grounded and pastoral process. We have to approach this not just from an institutional standpoint; we need to remember the real, live people in our churches.

Overall, as we discussed the exciting idea of the RCA and CRC coming together and forming one new denomination, our groups all agreed that we want a unified future. We believe God is a God of reconciliation, and God is at work in both of our denominations. We don’t know yet what that looks like or how all the details will come together, but we affirm and celebrate God’s movement toward unity.

REPORT OF THE JOINT CRC/RCA ADVISORY COMMITTEES APPENDIX TOPIC #2 - NEW CREATION

Summary that was used in the committees that met about topic #2 from the video shown at the CRC and RCA synods in 2017 (<https://vimeo.com/219702901>)

Advisory Committee Topic #2, New Creation (described as “Scenario 3” in the video, at 16.00)

Imagine that by the year 2027, the RCA and CRC could celebrate the formation of a new denomination out of two historic denominations. **This would not only bring the heritage of the two denominations together into one new denomination but result in a new model for denominationalism.**

This plan would require us to begin now (2018), with the realization that current denominational structures often do not meet 21st century realities. The weight of tradition and culture in the RCA and CRC might not allow for the level of transition, change, and transformation needed for our denominations to continue to respond to the opportunities and challenges of the 21st century and beyond. **This necessitates rethinking the future of denominations in the reformed tradition in North America.** For each denomination to continue with vitality, vibrancy and efficacy, a new model of denominationalism might be needed, along with a rethinking of substance, structure, strategy and style.

Rather than seeking to adjust how the RCA and CRC function individually, the RCA and CRC could begin to formally explore the possibility of coming together to launch a new denomination based on 21st century realities and bringing a respectful closure that honors historic contributions and heritage to both the RCA and CRC. The goal would be to discern and develop a new denomination that could carry with it the strengths, substance, and heritage of the RCA and CRC with structure and style designed for relevance to 21st century denominational life.

Together, we would need to commit several years to exploring new, emerging synergistic models in business, education, and denominationalism. This exploration might be led by a cross-denominational group of thought leaders who embrace both tradition and innovation. They could focus on models that both preserve the core substance of our theology and mission, and make space for radical structural change to equip an increased number and diversity of churches with greater specialization.

The question before us is: **“If we were to form a new reformed denomination in North America relevant to the movement in God’s Church of the 21st Century, what would it look like?”** This new denomination must be built on shared beliefs and convictions, be innovative yet rooted in RCA and CRC traditions, and able to equip the local churches to engage in God’s transformative mission.

Logistically, by about the year 2025 we would need to form a multi-year plan to centralize services, agencies, and institutions. **We might also need to consider the formation of a diverse synodical structure. One proposal is for three distinct affinity synods to be formed to represent the spectrum of theology and practice within our congregations and regions.** Each synod could embrace the challenge of identifying ministry priorities and equipping congregations within their synod for mission. Within each synod, church renewal

would be engaged, new churches would be started, and leaders would be equipped. Processes would be developed to help congregations identify which synod to align with.

Realizing people may be unclear about what is happening to their denomination, both the RCA and the CRC would need to provide pastoral processes to deal with the emotional response created by this change. Early on, metrics would also need to be developed to assure that the benefits of transitioning were greater than the perceived losses that would be experienced.

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

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

- 29% (30) mentioned that this approach would be a great example of Christian unity, follows Biblical directives to seek unity, and is well adapted to the post-denominational era in which we live
- 22% (23) focused on the fact that working together would maximize our impact and give us a greater voice and greater witness in the world.
- 20% (21) focused on increased efficiency and financial savings that would result from streamlining our administration and ministries and eliminating duplication
- 19% (20) mentioned that this would provide a fresh start or clean slate for the future, it would break old habits and eliminate tradition for traditions sake
- 13% (14) mentioned that this would enable us to take steps of reconciliation and manage the theological/cultural differences that are currently hurting our denominations
- 12% (11) mentioned that it this scenario is the most exciting to think about, it provides the opportunity for something new, freedom to experiment, and to be innovative

The top challenges were:

- 24% (26) mentioned current cultural and theological differences that would make it difficult to find unity
- 20% (21) mentioned resistance from congregations and individuals that would lead to an overall loss of churches and members
- 18% (19) said it was just too impractical and complex; how can you create a shared vision and come to agreement
- 17% (18) questioned the affinity synods. Is this just a way of providing a place for liberal, moderate and conservatives to have their own church? Would it lead to a future split and the fracturing into three new denominations?
- 13% (14) worried about the overall loss of identity
- 9% (10) Said it would be too expensive financially and emotionally; and that this would create a loss of focus on gospel ministry