

## **REPORT OF THE JOINT CRC/RCA ADVISORY COMMITTEES TOPIC #3 - CONGREGATIONAL RENEWAL**

Eleven advisory committees engaged topic #3, congregational renewal. The purpose of our advisory committees was “to help shape the vision and work of the Reformed Partnership for Congregational Renewal [RPCR] between the RCA and CRCNA.” Our groups imagined what it could look like for both denominations to have access to a resource capability that would encourage the ministry of the local church.

Our committees engaged this topic by:

- Sharing stories from our ministry settings.
- Reading a summary document prepared by those who already participated in listening groups around this topic.
- Drawing such a resource capability.
- Compiling a list of key success factors that would be critical for the launching and implementation of this capability.

### **Group experience**

All groups expressed joy in working together as two denominations and engaging with this topic collaboratively. There was a clear sense of excitement as we shared stories from our individual contexts and expressed a need for shared ministerial resources. Multiple groups said they were able to come to a quick consensus concerning process values. Alongside this excitement, there was a named skepticism that such a resource may not be accessible or useful, or that such a capability might negate the uniqueness of a specific church. There is a sense of urgency in our groups that such a resource is necessary, evidenced not only in our conversation, but by the significant number of participants in this topic.

### **Values: concerning theology and process**

Throughout their conversation, groups articulated both the values of this resource capability and a strong desire to see it align with our Christian faith and Reformed identity. This includes:

- A strong biblical foundation.
- Strengthening ministries of both word and deed.
- Attentiveness to the Holy Spirit, which includes grieving our losses as God leads us through transformational change.
- Every congregation is a unique, called community.
- Relationships among churches, ministries, and denominations must be rooted in trust and built on mutuality and love.

The following observations emerged as being essential to this collaborative effort:

- Respect: Specific contexts matter, and the autonomy of our individual ministries must be honored by this process.
- Listening: Creating space for internal dialogue that inspires ownership of our current reality and a desire to flourish. The desire for coaching was addressed in the majority of group reports.

- Assessment: Tools that provide honest internal and external evaluations.
- Sharing: A space to contribute ideas, collaborate, and learn from one another, which includes engaging existing resources.
- Accessibility: A multilingual information database that is simply designed for participation and collaboration.
- High tech, high touch: Available online, and deeply rooted in human relationships.
- Congregational responsibility: Action and implementation of church renewal is the responsibility of the local church, with support from partners.

### **Additional observations**

- While no report presented a *specific* outline for this resource capability, there is a consensus that such a process should be *clear* and available to any congregation who chooses to use it.
- Our advisory groups wanted this resource capability to reflect the experience we had together in our conversation: one of authentic listening, collaboration, vulnerable storytelling, and a common love for serving God through ministry.

### **Conclusion**

We observed that those who participated in this conversation around congregational renewal expressed a deep need for a resource that would allow churches within the RCA and CRC to share their learning, ask questions without fear of losing contextual identity, and network with other ministry leaders whom they might otherwise not know.

**REPORT OF THE JOINT CRC/RCA ADVISORY COMMITTEES APPENDIX  
TOPIC #3 - CONGREGATIONAL RENEWAL**

*Summary that was used in the committees that met about topic #3*

**Summary of what was learned through the 12 listening sessions held across Canada and the U.S.A.**

1. Most RCA and CRC churches desire revitalization and many will require a new approach to achieving their goals.
2. Many vital, mission-shaped congregations have undergone revitalization processes; they have used external catalysts and coaches to supplement the work of pastoral and congregational leadership; and they are eager to equip and assist other congregations.
3. Many vital, mission-shaped congregations have developed prayerful discernment processes through which they listen to God and their local contexts and then identify and implement next steps.
4. Current needs of other CRC and RCA congregations are not currently being met well due in part to lack of knowledge about what is available, lack of readiness for change, or inadequate processes for prayerful discernment.
5. Current efforts, while good, do not adequately address the vital needs of all congregations — helping them identify the right resource at the right time with the right implementation support.
6. Present processes usually focus on specific solutions or resources and because they are not universally holistic, do not draw on the best of both denominations
7. Both denominations would benefit from collaboratively developed and commonly shared approaches to prayerful discernment leading to congregational renewal and missional engagement.
8. There is an opportunity to develop a new approach or capacity—a partnership for church renewal—which complements and enhances existing denominational work in both denominations and that creates better alignment with congregational needs.
9. Congregations and pastors in vital, mission-shaped churches are eager to participate at tables of conversation and collaboration—both with congregations that are similar to them and with congregations that would like to learn from and with them.
10. Denominational and regionally deployed staff are ready to collaborate more fully in order to better serve congregations.

**The opportunity that was discerned:**

1. How the Reformed Partnership for Congregational Renewal (RPCR) can best serve CRC and RCA congregations.
  - a. *Congregational Discernment*
    - i. Congregational agency. It is the responsibility of the congregation to engage in prayerful discernment and then to identify and implement the processes or resources that are right for them.
    - ii. CRC and RCA regional and denominational staff are responsible to assist congregations as they prayerfully self-evaluate and discern their current reality. so they can connect to the right resources/consultants
    - iii. Congregations possess an understanding of current health and life-stage and, with assistance can make decisions based on what they know

- iv. Many congregations need assistance in understanding their current context and discerning how God is calling them to serve in that context
- b. *Convening, Collaborating, and Coaching for the Sake of Learning that Leads to Action*
  - i. Pastor and congregational leaders are eager to participate in “tables of conversation and collaboration” that lead to shared learning and action.
  - ii. The Reformed Partnership for Congregational Renewal can catalyze innovation and renewal by stimulating gatherings of leaders from CRC and RCA congregations with common interests, church settings for dialogue and learning.
  - iii. The Reformed Partnership for Congregational Renewal can serve both denominations by creating tables of conversation and collaboration for regionally deployed and denominational staff members of the CRC and the RCA.
  - iv. The Reformed Partnership for Congregational Renewal can serve by creating networks of learning for CRC and RCA rural churches and urban churches
  - v. The Reformed Partnership for Congregational Renewal must align congregational health and life-stage with appropriate resources (*what*) and scope of assistance (*how*) for each congregation
- c. *Based the Listening Sessions, the Activities to be Performed by the Reformed Partnership for Congregational Renewal include:*
  - i. Mutually developing and employing prayerful congregational self-assessment
  - ii. Convening tables of conversation leading to intentional collaboration
  - iii. Collaboratively enhancing existing, and developing new church renewal resources
  - iv. Stimulating missional imagination and courageous experimentation
  - v. Shaping a common vocabulary that is widely employed
  - vi. Curating resources appropriate to a wide variety of congregational contexts and sizes