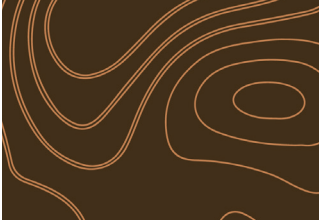


**RESPONDING TO
GOD'S GRACIOUS
CALL**



Who We Are and What We Believe



**Christian
Reformed
Church**

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We welcome your comments.
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or e-mail us at communications@crcna.org.

ISBN 978-1-59255-452-2

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Welcome!

This congregation belongs to a network of more than a thousand churches called the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC for short). We're like an extended family spread out across the United States and Canada. Although there are variations and differences among us, we still count ourselves as one.

Perhaps you are familiar with “churchy” things and simply want to solidify or renew a relationship with this congregation. Maybe you have just moved to a new place and are looking for a church that's a good fit, and you want to learn a little more. Or maybe this is the first time you have ever come to church, and you wonder what it's all about. Whatever your background, we're glad you've come. Think of this little booklet as your tour guide to the CRC.

We've covered the essentials under these five headings:

- **Becoming Together** shows the course and commitment we've set in our mission and vision statements.
- **Being Together** tells you where we come from and who we are.
- **Believing Together** will help you understand the most important things that we as a church believe to be true.
- We don't simply gather and believe; we also accomplish things. **Building Together** explains how we pool our resources so that we can help change the world in response to God's call, both at home and far away.
- And in the fifth section, **Belonging Together**, we'll explore what's involved in being a member of this congregation. How does that happen? What do you need to do?

Becoming Together

Our mission statement defines what we are about, and our vision statement paints a picture of where we hope to go. With God's strength and leading, we can work toward fulfilling that picture together.

Our Mission

As people called by God, we gather to praise God, listen to him, and respond. We nurture each other in faith and obedience to Christ. We love and care for one another as God's people. We commit ourselves to serve and to tell others about Jesus. We pursue God's justice and peace in every area of life.

Our Vision

The Christian Reformed Church is a diverse family of healthy congregations, assemblies, and ministries expressing the good news of God's kingdom that transforms lives and communities worldwide.

Being Together

We call ourselves the Christian Reformed Church in North America. What does that mean?

- We call ourselves *Christian* because we are followers of Jesus Christ. We believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that he is the center of human history.
- We're called *Reformed* because we are a branch of the church tree that emerged from the Protestant Reformation in sixteenth-century Europe.
- We're a *Church* because we believe God has called us together to be a people who belong to him and live for him.
- *North America* tells you where we are situated; it also implies that we're connected with Reformed denominations in other places around the globe.

As denominations go, the Christian Reformed Church is not very big. About 75 percent of our 1,000+ churches are in the United States, and 25 percent are in Canada. We're one of only a few binational denominations: rather than split into different churches in the U.S. and Canada, we're united. Almost 190,000 people belong to the CRCNA—not a large number when you consider the populations of our two countries. But by God's grace we can accomplish a lot when we work together.

Where Did the CRC Come From?

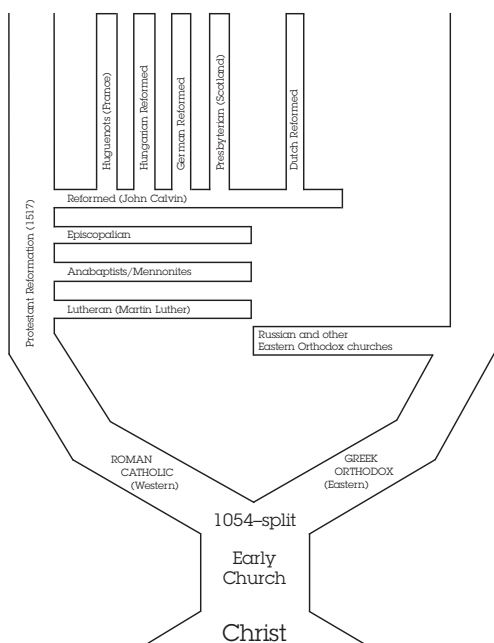
Picture the Christian church as a tree. The church began with followers of Jesus Christ in the first century A.D. But there were already strong roots growing before the coming of Jesus Christ. God's Word, the Bible, tells us the story of God's work among his people, the Israelites, in the Old Testament, and then in the New Testament we learn about Jesus and the development of the early church. Beyond the first century, the church grew and spread throughout the present-day Middle East and into Africa and Europe. For the first thousand years after Christ, the church remained unified in one solid trunk. Shortly after the first millennium, the church separated into two main branches: an Eastern Church and a Western Church.

The Western Church, centered in Rome, became known as the Roman Catholic Church. Throughout the Middle Ages, the church became entangled with political power, money, and influence. The resulting corruption led a sixteenth-century German monk, Martin Luther, to begin a protest movement to reform the church and bring it back to scriptural teaching. This movement developed into the Protestant Reformation.

The Reformation spread through various European countries. Many present-day denominations, including the CRC, are

branches that sprang from this movement. The Reformation churches in Scotland were called Presbyterian. In Germany they were called Lutheran. In England they became the Anglican Church. And in the Netherlands they were called Reformed churches. Sometimes the Reformed and Presbyterian churches are also known as “Calvinist” because of their association with the French Reformer John Calvin, who led a Reformation movement in Geneva.

Another stream of the Reformation broke with the Roman Catholic practice of baptizing infants and became a branch of the tree called Anabaptist. Several North American denominations such as Mennonite and Baptist are the fruit of this branch.



In the 1840s, a group of pastors and farmers left the Netherlands with their families to begin a new life in North America. They settled in a place now called Holland, Michigan. By 1857 a group of them had officially begun the church

now called the CRC. Like many immigrant churches, this denomination at first worshiped in its first language, and its identity was closely tied to its ethnic background. Gradually the ethnic imprint has diminished, and the CRC has become more typically North American.

For the first century of its history, the Christian Reformed Church was primarily located in the United States. Then, in the post-World War II 1940s and '50s, tens of thousands of Dutch nationals immigrated to Canada. Many of them found a home in newly formed Christian Reformed congregations. These immigrants were quick to adapt to their new context, and the flourishing denomination became well established in North America.

In the 1960s the CRC welcomed its first of many Spanish-speaking congregations, in which immigrants and refugees from Cuba and other Latin American nations found a place to worship and build community, beginning in Florida and eventually spreading to various parts of the continent.

Another wave of immigration began making an impact on the CRC in the 1970s, as many Korean Presbyterians connected with the CRC. Korean-immigrant churches particularly flourished in California, and now congregations with Korean roots make up about 10 percent of the CRC throughout North America. Like the Dutch immigrants of the 1840s, these immigrant congregations began by worshiping in their first language, and now in successive generations English is becoming the language of worship.

In this changing North American context, the CRC is becoming increasingly multiethnic. People from diverse ethnic groups and different corners of the world now find their church home in the CRC. In any given week CRC congregations worship in many languages

besides English, including Korean, Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Laotian, Swahili, Navajo, French, and Zuni. In this way the CRC is coming to resemble the heavenly picture of people from all nations and languages praising God together.

Believing Together

Now that you have some idea where we've come from, let's talk about why we have come together. What unites these diverse people across North America? What binds them into one entity? Among other things, we agree on certain core beliefs. That is one of the reasons we gather to worship and to work, pursuing God's plan for this world. We believe in the Bible as the authoritative Word of God.

What We Believe

Much of what we believe we hold in common with the Christian church around the world and throughout the ages. Three creeds adopted by the worldwide church centuries ago summarize the most important points of our faith: the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed.

We also affirm three confessions—the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort—as historic Reformed expressions of the Christian faith, whose doctrines fully agree with the Word of God. Along with these historic creeds and confessions, we recognize the following Reformed expressions of the Christian faith, adopted by synod as contemporary testimonies: the call for unity, justice, and reconciliation of the Belhar Confession and the witness of Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony.

To summarize these common beliefs, we'll use the text of the Apostles' Creed. (You'll find this document as well as the others at

www.crcna.org.) But first an explanation. Despite its title, the Apostles' Creed was not written by the apostles or disciples who walked and talked with Jesus in the first century. Instead it is a compilation of what believers in the first centuries knew from the oral and written testimony of the apostles, which was then distilled into the main teachings of the Christian faith. This creed was reworked by successive councils of the early church and was adopted in its present form before the end of the fourth century.

A quick look at the structure of the Apostles' Creed reveals one of the bedrock truths of the Christian faith: the Trinity. The creed is divided into three parts: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. All Christians believe that the Bible reveals one God in three persons. In other words, God is a perfect community of love.

God

I believe in God,

The creed begins with a simple affirmation of belief in God. The following three sections describe the three persons of this one God.

God the Father

*the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.*

The first person of the Trinity is the one whom Jesus revealed to us as “the Father.” God is not some remote, unknowable spiritual entity. Rather, God is our loving, powerful heavenly Father.

Against all other ideologies about the beginning of the world, we profess that God created heaven and earth and all that is in them. This profession affirms the goodness of creation and endows it with meaning and purpose.

Further, all that is good and beautiful points to a Creator God. Thus all humans can know something about God through what creation reveals.

God the Son

*I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father
almighty.
From there he will come to judge the living and
the dead.*

We affirm that Jesus of Nazareth, conceived miraculously by the Spirit of God and born of a woman (see Luke 1:26-38), is fully human as well as being fully God; he is the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity.

As the Christ, Jesus fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah who would redeem God's people. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are grounded in historical fact.

After his earthly work of redemption was finished, Jesus took his place in heaven as Lord of all things. He will come again to make all things new.

God the Holy Spirit

*I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic* church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.*

*that is, the true Christian church of all times and all places

When Jesus ascended bodily to heaven, he promised his disciples a comforter, a source of power who would lead them “into all the truth” (John 16:13). This gift is the Holy Spirit. Ever since then, the Holy Spirit has dwelled in and empowered God’s people.

The Holy Spirit is the presence and power of God with us here and now, leading the church, uniting God’s people, applying God’s forgiveness to our broken lives, speaking to us, and spurring us individually and communally to godly living.

The Bible

We believe that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God. It contains all that people in any age need to know for their salvation. We call the Bible God’s Word, believing that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, God speaks to us through this book.

The Bible has two major sections that at first glance seem quite different from each other. The Old Testament records God’s work through centuries of Israelite history until about 400 B.C. The New Testament picks up with God’s work through the life of Jesus, the coming of the Holy Spirit in power, and the subsequent spread of the church over the first century A.D. You could also think of the Bible as a library of sixty-six unique books of various kinds by many authors in different contexts over thousands of years. But it is only one book: the whole of it forms one richly textured story of God’s loving purpose in relation to humans and the whole creation.

Four Themes

Reformed believers summarize this biblical story in four major themes:

Creation

In the beginning God created a world where everything was in perfect harmony. Relations

between God and humans and the creation were good and whole.

Fall

Through pride, humans were enticed by Satan into rebelling against God. Their disobedient act opened the door for the “sin virus” to enter the world. This virus contaminates everything: no person, no creature, no institution, no relationship or individual action is free from the totality of this contamination. The results of sin are evident in such things as greed, violence, and oppression as well as pollution, sickness, death, and weeds. The most devastating effect of sin is alienation from God. Still, sin cannot obliterate the “image of God” in us that longs for God and for wholeness.

Redemption

But God did not allow sin to have the last word in this story. Because of his great love for humans and for the whole creation, God set out to redeem the world from its sinful condition. God called Abraham and Sarah and their descendants, the people of Israel, to be his partners in blessing the whole world. Finally, he sent his only Son, Jesus the Messiah, to live a fully human life and then die, thus paying the price for humanity’s sin. But death could not defeat Jesus. God raised him from the dead to show that he conquered sin and death. Now God’s kingdom is growing and spreading in this world, and Christians are part of that great work.

New Creation

One day, Jesus is coming back again to extend God’s reign on earth completely. He will do away with any traces of sin and its effects. There will be no more sickness, no more suffering, no more alienation from God, no more death. Evil will be eradicated. God himself will dwell with humans, and all creation will be fully restored. Praise God!

Reformed Accent

We've already pointed out that the CRC's teachings have much in common with the beliefs of Christians all around the world. Yet as a denomination we tend to emphasize some teachings or scriptural interpretations more than others.

If you think of the worldwide church as a body, then you can imagine denominations as individual organs. Each organ contributes to the proper functioning of the body, and each performs a unique function. Or imagine a room full of English speakers from different corners of the world. Each speaks the same language, but their accents make them sound very different! Sometimes we refer to our particular emphases as speaking with a Reformed accent. Three words that figure prominently within a Reformed accent are *sovereignty*, *covenant*, and *kingdom*.

Sovereignty

It's all about God! Those who speak with a Reformed accent hold a very high view of God's sovereignty: God's plan, God's will, God's power. Everything that happens in the world, from the acts of nations to the faith of individuals, is ultimately under God's sovereign control.

Our very salvation depends on God's sovereignty. No human thought, speech, action, or desire is free from the effects of sin. The Bible says we are "dead in [our] transgressions and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). We cannot will ourselves out of sin's slavery or work our way out of sin's debt. Our only hope is in God's sovereign grace, by which he opens our hearts and empowers our wills by the Holy Spirit to God's service.

This does not mean we have no part to play in our salvation. We need to ask for God's help and respond to the Spirit's promptings. Still, our salvation is the work of God's sovereign

grace from beginning to end. So we say with the apostle Paul, “Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. . . . And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified” (Romans 8:29-30).

Covenant

Another word that shows up a lot in our Reformed accent is *covenant*. A covenant is like a contract or a treaty. It involves partners who make promises to each other and then seal the deal in some appropriate way—with signatures, for example. The Bible talks of God as a “covenant-making God,” meaning that he makes promises and keeps them. (The word *testament*, as in the Old and New Testaments, refers to God’s covenant making as well.)

This is a good thing to know, because the sad truth about us is that all of us human beings have a hard time keeping our promises. Think of all those New Year’s resolutions that dissipate in the light of January 2. More sadly, think of the number of marriage promises, made in complete sincerity, that are broken. God makes firm covenant promises to love and protect, to care for and guide his people—in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer. Though our promises prove feeble, God’s are firm. In fact, God can carry our covenant all by himself.

Here’s where our Reformed accent gets a little more pronounced. We profess that God’s promises are not simply made to individuals but to a community—and not only that, but God’s promises are generational. We take our cue from God’s Old Testament covenant with the people of Israel. And we note that on the day of Pentecost, in the first Christian sermon, the apostle Peter urges adult Jews to repent and believe this new interpretation of the events of Jesus’ life and death and their complicity in it. When they do so, he says, they will receive

the promised Holy Spirit, which is “for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:39). Even in the New Testament, God’s promises are communal and generational.

This means, for example, that with joy we baptize adults who want to profess their faith, and with equal joy we baptize infants (a practice that goes back to the early church). There’s a catch, though. Baptism is reserved for children of believing parents (or a believing parent) who are part of the church family, because we know that the Holy Spirit is active in those households. Those children will grow up to experience God’s promises at home and in the Christian community. Infant baptism is about God extending his promise to our children even though they have no understanding at the time. It is a sign to the whole congregation that God’s grace is a gift we cannot earn: it’s all about God acting first.

Kingdom

A final word that’s important to a Reformed accent is *kingdom*. And here the accent gets very broad because *kingdom* takes in all of human culture throughout the world. Unlike nations on earth, God’s kingdom does not have defined borders. It is not restricted to a certain location, like a cathedral; nor can it be reduced to “religious” activity. By God’s kingdom we mean God’s sovereign rule over all things. We believe that God’s Spirit is busy extending God’s rule all over creation.

Certainly God’s reign is evident in spiritual experiences of renewal and change. But it is also evident in God’s gracious upholding of creation day by day, season by season. God’s reign is evident *anywhere* God’s will is done—in actions, lives, technology, artistry, and institutions.

God calls each of us to participate in the spread of his kingdom. The whole world is a place

where we can carry out the mission of restoring God's creation. In the memorable words of the Dutch statesman and pastor Abraham Kuyper, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'"

Our kingdom focus means that our denomination has been active in some unique kingdom-building activities. Avoiding any division between sacred and secular, we encourage endeavors in every sphere of human activity: art, media, publishing, law, education, labor relations, caregiving, agriculture, business, social justice, and politics. No area of human enterprise is exempt. CRC communities have established Christian schools from preschool to graduate school—not to protect students from the world but to give them the tools to engage any aspect of culture from the perspective of God's kingdom. After all, it's God's world.

Jesus came to inaugurate the kingdom of God. His victory over sin and death turned the tide. Though sin, brokenness, and evil are still evident in the world, God's kingdom is already here and is still coming. Someday Christ will come again, bringing the kingdom in full. In the meantime we pray and act for God's kingdom to come.

Building Together

You've probably noticed from all this talk about kingdom activity that we are not content just to gather for prayer and worship. Together—as individual congregations, as regional groupings of congregations called classes, and as a whole denomination—we can accomplish a lot. When we work together, God enables us to make a difference in our local communities, throughout North America, and around the world.

The ministries of the Christian Reformed Church share Christ's love with millions of people around the world. **Our agencies**

of evangelism, education, congregational support, and relief and development are active in 40 countries, and our radio and television broadcasts blanket the globe.

We undertake these ministries in obedience to the Great Commission: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20).

The support of our members through prayers, offerings, gifts, and ministry shares makes this possible.

We group our denominational ministries into five areas of ministry that reflect our calling.

Faith Formation

As a community of believers, we seek to introduce people to Jesus Christ and to nurture their faith through all ages and stages of life.

Thrive encourages and equips congregations in their ministry of helping believers of all ages to grow in faith as disciples of Jesus Christ.

crcna.org/thrive

Calvin University is a top-ranked liberal arts college in Grand Rapids, Michigan, that prepares students to be Christ’s agents of renewal in the world. Through rigorous academic study and intentional Christian community, students learn to think deeply, act justly, and live wholeheartedly in everything that they do.

calvin.edu

Gospel Proclamation and Worship

Believing that faith comes through the hearing of God’s Word, we proclaim the saving message of Jesus Christ and worship him in all that we do.

Calvin Theological Seminary prepares people to lead in ministry for Christ’s church and his kingdom. **Founded 150 years ago**, Calvin Seminary continues to live out the values of

its legacy in which all the CRC's teaching and formation grow from a shared understanding of God's Word as articulated in the Reformed confessions.

calvinseminary.edu

Thrive seeks to develop networks for sharing creative gifts already present in CRC churches, finding and creating resources, and helping churches to deepen the questions they ask around worship. We also work closely with partners such as the Center for Excellence in Preaching at Calvin Seminary and the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship at Calvin University. *crcna.org/thrive*

Global Mission

Called to be witnesses of Christ's kingdom to the ends of the earth, we start and strengthen local churches in North America and around the world.

ReFrame Ministries is a media ministry that produces and distributes evangelism and discipleship resources in 10 major world languages. Through ReFrame, we produce resources online and on the air to help people see God's story in their lives.

reframeministries.org

Resonate Global Mission walks alongside congregations as they join God's work in the world. As the mission agency of the CRCNA, Resonate's role is not to carry out mission on behalf of the church, but to help the church more fully live into its calling. Resonate faithfully stewards three Core Initiatives: Global Mission, Local Mission, and Church Planting. They are not separate silos, but interconnected expressions of living out the good news of Jesus Christ. Together they nurture faith formation, cultivate servant leadership, engage mercy and justice, and proclaim the gospel in word and deed. In all of this, Resonate's role is to serve, connect, and support—so that congregations may take

their next faithful steps in God's mission. In addition to this ongoing work, Resonate is also tackling new opportunities for ministry. In North America they utilize experience in international ministry to help churches effectively reach across cultural barriers and forge partnerships within new communities of faith. In other nations Resonate benefits from expertise in church planting and campus ministry to help people in every nation discover God's plan for their church, community, and life.

resonateglobalmission.org

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Servant Leadership

Understanding that the lifelong equipping of leaders is essential for churches and ministries to flourish, we identify, recruit, and train leaders to be servants in the kingdom of God.

The **Candidacy Committee** provides leadership in the process of training and ordaining pastors to serve in our churches.

crcna.org/candidacy

The chaplaincy and care ministry of **Thrive** supports and develops chaplains to serve in institutional settings such as hospitals, workplaces, prisons, and the military.

Thrive also supports congregations and their leaders in times of transition and discernment by providing consultations and resources that foster personal and communal health. **Thrive seeks to strengthen Christian Reformed pastors so that their wellbeing is supported and they are equipped to shepherd congregations that flourish.**
crcna.org/thrive

The **CRC Loan Fund, Inc.** offers low-cost loans to CRC churches in the United States for various projects, primarily for facilities.

crcna.org/loanfund

Mercy and Justice

Hearing the cries of people who are oppressed, forsaken, and disadvantaged, we seek to act justly and love mercy as we walk humbly with our God.

World Renew is the relief and development arm of the Christian Reformed Church, responding to the needs of people around the world who are suffering from poverty, hunger, disaster, and injustice.

worldrenew.net

Indigenous Ministry (Canada) promotes healing and reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada.

crcna.org/Indigenous

Thrive helps churches to grow in accessibility so that persons with disabilities and their families are full participants in the life of the church.

Thrive also supports congregations and leaders as they pursue Biblical justice, diversity, and intercultural competence in ministry.

And Thrive equips churches in abuse awareness, prevention, and response.

crcna.org/thrive

Centre for Public Dialogue seeks to educate CRC members about and encourage their engagement in social justice issues, presenting a voice of faith in Canadian public life and promoting justice, hope, and reconciliation in Canada and beyond.

crcna.org/publicdialogue

Other Ministry Programs

The CRC has a publishing ministry under the brand ***Faith Alive Christian Resources***, which provides materials for Sunday school, Bible study, outreach, and worship. Faith Alive also provides resources to a sister denomination, the Reformed Church in America.

www.FaithAliveResources.org

We also publish ***The Banner*** as our denominational magazine.

www.thebanner.org

The Network is an online forum connecting people across the CRC who are engaged in ministry in their local churches and elsewhere.

crcna.org/network

Affiliated Ministries

In addition to these ministries are others with whom we work in close partnership. They include the youth agencies that support the ***Calvinist Cadet Corps*** program for boys and the ***GEMS*** program for girls as well as ***ThereforeGo Ministries***, which provides leadership for ministries to teens and young adults.

Christian colleges, such as ***Dordt University*** in northwestern Iowa, ***Redeemer University*** in southwestern Ontario, and ***The King's University*** in Edmonton, Alberta, offer university-level liberal arts and science education that is scripturally directed and explores the relation of faith, learning, and living from a Reformed Christian perspective.

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The ***Barnabas Foundation*** (U.S.) and ***Christian Stewardship Services*** (Canada) promote stewardship.

In Canada deacons have banded together to create ***Diaconal Ministries Canada*** to pool resources and provide training.

Belonging Together

This tour of the CRC ends with you. Do the mission and vision of the CRC stir your heart? If so, we invite you to enter into a deeper relationship.

Everyone is welcome to come and join activities or worship at a local church. But at some point we challenge people to become more fully committed to following Jesus and sharing in the ministry of the church by becoming a member. We believe it's wise to solidify a relationship with commitment.

Why? Because we know from experience that growth occurs best in a community with relationships and interaction, and real community involves commitment. We want to encourage and help each other and get to know each other well enough to notice if someone is missing.

Also, some servant leadership roles in the church can be filled only by those who have fully aligned themselves with the church through membership. Filling these roles can bring real joy, as we serve the Lord in serving each other.

Finally, while the church is a community of God's people, it also functions as a legal entity and is registered as a charitable institution. So a congregation will have annual meetings where members give input and set direction. Only members can participate in decision-making votes.

If you would like to become a member, speak to a pastor or staff person at your local church. We've already welcomed you to worship and participate. We'd love to welcome you wholeheartedly into the part of God's family called the Christian Reformed Church in North America.




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crcna.org

ISBN 978-1-59255-452-2



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