

Eleanor Kavana, who owned the Kavana strip mall for years. “Their life mission during the 1940s was to adopt at-risk youth. Three of their four children were adopted. Our work is like their legacy,” Leonard says.

“It’s about looking at what God is already doing and serving with his other partners in the community like the Methodist church, the fire station, the Lion’s Club, and the local high school. Forget about building our church. The question is, are we being faithful?”

## Report of the General Synod Council on Discipleship

*“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:16-17).*

Discipleship changes people, communities, and institutions as disciples commit to making disciples and more people become more like Jesus, embodying his teachings in their daily lives.

### GSC DISCIPLESHIP ENDS MONITORING REPORT

Each spring the general secretary is required to report to the General Synod Council (GSC) on progress on the various ends policies established by the GSC. The monitoring report for discipleship follows.

#### Discipleship Policy Ends

The RCA will be a fellowship of congregations filled with disciples, nurtured inwardly, focused outwardly, becoming like Jesus in all they think, say, and do in order to show the love of God in all circumstances to all people.

#### **General Secretary’s Interpretation**

Disciples making disciples is the clearest and most precise way to state the vision and values of the discipleship office. Each disciple of Christ is committed to internalizing the gospel in his or her individual life, which results in a compelling desire to disciple another person. Through empowering, connecting, encouraging, and sustaining, leaders, teachers, pastors, youth, and children will be disciplined and will disciple others, and this will result in transformed lives.

This is also reflected in the mission statement of the discipleship team: “Christian discipleship is the practice of following Jesus Christ, becoming like him in all we think, say, and do, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to be the very presence of Christ in a lost and broken world so loved by God.” The youth team, the Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship, the HOPE prayer team, and the discipleship team are collaboratively strategizing methods to live into the definition that we have stated.

Disciples making disciples embodies the inward nature of growing in Christ as an individual and it incorporates the outward focus of discipling others. It is relational in its approach, missional in its nature, educational in its practice, incarnational in its witness,

and transformational in its outcome. It is integral to all we do as the body of Christ. Discipleship is one of the foundations of the ten-year goal, and with that comes the urgency and necessity of working with revitalization and multiplication to equip and empower disciples for faithful and fruitful ministry.

**Goal: To implement and provide training for a relational model of discipleship, using reproducing triads and small groups.**

The RCA believes that discipleship is relational and done best in community. What are the relational techniques and models that help form disciples that emulate Jesus Christ in all they think, say, and do?

*Strategies*

- Design, through the discipleship team and with Greg Ogden, a training process by which local leaders will be equipped to lead a triad approach to disciple making.
- Train regional leaders, who can in turn work with and train congregational leaders, in a relational model for discipleship.
- After year two, to gather the discipleship team and regional trainers for evaluation, follow-up training, and revision of the process.
- Offer venues and training for small group leadership.
- Continue to use the language and practice of people development versus program development.

*Outcomes*

- By 2013, at least one hundred persons will be trained in the triad approach, and in turn will provide training in at least three congregations annually.
- By 2013, at least three hundred congregational leaders will have received training in relational discipleship.
- By 2013, at least one thousand congregational leaders will be involved in triads that provide accountability, trust, and biblical engagement as a means by which to strengthen their discipleship ministry.

*Data*

- The discipleship staff has designed the triad training process. At a November conference featuring Greg Ogden, the first group of people will be trained as trainers in the triad approach.
- Discipleship staff has initiated triads in one of the RCA offices among staff members; presently eight triads are meeting.

**Goal: To see our consistories, leadership, and congregations transformed as they are challenged to participate in an intentional form of discipleship that results in life change.**

The RCA is focusing on transformation. What does life change look like as a disciple and how is that measured?

*Strategies*

- To develop a spiritual assessment tool for leaders to use as a way to examine their lives as disciples of Jesus Christ.
- To work with the revitalization staff in developing coaching techniques and strategies for leader-based discipleship.
- To collaborate with the HOPE prayer team in developing and supporting more RCA congregations as houses of prayer.

- To encourage the leaders in our churches to invest in the lives of youth and children and new believers as they walk with them in a discipling relationship and as they encourage the leaders and teachers in the church who are teaching Sunday school, Children and Worship, vacation Bible school, or Wednesday night programs or mentoring.
- To continue to raise up new leaders who experience transformation and are being called to use their gifts in fruitful and faithful ways.
- To work with the coordinator of multiracial initiatives and social justice in developing methods and ways to live out our discipleship by seeking justice in our churches and communities.

### *Outcomes*

- By 2013, at least five hundred RCA congregations will be active houses of prayer.
- By 2013, the number of Children and Worship centers in RCA congregations and non-RCA congregations will increase by 10 percent, allowing for increased nurturing and transformation of young children.
- By 2013, the number of young people exposed to missional leadership opportunities through programs and institutions will be 20 percent higher.
- By 2013, one hundred discipleship leaders will have participated in Foundational Coach Training.
- By 2013, three hundred discipleship leaders will be active in networks.
- Annually, discipleship staff will work directly with forty congregations as a consultant.

### *Data*

- Discipleship staff has written a spiritual assessment tool around the six key areas of discipleship. The tool assesses how churches and leaders are working towards discipleship that is missional, relational, educational, transformational, incarnational, and foundational.
- RCA staff, in collaboration with a discipleship coaching task force, has developed coaching techniques and strategies for leader-based discipleship. The pilot training event was held in March 2009.
- The HOPE prayer team is in a time of transition as it seeks new ways to equip and empower people to pray.
- The updated youth website has provided new resources for youth pastors. A youth leaders training event was held in May 2009. The youth team has encouraged churches to think more broadly about how they incorporate youth and children in worship, service, discipleship, and leadership.
- The coordinator for discipleship has worked with camps and colleges to coordinate efforts on fostering leadership in the RCA.
- RCA staff has worked with the R-11 committee in trying to get younger delegates at General Synod. They are also seeking opportunities for further leadership as it emerges from General Synod.
- Networks are growing; presently about 120 discipleship leaders are active in networks.
- Discipleship staff acted as consultants for approximately nine churches in 2008.

### **Children and Worship Program Expands in Mexico**

Children and Worship International is expanding in Mexico. The first Children and Worship center in Mexico opened six years ago; RCA missionaries Martha and Jaime Amaro report that more than 200 churches have been trained in the Children and Worship program, with 45 worship centers running each week. Sometimes the worship centers are located in churches; in other cases, they are the only Christian presence in a particular area.

One of the worship centers travels to hospitals and runs a program for terminally ill children. Another center works with orphans.

This year, the Amaros trained 40 churches in the program, and eight new centers were opened.

Children and Worship is an interactive worship experience for kids, who learn Bible stories using wooden figures and other materials. The program is used throughout the U.S. and Canada and has recently expanded into Japan and South Africa as well as Mexico.

**Goal: To continue to offer Reformed and missional resources for empowering and equipping local congregations.**

The RCA is working toward a form of missional discipleship. How are we preparing disciples to make other disciples?

**Strategies**

- Work with Faith Alive and other ecumenical partners on the creation of resources for congregational use that supports our commitment to be Reformed and missional.
- Continue to highlight opportunities in the denomination that lead people into mission in a Reformed context.
- Collaborate with the Mission Volunteer Program, Project Timothy, and Leaders on the Horizon in order to call youth into mission, service, and leadership.
- Work with revitalization staff to equip congregational members to engage in incarnational ministries through which they serve people who are not yet disciples of Christ and are trained to engage in spiritual conversations with them.
- Work with the seminaries in providing lifelong learning opportunities that are both Reformed and missional.

**Outcomes**

- By 2009, to have a fully functioning, three-year online training course (Opening Doors to Discipleship) available to all RCA congregational leaders in discipleship.
- By 2010, to have one hundred churches participating in Opening Doors to Discipleship.
- Annually, to provide complete and updated resource lists of curriculum for children, youth, and adults that support our commitment to be Reformed and missional.
- By 2013, youth from every region will be participating in Project Timothy.
- To participate in at least two collaborative lifelong learning events with both New Brunswick Theological Seminary and Western Theological Seminary in order to train and empower fifty local leaders who will be models of lifelong learning and voices of discipleship in their regions.
- By 2013, resource networks will be using discussion forums or blogs so that Reformed disciples may share Reformed and missional resources and best practices with one another in order to grow disciples, nurture them inwardly, and focus them outwardly.

**Data**

- Opening Doors to Discipleship, a three-year online training program, is complete and currently has eighty-nine participants. Year four is being developed on a discipleship theme.
- The RCA website has complete and updated resource lists of curriculum for children, youth, and adults that support our commitment to be Reformed and missional.
- The discipleship office has had two successful events in partnership with Journey and Western Seminary. It is still pursuing opportunities at New Brunswick.

- The discipleship team has set up a blog and members from the team post items regularly.

### Summer Camps Grow Faith

At Inspiration Hills, an RCA camp near Inwood, Iowa, summer campers experience a week filled with not only fun and games but also with meaningful discipleship. “I see camp as my mission field,” says Cal Ver Mulm, director of ministries at Inspiration Hills. “We’re helping to start kids on their faith journey.”

The theme at Inspiration Hills this summer was “Ready to Live,” drawn from Ephesians 5:1-2: “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” During their week at camp, campers learned to imitate Christ in their lives by following his example.

Ver Mulm says kids grow in their faith during daily Bible studies and chapels, but also through every activity during the camp week. As they watch staff members imitate Christ in their daily lives, they learn how to react and relate to one another in a Christlike manner. Ver Mulm says that the Inspiration Hills staff works to instill in campers the reality that when they leave camp, they need to take what they’ve learned back with them and make it a part of their lives at home.

Inspiration Hills is one of eight RCA camps that collectively hosted 14,000 kids this summer. The others are Countryside Camp in Cambridge, Ontario; Camp Fowler in Speculator, New York; Camp Geneva in Holland, Michigan; Camp Warwick in Warwick, New York; Cran-Hill Ranch in Rodney, Michigan; Laurel Pines Christian Camp in Big Bear City, California; and Manitoqua Ministries in Frankfort, Illinois.

### **Goal: To educate and empower our children, youth, and leaders as they seek to grow as disciples of Christ.**

The RCA is focused on education and examining how the resources we are presently using are helping us to grow disciples that are nurtured inwardly and focused outwardly. What new and creative resources and methods will help us educate disciples, and what present methods are still effective?

#### *Strategies*

- To gather data about what methods and curriculum are being used to educate our children, youth, and adults.
- To offer a scope and sequence of what adults, children, and youth should be learning.
- To educate leaders, teachers, and pastors on teaching techniques, methodology, discipleship training, and spiritual disciplines.
- To develop Christ-centered followers, teachers, and leaders who are connected and sustained in community and who live out their faith in all they think, say, and do.

#### *Outcomes*

- By 2010, a training session will be offered in every region for children’s ministries and adult discipleship.
- By 2010, training events for *I Wonder* and *Following Jesus* will be developed and implemented so that local Children and Worship leaders will be further equipped and empowered for faithful and fruitful ministry.
- By 2011, an online Children and Worship introduction workshop will be available.
- By 2013, the number of Children and Worship basic trainings, introductions, enrich-

ment, and specialized events will increase by 20 percent in order to strengthen local Children and Worship ministry.

- By 2013, discussion forums and blogs for Children and Worship trainers and local leaders will provide communication and a means for sharing questions and best practices. New Children and Worship networks will also be created.
- By 2013, a network for educators will exist in each region to keep them connected, revitalized, and sustained.
- By 2010, the Season of Discipleship task force will bring a proposal to General Synod outlining how disciples can be fully embraced in the life and mission of the local church.

#### **Data**

- A consortium of experts in the field of education was held to discuss the future of and trends in children's ministry.
- In 2008 and 2009 the discipleship office held trainings in every region for adult discipleship. RCA discipleship staff work in partnership with Faith Alive for children's ministry and numerous Children and Worship trainings were offered.
- The discipleship team has been empowered to develop a discipleship team in each region.
- A Season of Discipleship task force has been formed to create new resources and methods that will help churches engage in developing disciples of Jesus Christ for all ages.

## **Report of the General Synod Council on Leadership throughout the RCA**

*"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, 'Here am I, send me!'" (Isaiah 6:8).*

God is still calling people into relationship and sending them to participate in and witness to the reign of God. By God's grace, the Reformed Church in America is joining in that work by identifying, forming, deploying, nurturing, and renewing people with gifts for leadership. Throughout the denomination, this occurs by:

- Forming a new generation of pastoral leaders
- Training elders and deacons in their ministry
- Assisting leaders to discern God's direction
- Connecting ministers of Word and sacrament and congregations
- Creating pastoral networks for support and learning
- Coaching and mentoring pastors in their work
- Nurturing the unique gifts and ministry of women

The GSC nurtures congregational leadership—deacons, elders, ministers, emerging leaders, and longtime leaders—through programs and ministries around four themes: calling people to ministry, forming people for ministry, nurturing people in ministry, and renewing people for changing ministry.