
Each spring the general secretary is required to report to the General Synod Council about progress on the various ends policies established by the GSC. The monitoring report for ends policy E-2: Cultivating Transformation in Christ follows.

ENDS POLICY E-2: CULTIVATING TRANSFORMATION IN CHRIST

The RCA will engage, equip, and encourage congregations and missional communities in the work of cultivating transformation that results in faithful and passionate disciples of Jesus.

GENERAL SECRETARY’S INTERPRETATION

“Go therefore 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 that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20).

Jesus’ command to make disciples is the church’s mandate to help all people grow and deepen their faith as they live it out in everyday life. Transformed disciples become more like Christ as they read and reflect on God’s Word, pray and listen to God, spend time in community with other Christ followers, and engage in Christ’s mission. The RCA’s commitment is to help provide accessible environments, processes, resources, and relationships that local congregations can use to foster, in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, more fully devoted followers who willingly and boldly live and love like Jesus.

The unique discipleship pathways created by congregations will foster transformation in both hearts and minds, exhibited in changed actions in the lives of equipped and empowered disciples. These growing disciples will make contributions as leaders, teachers, and people of influence within their congregations. Transformation will manifest in our relationships with one another, our increasing love for each other, our sacrifice for the cause of Christ, our willingness to influence our world for the gospel, and how we advocate for justice with compassion in communities where we live and serve. The way we live and love like Jesus will impact how we reach out to those who live on the margins, to those who have been disempowered in our society, and to those who have no voice in the broken world in which we reside.

TRANSFORMATIONAL PROCESSES

“Go and make disciples of all nations” is a pretty clear instruction from Jesus. In Transformed & Transforming, the discipleship priority area is called “Cultivating Transformation in Christ”—with Jesus’ words at its heart. As we follow Jesus as disciples, both leadership and mission follow.

The Transformational Experiences (discipleship) guiding coalition, led by Jill Ver Steeg, is a team of people who are passionate about changing lives and communities for greater kingdom impact. This is a team of ten to twelve practitioners in the field of discipleship who help shape the goals of this priority area and the approach to accomplishing them. The guiding coalition will work passionately toward every RCA congregation having a discipleship pathway or process to bring greater kingdom impact and deeper transformation, both personally and systemically.
The Transformational Experiences guiding coalition is focusing on the following six processes to help congregations create a discipleship pathway in their context.

**Discipleship Connection Events**

The purpose of a discipleship connection event is to help congregations discern and dream about what future ministry could look like, serving as an on-ramp for a discipleship learning community. This is a group of 12 to 20 churches in relatively close geographical proximity who share current discipleship challenges and celebrations, together creating a sense of urgency around seeing greater transformation in their context. The goal of a discipleship connection event is to paint a picture of a future greater ministry impact and invite churches to take a next faithful step toward that future.

**Discipleship Pathway Learning Communities**

A discipleship pathway learning community is a cluster of eight to ten RCA congregations in relatively close geographical proximity that each gather a team of three to five people, including the pastor, to learn about discipleship together. Each congregation in the learning community will develop its own unique pathways through which people will be transformed, through the power of the Holy Spirit, into passionate, outwardly focused followers of Jesus that live for the sake of others.

**Discipleship Leadership Communities**

Teams of three to five staff and leaders from RCA congregations engage in a two-year process; each leadership community will have between five and seven congregations, drawn from all geographic regions of the RCA. Teams from the pilot group of eight RCA congregations completed their two-year process at the end of April 2016. Reports from all eight congregations are extremely positive. Four of those eight congregations are now serving as “discipleship bases of operation” where ongoing learning, coaching, resourcing, and partnership are happening for wider impact. Another discipleship leadership community was launched in October 2016.

**Faithwalking Learning Communities**

Faithwalking is the personal transformation component of Ridder Church Renewal. Many RCA congregations lead Faithwalking experiences with neighboring congregations as one dimension of their discipleship pathway. A long-term goal will be to expand Faithwalking to non-Ridder congregations through the development of learning communities.

**3DM Learning Communities**

3DM learning communities consist of ten to twelve RCA, CRC, and other neighboring congregations that gather four times over the course of two years, implementing what they learn between gatherings. Each congregation will learn and employ the 3DM missional community process as a primary way to focus on multiplying disciples, leaders, and mission. The RCA is also partnering with 3DM to see five to seven pastors trained in 3DM by June 2017.

**VantagePoint3 Learning Communities**

This is a one-year learning community of three to five RCA congregations in which each congregation will learn from and with one another as they employ VantagePoint3’s
primary introductory resource, *The Journey*, which focuses on discipleship and leadership development.

**Year Four Goals (by June 2017)**

- Launch one discipleship leadership community with six to eight RCA congregations.
- Launch one Growing Generosity leadership community with seven to ten congregations.
- Launch two discipleship learning communities with ten to fifteen RCA and CRC congregations.
- Launch four Creating Congregational Cultures of Generosity learning communities.
- Train five to seven pastors for leadership in 3DM.
- Twelve to fifteen RCA congregations have participated in a 3DM learning community.
- Launch one to two Faithwalking retreats, involving six to eight RCA and other congregations.
- Hold five connection events focused on cultivating transformation.

**Progress**

- One discipleship leadership community launched in October 2016 at Corinth Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan, involving six congregations from Michigan, Iowa, and Pennsylvania. A seventh congregation was added for the second gathering in April 2017.
- One Growing Generosity leadership community launched in November 2016 with three participating congregations. The intention is to add three or four more congregations by the second gathering.
- One discipleship learning community launched in East and West Sioux Classes in September 2016 at Trinity Reformed Church in Orange City, Iowa. Nine congregations are involved in this learning community.
- A joint RCA/CRC discipleship learning community launched in Holland, Michigan, in May 2017.
- A discipleship learning community will launch in the Rochester, New York, area in June 2017.
- Three Creating Congregational Cultures of Generosity learning communities have launched, one in each of Albany, Mid-America, and New York. Each of these learning communities has three congregations participating.
- Seven pastors (from Lynden, Washington; Chino, California; Sheboygan, Wisconsin; Okoboji, Iowa; and Colorado Springs, Colorado) are in the process of being trained for leadership in 3DM.
- Thirteen RCA congregations—from Sheboygan, Wisconsin, to Okoboji, Iowa, to Edmonds, Washington—are participating in a 3DM learning community.
- Approximately eight Faithwalking retreats, involving 25 RCA congregations, have been held in classes such as Canadian Prairies, Albany, Wisconsin, and New York.
- Discipleship connection events have been held in Orange City, Iowa; Holland, Michigan; and Rochester, New York.
- A joint next generation/discipleship connection event was held in Pella, Iowa.
Five-Year Goals (June 2013 to June 2018)

• 16 RCA congregations have completed a two-year discipleship leadership community and are providing other congregations resources for discipleship as requested.
• Ten to fifteen RCA congregations have participated in a discipleship learning community and are implementing their own unique disciple-making pathway in their congregation.
• 50 to 65 RCA congregations are engaged in Faithwalking as a core process for cultivating transformation in Christ.
• Ten to twelve RCA congregations have participated in a joint RCA and 3DM learning community and have launched missional communities focused on discipleship, leadership, and missional living.
• Ten to fifteen RCA congregations have participated in a VantagePoint3 learning community and are using VantagePoint3 resources to develop disciples and equip leaders.
• We have collaborated with Organic Outreach to develop a pre-discipleship learning community to launch in 2017–2018.

NEXT GENERATION ENGAGEMENT

Rick Zomer assumed leadership of this team as the coordinator for Next Generation Engagement in February 2016. The team consists of nine members—three are RCA staff and six are RCA pastors. Their purpose is to empower young adults, ministry teams, and congregations to create a culture where people of all ages serve in leadership positions at the church, classis, and denominational levels. The goal is to create an environment where the emphasis moves from merely keeping people in the church when they reach adulthood to equipping congregations to both fully include younger members in the church and reach out to those who have left the church.

Next Generation Connection Events

Clusters of RCA churches in the same geographical area gather for a one-day process to examine their current reality regarding young adults’ presence and involvement in their congregations. In addition, participants are given the opportunity to envision ways to increase the number and involvement level of young adults in their church.

Next Generation Learning Communities

Plans have been developed and clusters of churches have been asked to consider an 18- to 24-month process focused on three specific goals: creating a shared understanding of their current reality as it relates to young adults, considering steps for connecting across generations, and developing plans to commit to ministry with young adults in their church and regions.

Growing Young Learning Community

Growing Young is a transformational process that is offered by the Fuller Youth Institute (FYI), housed at Fuller Theological Seminary. RCA churches are given the opportunity to engage in a one-year process with congregations from across North America. The goal is to have congregations identify and implement specific steps to engage young adults in connection and leadership in their church.
Year Four Goals (by June 2017)

- Launch one high-quality learning community focused on next generation engagement.
- Recruit and complete the Growing Young learning community with at least two RCA churches.
- Design and execute six connection events focused on involvement and leadership pathways for emerging adults in the local church.
- Recruit a Next Generation guiding coalition composed of a diversity of ages and contexts within the RCA and begin meeting quarterly.

Progress

- Ten congregations from Central Iowa Classis are thinking about joining a joint discipleship/next generation learning community that would launch in September 2017. These congregations gathered for a connection event on January 31, 2017, in Pella, Iowa.
- Three RCA churches (New Life Community Church in Artesia, California; Rancho Community Church in Temecula, California; and Third Reformed Church in Pella, Iowa) completed the Growing Young cohort in March 2017. Each participant received coaching calls between cohort meetings from FYI staff.
- 18 churches participated in two connection events held in Wisconsin in August 2016. Congregations were given the opportunity to consider joining a learning community focused on next generation engagement.
- Seven churches attended a connection event in Des Moines, Iowa, in September 2016. Several of these churches also attended the next generation/discipleship connection event in Pella and are currently discerning becoming involved in a learning community.
- Eight churches participated in a connection event in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, in September 2016. These churches were offered the opportunity to form a learning community focused on next generation strategies.
- Six RCA churches in the Regional Synod of New York participated in a connection event in New York City in November 2016 that focused on calling and vocation and the next generation.
- Three RCA churches participated in a connection event in German Valley, Illinois, in April 2017.
- Six RCA churches in the Regional Synod of Canada are participating in a learning circle that is utilizing FYI materials.
- Three RCA churches (New Life Community Church in Artesia, California; Woodhaven Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan; and Fifth Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan) have hosted learning events focused on understanding young adults and faithful next steps for their churches regarding the next generation.

Five-Year Goals (June 2013 to June 2018)

- 30 congregations will have participated or will be participating in a learning community and will have a next generation ministry that is resourced.
- 150 congregations will have attended a next generation connection event and will have been invited to participate in a learning community as a next step toward developing a next generation strategy and ministry.
- Onboarding of the FYI collaboration is complete and Growing Young resources have been introduced to 20 congregations through participation in the onsite cohort experience or through specific FYI-resourced connection events.