

# God Calling

**A Study of “Our Call,”  
the RCA’s Ten-Year Goal to  
Revitalize Congregations and  
Begin New Congregations**

**Produced for RCA Women’s Ministries.  
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## Contents

<b>“Our Call”—the Ten-Year Goal Statement</b> .....	<b>.5</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>.6</b>
<b>Suggestions for Group Study</b> .....	<b>.7</b>
<b>Revitalization: “CPR or Heart Transplant? Why the Church Needs Revitalization”</b> .....	<b>.9</b>
<b>Multiplication: “The Joy of New Beginnings”</b> .....	<b>.17</b>
<b>Discipleship: “To Each Is Given”</b> .....	<b>.21</b>
<b>Leadership: “God Calls Women to Lead”</b> .....	<b>.27</b>
<b>Mission: “Following Christ in Mission”</b> .....	<b>.33</b>
<b>“Next Steps”</b> .....	<b>.41</b>
<b>Resources</b> .....	<b>.45</b>
<b>RCA Mission Statement</b> .....	<b>.51</b>

## Our Call: Following Christ in Mission



Our Call in the Reformed Church in America is to build on the foundations of discipleship, leadership, and mission and to renew existing congregations and start new churches.

**Revitalizing and multiplying**—not one or the other; not one more important than the other; but both, equally essential and deeply interwoven.

Revitalizing congregations are responsive to God's call, developing a faithful and fruitful life through new mission, new ministries, and new members.

New congregations extend God's love and grace by inviting people into a new community of faith and a relationship with Jesus Christ.

**Discipleship** forms us as we seek to follow our Lord in all he said and did—living out his passion for justice, his care for the outcast, and his seeking for God's kingdom as we answer his invitation to open our lives to the transforming power of God's love.

**Leadership**—we build a healthy, growing future for our ministries when we identify, equip, and deploy people with gifts for leadership.

**Mission** becomes a way of life when we reach out to people with the gospel, meeting needs in our own neighborhoods and cities and through global partnerships.

This is what the church has always been about—faithful congregations, inspiring worship, and loving relationships that flourish as the church builds community, nurtures the gifts of all its members, and reaches out in mission both locally and globally.

### Our Call

Following Christ in mission together, led by the Holy Spirit, and working with all the partners God provides, we believe that God is calling the Reformed Church in America over the next ten years to focus its efforts and resources on starting new congregations and revitalizing existing congregations, thereby empowering fruitful and faithful ministries for the glory of God.

—*Minutes of General Synod 2003*, p. 66

## Introduction

If you are reading this study, you are probably acquainted with a congregation of the Reformed Church in America. This wonderful old denomination is sensing that it is time for renewal, time to offer answers to the spiritual questions people are raising in a culture that is becoming increasingly secular and fractured.

All women of the RCA must take seriously the call God has placed on our denomination to proclaim the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. Considering the culture of North America and beyond, the challenge before us could be staggering and considered impossible. As sisters, grandmothers, nieces, mothers, daughters, granddaughters, as women who follow Christ, we can make a difference in the world so loved by God. Our history is rich with the stories of women who have given themselves for God's work. Together, we will continue the story.

This study is written by six such women. Each has written a chapter telling of her journey and how God is using her gifts and the gifts of people around her. Each chapter is related to the vision that drives Our Call, the RCA's ten-year goal to revitalize existing congregations and start new congregations.

My prayer is that as you study each chapter, you will have clarity about how God can use you. I hope that, in addition to reading and praying, you also act on what you discover. Use the questions at the end of each chapter to provoke answers that lead to ministry. A list of resources has been included to help you succeed in whatever action God leads you to take.

If we truly believe that God has gifted and called each of us for his purposes here on earth, then we must not squander the incredible talent and wisdom given to the women of our congregations.

“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).

Come on, women of the RCA; it's time to answer God's call!

*Mary Clark*

Mary Clark  
Coordinator of Women's Ministries

## Suggestions for Group Study

1. Come to the session prepared.
2. Be willing to join in the discussion.
3. Stick to the passage being studied.
4. Try to be sensitive to the other members of the group.
5. Be careful not to dominate the discussion, but by all means, participate! Be sure to allow others to have equal time.

At the end of this study you will find a collection of resources and teaching materials to help you in your growth as a follower of Christ. You will also find resources that will help your church develop and build fully devoted followers of Christ.

# 1

## **CPR or Heart Transplant? Why the Church Needs Revitalization**

*by Nancy Ryan*

### **Scripture readings**

Isaiah 43:18-19

Matthew 5:17-20

John 3:1-17

### **Opening prayer**

*Lord God, thank you for the gift of your presence among us. Help us, Lord, to always recognize your presence and ask you for direction in our lives and in our ministry together. Amen.*

“What is God asking of us?” The responses were as varied as those present at the consistory table: to care for one another; to remain open to God’s Spirit; to feed the hungry; to be patient; to remember why Christ came; to have a vision; to start a new ministry; to believe.

This discussion at a meeting of the Reformed Church of Fort Plain consistory in 2000 led to the ministry of Manna House Meals, a meal program for the hungry of our community.

The question that started us praying and planning for Manna House Meals is part of our “worshipful work” consistory agenda. Our monthly meetings look more like worship than a business meeting, and we do that by design.

After praying and reading a variety of resources and going on retreat

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together, we felt the Spirit prompting us to do things in a new way. With some resistance to this “new thing,” but with a fantastic faith that God was at work in our midst, we stepped out to discover what would become for us the beginning of a new and more vital ministry.

Five years later, we still do worshipful work, people serve on our consistory because they feel called by God to do so, the Manna House ministry is going strong, and a new youth outreach is in the works. Along the way we often encounter roadblocks and potholes, but that does not keep us from striving for the goal, because we know that it is not our ministry, but God’s ministry among us.

There is a spirit of hope and promise that is lived out in this place as we care for one another and for the community. Is there more to do? Absolutely! And there is a confidence within us that we are not alone on this quest that God has called us to, and that God is the one calling the shots—God is directing us and leading us through all of our ministry endeavors by the power of his Holy Spirit.

We are currently preparing for the Natural Church Development process, which will take us even further along this path that God has set us on.

We believe that it is a priority for us to ask God what he wants us to do. This means asking God where we fit in his plan of ministry, instead of asking God to bless what we think is the right thing. That is not easy by any measure, but it is freeing to know that the One who has called us into this wonderful ministry also sustains us in it.

Prayer was a huge piece of how we got to where we are, and prayer continues to be a vital factor in our life together and in our ministry. It has also been helpful to know the area in which we are called to ministry. We have sought to know who the people are, what the needs are, and what the community is about. Another piece of our revitalization has come in recognizing that we need to share these ministry opportunities with the whole community. So we are very willing to work with other churches, community groups, schools, and individuals to accomplish what we believe God is asking us to do.

## **Why revitalize?**

In a sense, Jesus was the first revitalization expert and practitioner—he revitalized our relationship with God and the law of God. Jesus says, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17).

The Holy Spirit is the driving force of any revitalization program or process in a church, no matter how organized and intentional (or unorganized and unintentional) the program or process might be. Jesus reminds Nicodemus, “The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8).

Numbers should not drive our desire to revitalize. Instead, we should be driven by the power of God’s Spirit in our midst, calling us to be his people in this place. When, in other words, we seek wholeness as God’s people individually and corporately, we are on our way to revitalization. Revitalization is more about health than it is about growth.

If the goal is simply church growth, then find a plan or principle and run with it. You could try giving money away on Sunday morning to anyone who comes to worship. More than likely, your church will grow in numbers, but certainly not in quality, health, spirituality, or any other mark that should characterize a church.

## **What does revitalization mean?**

For our purposes, revitalization can be defined as the faithful response of a denomination or church to the God who calls us into being, and who tells us, “Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah 43:18-19). Revitalization is about receiving new life or being invigorated by the Spirit of the living God. It is what God does with us, with his whole creation, with his church—not what we do with God. Remember Paul’s words to the church in Corinth: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth” (1 Corinthians 3:6).

Look for a moment at the exchange between Nicodemus and Jesus.

Nicodemus says, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God” (John 3:2). But what does Nicodemus really know about Jesus as a teacher? What does he really know about Jesus as one sent from God? It would appear from further dialogue that Nicodemus really does not know much: “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” (verse 4). Jesus is speaking of those things that are spiritual and that build up the person and the whole body. Nicodemus is stuck in spatial reality, so he misses the spiritual reality that Jesus seeks to draw him into through his teaching.

Real and lasting revitalization requires listening with head and heart and being willing to accept the unacceptable from Jesus. It is not unlike Paul’s vision of the unclean animals. He had to expand his understanding in order to participate in the life-giving ministry that God had called him to. This is no easy task. But the truth is, you can teach old dogs new tricks; you just have to be patient and focused. It could be said of the church that we are “old dogs learning new tricks,” or better, “the people of God learning to be the people God called us to be.”

### **What do we mean by “church”?**

If we are to be the church of Jesus Christ in the world today, we will do well to seek renewal and revitalization. To participate in revitalization is to invite, nurture, and ready ourselves and others for the Spirit of God to descend upon us to do, as Isaiah reminds us, “a new thing.” God is always drawing us, calling us, to a new place, to a new way, to a vital ministry of hope, love, and mercy. This, in part, is what makes the church vital.

The church today is in many ways different from the first-century church. God knows this, and God continues to call us to “a new thing.” As the church, the body of Christ, we go with courage, knowing that we do not go alone. That is part of what I mean when I use the term “church.” God in Christ established the church to be his very presence now. The church is the body of Christ when it takes its cues from the Creator, when it acts by the power of the Spirit, and when it humbly follows the way of Jesus. We cannot do it without God. And if we try to,

we fail to be the church that God has established and we become the church that we want. We cease to be the church of Jesus Christ, in other words.

Nicodemus sought Jesus out and asked him a poignant and important question that still must be asked today: How can a person be born again when that person is old? Or, as this concept relates to the church, How can we be born anew when we are already here?

Jesus gives Nicodemus an answer that perplexes him and seems totally unacceptable to him. He is stuck in how things ought to be, how things have come to be at the hands of humankind, and he is blind to see what God can and will do—indeed, what God is doing and has been doing since the start of creation.

Revitalization starts when we get out of God's way and let God do what only God can do—grow God's church. We are reminded in 1 Corinthians 3:7, "So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth."

Revitalization includes fostering healthy relationships within the church. The church can be an incredibly hostile environment for a variety of reasons, but when we change that and build healthy liaisons between pastor and lay leaders, and between the congregation's members, we are able to ready the arena for God's Holy Spirit to work on bringing life to an almost, if not already, dead church. Creating loving and caring relationships, engaging in need-based evangelism, promoting passionate spirituality, engaging in inspiring worship, encouraging empowered leadership, facilitating functional structures, and promoting the use of gifts in everyone's ministry are all vital if revitalization is to occur.\*

Revitalization impacts every program, and should impact every person, within a congregation. The Spirit moves where it chooses, and we need to be in place and ready for it to move us.

\* Ideas drawn from *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches*, by Christian Swarz (ChurchSmart Resources, 1996)

## **What does revitalization mean for you? Your congregation?**

We tend to be a fearful people, afraid that we are “the only ones,” like Elijah when he argues with God that he is the only faithful one, that he alone has been jealous for the Lord, that he is all that is left (1 Kings 19:9 and following). God renewed and revitalized the ministry of Elijah and sent him back into the world to carry out the ministry that God had placed before him. God does the same for us.

We come to God as a congregation and as individuals, we place our brokenness before God, and we seek God’s healing touch to help us get back on track. We seek the Spirit of God to renew and revitalize our efforts daily. We seek relationship with Jesus Christ and the forgiveness that he holds out to us as we make our way in this world.

Part of what revitalization means for the church is recapturing the joy of being the people of God in a lost and broken world so loved by God. To recognize that God has some very wild and wonderful ways is to be on the road of revitalization. His ways are not our ways, but his ways are always better than our ways, and recognizing that is another step on the road of revitalization.

A sign of revitalization in a person’s life and in the life of the church will be a sense of joy even in the midst of hardship, a sense of hope even when trials and tribulation are taking a toll, and a loving, compassionate response to God’s people despite the pain of our own life.

We need to enjoy God and one another more, sharing each other’s burdens, which makes them much lighter for us. God has gifted us and called us to do and be certain things. If we focus on what God wants for our lives, our life as the people of God in the church of Jesus Christ can and will be blessed.

## Questions

1. Are you like Nicodemus? In what ways?
2. What is your spiritual gift?
3. How can you help your church engage in revitalization?
4. What do we mean when we say that God is doing “a new thing”?
5. Is there anything about revitalization that frightens you?
6. What might change in your life or the life of your church if revitalization became a priority?

## Closing prayer

*When we falter, Lord, be ready with a steady hand to right us along our way. When we are overwhelmed, give us courage to go forward in your light and love. Lord, may we be born anew in our understanding of your call to us. Amen.*

# 2

## The Joy of New Beginnings

by Laura O'Shea

### Scripture readings

Matthew 28:19

Acts 1:8

1 Corinthians 12

### Opening prayer

*Dear Lord, open our hearts to the joy of new beginnings. Show us the harvest and help us to get excited about the many ways to reap the harvest. Amen.*

Early in 2001, God called me to step up to a new challenge—to help plant a new RCA church. So one sunny day in February, about twenty of us from our mother church sat in a room and prayerfully began the process of asking God to guide us. Eight months later we had our very first preview service, and by January 2002 we were holding services every Sunday.

Planting a new church is a lot like getting pregnant, having a baby, and then raising your child. Though this analogy is overused, it is appropriate and biblical. In 1 Corinthians 12, the apostle Paul refers to the church as a body—as a living organism. Churches, like all living organisms, are born, grow, reproduce, grow old, and even die. Therefore, the only way for churches to survive and grow is by converting new believers and by planting new daughter churches.

### Don't we have enough churches already?

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If you've ever thought this to yourself, you probably have also thought, "Why not just get more people to come to my church?" I wondered that too. The reasons are complex and multilayered. First, we need to realize that over time, established churches become less effective at reaching new people in their community. Studies have shown that churches that are three years old and under reach ten new people each year for every one hundred members; churches that are three to fifteen years old reach five new people per one hundred members, and those older than fifteen years reach an average of just three people for every one hundred members.<sup>1</sup> Even if you do invite people, not every person is comfortable stepping into a traditional brick-and-mortar church. Whatever the reason may be—the language, the music, a negative childhood experience, a feeling of intimidation, or maybe feeling like they don't have the right clothes—some people just can't bring themselves to do it.

### **Why plant a new church?**

Studies have shown that smaller churches are 1,600 percent more effective than larger churches are reaching the unchurched in their area.<sup>2</sup> That's because planting new churches allows various types of people to be reached more effectively. No one church speaks to all people, who may differentiate themselves by the language they speak, their culture, or the generation they belong to. People respond to and like different kinds of music, have different ways of learning, and relate to one another differently. Starting a new church allows these differences to be celebrated and removes barriers to the teaching of the gospel.

Imagine a local community center where individuals learn how to dance the two-step on Tuesday nights, but which on Sunday morning houses a church designed specifically for them—a place where they can worship God to the rhythms of country music!

Starting a new church provides opportunities for people to grow and to step up as new leaders. This is true for the mother church as well as for

<sup>1</sup> *Christianity Today*, January 1991

<sup>2</sup> *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches*, by Christian Swarz (ChurchSmart Resources, 1996), pp. 47-48

the church plant. God is amazing. In my own life, God has given me the opportunity to work hand in hand with him in building his kingdom. Surprisingly, I find myself leading ministries that I would never have led had I stayed in my mother church. This is not a critique of that church, but a fulfillment of God's plan. God called me to lead new ministries in a church plant, just as he called others to lead the ministries that I left behind at my mother church. The act of blessing a new set of leaders and sending them off to plant a new church may seem scary, but I promise you that God will not leave you wanting.

### **A passion for changed lives**

I will never forget the joy I felt that first Sunday in January when people I would otherwise never have met came walking into our new “baby” church. About six months later, I was further blessed when I participated in our first baptism and witnessed as ten individuals committed their lives to following Jesus Christ.

When the first-century church was just beginning, it faced many of the same challenges that we do today. The bottom line is that planting a new church may not be easy, but the rewards are great. Though the culture, language, and music of the early church were vastly different from our own, the power of the Holy Spirit brought the gospel to every corner of the world. It's no different today, except that the “corners” of world are closer than ever before.

### **Questions**

1. Review Acts 1:8. Would this scripture be realized by supporting a new church plant in your area? In what way?
2. In what ways is supporting a new church plant in your area the same as supporting an overseas mission? In what ways is it different?
3. How important are the following things in helping people find God: music, popular culture, style?
4. Why are smaller, newer churches better at reaching the unchurched than larger, established churches?

5. Skim Acts chapters eight through twenty-one. How did the disciples fulfill the Great Commission described in Mathew 28:19?

**Closing prayer**

*Dear God, thank you for your providence. Bless us and expand our territory for you so we may reach people and share your good news. Amen.*

# 3

## To Each Is Given

by Nancy McNiven

### Scripture reading

Ephesians 4:7, 11-13

### Opening prayer

*Dear Lord, may the study of your Word enlighten us. May our conversation serve to encourage us and deepen our commitment to discipleship. Amen.*

How does becoming more fully a disciple of Christ help in revitalization? Scripture certainly points to one way it can happen, and that is by using the spiritual gifts we are given.

In my role as Christian educator and deacon I became intrigued with the potential released in individuals and congregations when they discover and use their spiritual gifts. I've seen how a study or retreat can energize and equip a community of believers to live out Christ's call to true discipleship. Gift-conscious ministry must be a key component of any new church start or church revitalization effort. A healthy congregation needs to utilize the potential of each of its members and adherents in, as the RCA Statement of Mission and Vision says, "following Christ in mission, in a lost and broken world so loved by God" (see p. 51).

A growing number of resources focus on spiritual gifts. The definitions and names of the gifts vary, but all the resources emphasize that spiritual gifts are special abilities given by Christ through the Holy Spirit to empower each believer for the ministries of the body and the call of God

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in their lives. These abilities include the gifts of administration, creative ability, discernment, encouragement, evangelism, faith, giving, hospitality, intercession, knowledge, leadership, mercy, service, shepherding, teaching, and wisdom.

Each of you has at least one of these special gifts that needs to be used in the work of the body of believers. Normally when I say that in a group, at least one person says, “No way!” Our Scripture passage clearly indicates not only that we have a gift, but that the gift is blessed. Sometimes our gift or gifts mirror something we would recognize as a natural talent, or our selected profession. In other cases, our gift is radically different. I know public school teachers who use their gifts of service, hospitality, and mercy to serve meals to homeless people, stock cans of food in food pantries, and organize Christmas gift collections for people with HIV/AIDS. I know carpenters, nurses, and computer specialists who are committed to sharing their knowledge of Scripture and their faith in the teaching ministry of the church.

Because being a disciple of Christ calls for transformation and growth, we can also expect a few surprises along the way. We may be called to use a particular gift for a period of time and then encouraged or prompted to engage in another ministry that uses a new or different gift in ways we could not have imagined.

Here’s an example. I was leading an adult study on spiritual gifts and enjoyed spending time with an elderly woman who was taking the course because she just loved to learn. As part of the study we gave each participant a gift survey to fill out. We then matched the gifts identified on their surveys with active or potential ministries in their congregation.

When I asked participants to acknowledge a gift, this elderly woman gave a chuckle and said, “I have the gift of hospitality, but how can I use that? I’m basically housebound.” Well, this congregation wanted to strengthen their outreach to visitors and new members. We found out that our elderly disciple of Christ was a retired administrator who was very comfortable talking on the phone. With a huge smile on her face, she volunteered to be a phone contact person in this new ministry!

Do you see what can happen when we let the Spirit take command?

Many times that means letting go of our fears, perceived limitations, or egos.

Elizabeth O'Connor, in her book *Eighth Day of Creation: Discovering Your Gifts and Using Them*, writes, “No gift is unimportant. There are no lesser gifts. Each is crucial to the proper functioning of the Body; each contributes to the rich diversity needed by the Church for its work within the total organism of humanity.”

I like O'Connor's words because they compel the church to constantly discover, explore, and fine-tune the focus on gifts. *We cannot fulfill what God wants us to do and who he want us to be in this time and in this place if we do not use our gifts in partnership with each other.*

That partnership must be inclusive. Hear the words of Galatians 3:25-29:

But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

Scripture mandates inclusivity, and our Reformed covenant theology celebrates it. We are all family—each loved, known, and forgiven by God. We are all family—each committed to respect and love one another, each striving to become more Christlike each day, each committed to being Christ's disciple in the world.

The church in the twenty-first century can no longer pretend ignorance or display arrogance when it comes to the lack of full participation of certain groups within the body of the church. The apostle Paul talks time and time again about each of us being part of one body and responsible to each other. We each have different gifts and functions. All parts must be encouraged, equipped, and allowed to function fully “for the work of ministry” (Ephesians 4:12).

When each member of the body is using her or his gift or gifts properly, we become more fully the disciples Christ wants us to be. We then impact the church, whether it's a new church start, a church in revitalization, or a healthy congregation. When we commit to the words of the Ephesians text, this is the potential.

First of all, church communities will be energized and experience a strong sense of commitment as members seek their rightful place in them. No longer does anyone simply “fill a slot.” Each person is called to ministry and empowered by the Spirit to use her or his gift(s) as Christ deems. Second, these congregations should experience a strong spirit of unity. People no longer feel inferior or unnecessary when they realize that they are a vital part of the body of Christ. Because discovering, exploring, and using one's gifts are seen as a vital part of discipleship, these Christians will be supported, encouraged, and empowered by the congregation.

Third, outreach ministries in these congregations will be strengthened, and the potential for growth will grow as individuals develop their gifts. Finally, individuals and congregations will experience spiritual growth and maturity as they build up the body of Christ and move toward, as Ephesians says, “the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.”

With all these wonderful possibilities in mind, we acknowledge that we face enormous challenges in today's world. The church has lost its dominance in contemporary society. We are just one option in a world that wants a quick fix, sees time as money, and seems focused on personal gain. Seekers go shopping for the church that can offer the best “goods and services,” so the RCA, like other denominations, struggles with how to remain faithful and yet relevant in a secular society. We are divided on issues that concern worship, lifestyle choices, and, most certainly, our theology.

So while it is very important that we develop our gifts, we must continue to commit ourselves to prayer, worship, Bible study, reflection, and participation in our sacraments. These disciplines will serve to gird us and help us along our journey in faith. We can also rest assured and live in hope that as our discipleship is defined and matures, Christ goes

with us and before us. The answer to question one of the Heidelberg Catechism (“What is your only comfort in life and in death?”) begins with the following statement:

That I am not my own,  
but belong—body and soul,  
in life and in death—  
to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.

I have a plaque on my wall that is many years old. It held a very prominent spot in my parents’ family room. It reads, “Only one life, will soon be past. Only what’s done for Christ will last.” What will you do as Christ’s disciple, today and tomorrow?

## Questions

1. The title of this chapter is “To Each Is Given.” Reread Ephesians 4, verses 7 and 11 through 13, and the definition of spiritual gifts in the third paragraph of this chapter (pp. 21–22). Why do you suppose some believers have a hard time believing they are spiritually gifted?
2. Look at the Ephesians passage and the following scriptures: Romans 12:6-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 and 27-30. Certain gifts, often referred to as the “spectacular gifts,” are not mentioned in this study. Why do gift-conscious congregations explore more actively the gifts that are named in this study?
3. Read 1 Peter 2:4-5. Now read the list of gifts in this study (pp. 21–22). Share in small groups the story of a woman who modeled or models a gift and who is a “living stone”—one of the priesthood of believers.
4. How does the story of the elderly woman who discovered how to use her gift of hospitality (p. 22) relate to becoming more fully a disciple of Christ, and to the revitalization of a congregation?
5. Statistics on the participation of women in leadership roles in the RCA are disturbing: for example, of the 8,006 elders and deacons serving RCA congregations at this time, only 28 percent are women. Reread the quote from Elizabeth O’Connor (p. 23) and Galatians 3:25-29. How

can these words serve to encourage women to participate in ministry and also to advocate for their inclusion in ministry?

6. Looking at the study, review the potential for congregations when each member is using her or his gifts. Can you share a story that supports this?
7. What are some of the challenges the church faces today?
8. As we explore our gifts, how can the words from the catechism (p. 25) serve to encourage us?

### **Closing prayer**

*Dear God, in love you gave humanity the greatest gift, your Son, Jesus Christ. His sacrifice on the cross has paid for all my sins. Because I belong to him and because of your love for me, I now offer up my gifts for your purpose. Amen.*

# 4

## God Calls Women to Lead

by Carol Mutch

### Scripture reading

Judges 4

### Opening prayer

*Because we are yours, Lord, we ask that you make clear to us the ways in which our churches and we can be used for your mission and for your glory. Help us to look beyond what we think our abilities are or what we have been taught is our place in the church. Instill in us a keen sense of what it means to be your follower.*

So you've never really thought of yourself as a leader. That's all well and good, but have you ever considered the possibility that God may have a different plan for you?

When leaders are mentioned in the Bible, they usually are men. But in the fourth chapter of Judges—in Old Testament times, no less—we find two women who exemplify leadership in its finest, God-given form.

Deborah had the gifts of wisdom, prophecy, and leadership, and she was honored in her community with position and power commensurate with her abilities. The Israelites, after twenty years of oppression under King Jabin of Hazor, a Canaanite king, cried out to God for help. God chose to send a prophetic message through Deborah. When she told Barak that God was commanding him to assemble an army to battle the Canaanites, he refused to obey unless she went with him. Has there been a time in your life when you believed God had a mission that God

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wanted accomplished, but you and everyone else around you assumed that the person in charge would make it happen? And then you began to realize that it would only happen if you “went with” him or her?

And then there was Jael. She was not in a position of power. She is simply described in the Bible as the wife of someone. When Sisera, the head of the Canaanite army, fled after defeat in battle, she took a bold step and invited him to seek refuge in her home, which he welcomed because her husband’s family was on friendly terms with the Canaanite king. In keeping with the cultural context of his time, Sisera thought that the only good purpose Jael could serve was to bring him water and stand watch at the door. He even asked her to lie about his being there. But she was a woman of courage and conviction, and God chose her for a leadership role that far exceeded anyone’s expectations. When Sisera fell asleep from exhaustion, she took what she had at hand, and killed him with a tent peg. As a result of these two women being used by God, we are told in verse twenty-four, “from that time on Israel became stronger and stronger” (NLT).

Has the time come for you to view your contribution to the church as not limited by the roles that women have filled in the past? Are you capable of more than simply providing water and standing watch at the door? Is there some need that calls you forth to do something bold and courageous because the cause you champion and the God you serve demand no less than the leadership you can provide?

Is there something that you feel passionate about, or a need or cause that you feel compelled to do something about? Are you looking around, wondering why no one is seeing that this issue is addressed? Maybe no one is doing it because God is calling you to lead the way.

Just because you have not been a leader up to this point does not mean that you are incapable of leading in the future—it’s God’s call, not yours. We tend to have too narrow a definition of the word “leader.” The fact is that we have all had the experience of being leaders without being fully aware that people are following us. In your everyday walk, by who you are and how you care about others, by how you spend your time and use your voice and model how a life should be lived, for better or worse, you are leading others by your example. Maybe the question is

not whether you are a leader but rather what type of leader you are.

I read somewhere that no one can be a great leader until she or he has been a good follower. And that is certainly true not only in our secular lives but also in our faith journey. The best leaders are individuals who understand and value those they are called to lead—those who have walked the same walk and experienced the same ups and downs. Brian Bauknight, in the book *Body Building: Creating a Ministry Team through Spiritual Gifts*, says, “The effective leader is one who is ‘first among equals.’” And if we are called by God to lead within the faith community, whether it be by teaching, serving others, caring, preaching, praying, or initiating new ways to be about God’s work, we will do it well only if we have first learned to follow the Master.

It is from personal experience that I have come to believe that God gives us little nudges in life. If we pay attention to this prodding, God will reveal to us adventures we could never have imagined, and, more importantly, in the process we may be blessed to realize the purpose for which God placed us on this earth.

When I packed my bags for General Synod in June 1999, neither I nor any other delegate or staff member attending that annual gathering would have imagined in our wildest dreams that at the conclusion of synod I would leave as the newly elected vice president of General Synod. There were women delegates present with me who weren’t even allowed to serve on consistory in their own churches. I was the only elder nominated in the balloting for vice president; all the other candidates had more impressive credentials and were better known throughout the denomination for work that they had selflessly given in time and talent to the church. The stated clerk of my own classis, where I had served as classis president, took me aside and recommended that I decline the nomination because he felt that others were more qualified and that I didn’t “stand a prayer of a chance” of being elected. But throughout the process God kept giving me nudges—God tenaciously pricked my soul. As I agonized over what to do, I couldn’t seem to let go of the thought that I was meant to stand on the platform as a candidate because by doing so I would represent to all the delegates that elders and women also have gifts for leadership in the church and that God wants to use the gifts of all people.

The fact that I was actually elected continues to amaze people. I will never forget the woman who came up to me after the election, threw her arms around me, and said, “Now I believe in miracles!” That’s what it feels like when God calls you out of obscurity into the light of his will for your life—it is indeed a miracle. I was elected not because I was the best qualified or the most deserving, but because God chose that moment in time to lift up to the church the gifts of women and of the laity. God needed a leader, it was a cause for which I had a great deal of passion. God nudged, I responded—and the path God set my feet on has been one that has brought me deep joy and fulfillment. Along the way, God has equipped me with gifts and abilities I never realized I had, in order that divine purposes could be accomplished.

The biggest journeys always begin with one little step. God’s plan for utilizing your gifts, passions, and unique history will provide deep fulfillment. But to know the joy of being used by God will probably require that you step outside your comfort zone to do something you never envisioned yourself doing. It is an adventure that will require you to truly believe and claim the words of Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” And if, by the grace of God, you find that you can do nothing else and nothing less than what the Lord has called you to do, then you will know that God has called you to be a leader: to use your God-given passion and ability to make a difference. That leadership can begin to happen right now, right where you have been placed.

The last verse of Judges chapter four says that after Jael’s bold action, Israel became stronger. We are the women of the church. We are the majority. We are the backbone of our congregations and our families. We should lead out of an awareness of whom we belong to and out of a passion that those who follow us give God first place in their lives.

Yes, we are all leaders. We must understand that faith, talent, and the call of God on our lives need to be answered with courage, conviction, and confidence, because the leadership we are called to is blessed by God. And if we answer that call, the church will become stronger and stronger.

## Questions

1. When have you experienced frustration because something you felt strongly about didn't happen?
2. Do you think of yourself as useful only in traditional "women's tasks"? Is it God or those around you who give you that perception?
3. Which woman in the passage from Judges 4 can you relate to the most? How does what she did affect how you view your potential for leadership?
4. What do you feel passionate about?
5. Is there some need or cause that you can bring to others' attention, and for which you can then be part of the solution?
6. What is God nudging you to do right now? If you don't sense anything, will you commit to praying that God will reveal a plan to you so that your life can be used to its fullest for the Lord's ministry?

## Closing prayer

*Lord, lead us so that we might lead—not because we desire the acclaim of being a leader, but because your church today, more than ever, needs deeply committed people, close to your heart, who will hear your call to be instrumental in changing, electrifying, and deepening your church. Allow us to hear what you are saying and to go where you are calling us to lead. Give us the courage to speak up and to seek change when we are convicted by you that it needs to happen. Help us to hear each other as well, to cheer each other along in the journey, and to rejoice that we do not do any of this alone. Give us grace, laughter, peace, and confidence, and the joy of walking every step of the way with you. Amen.*

# 5

## Following Christ in Mission

*by Debra Braaksma*

### Scripture readings

Isaiah 6:1-8

2 Corinthians 5:14-21

### Opening prayer

*Gracious Lord, we thank you that you have called each of us to be the hands and feet of Jesus to reach out with the message of your love to a hurting world. Lord, give us your heart of compassion and concern for the suffering and those who do not know you, a heart that compels us to follow you wherever you call us to be involved in mission. Amen.*

Have you ever considered how you can be involved in mission? “Our Call” challenges RCA members to reach out to people with the gospel, meeting needs in our own neighborhoods and cities and through global partnerships. In a world where barriers to the gospel in both global and local contexts seem to be increasingly hard to cross, these passages from Isaiah and 2 Corinthians give wonderful insights into what we as the people of the Reformed church need to do in order to position ourselves to be “following Christ in mission, in a lost and broken world so loved by God.”

The Book of Isaiah records how Isaiah was used to proclaim the Lord’s judgment and salvation. Isaiah chapter six makes it clear that the reason Isaiah was used in such an incredible way was that he put himself totally and unreservedly at God’s disposal, willing to be sent in mission

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wherever he was called. For instance, when in verse eight of this passage God asks, “Whom shall I send?” Isaiah quickly responds, “Here am I; send me!” It is important to realize that Isaiah had no idea what he was getting into. God did not initially make it clear where Isaiah was being sent or what he was being asked to do! If we read on to chapter seven, we find that God soon gives him very specific instructions, but initially Isaiah is only given a general sort of calling. God simply asks him if he is willing to be sent.

It is important to notice what precedes this call. How did Isaiah come to the point that he could say yes to going who-knows-where to do who-knows-what? In verses one through four we see that Isaiah has a personal encounter with God and is awestruck by God’s majesty. In verse five we see Isaiah’s response: after experiencing God’s glory he is absolutely convicted that he is sinful. But then in verse six—at God’s initiative—he is offered cleansing and forgiveness. It is only then that he can respond to God’s call.

We too need to have that initial encounter with God and experience forgiveness in Christ, before we can answer God’s call to service. For those who are clear about their relationship to Christ, the message of Isaiah is for us to give ourselves to do whatever God calls us to in local or global mission. Prayers such as “I’ll do anything but work with the homeless, Lord” or “I’ll go anywhere but Africa, Lord” fly in the face of this message.

Second Corinthians 5 gives further insights on the concept of call, as well as about the impetus behind Paul’s affirmative response to God’s call to be involved in crossing extremely high cultural boundaries in order to initiate God’s mission to the Gentiles. In verse fourteen, Paul begins this passage by stating that he is compelled by the love of Christ to be involved in mission. In 1 Corinthians 9:16 he puts this sense of being compelled in even stronger terms, stating, “An obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!” What urges Paul on in his mission to the Gentiles is this deep realization of Christ’s sacrificial love for him. As women and men in mission, whether it is in our own communities or in an international context, we need to be sure that our relationship with Christ is alive and well and nurtured through personal Bible study and prayer, as

well as through corporate worship and fellowship.

Another prerequisite for being involved in mission is an attitude of willingness to sacrifice. In verse fifteen Paul states that we can no longer live for ourselves, and it is clear that he considered the Gentiles' need for the gospel as more important than his own comfort. In the following chapter, 2 Corinthians 6:4-10, it is obvious that he sacrificed greatly for the sake of the gospel. As was true in the first century, crossing today's barriers with the gospel, whether they are in our own communities or in a foreign country, is just plain hard work, and nothing difficult is done without personal sacrifice.

These are particularly tough words for North American Christians to hear. Everything in our culture, our media, and even our hearts seems to shout at us to do just the opposite: to put our needs, our security, and our comfort first and foremost. Yet I believe that we all know people who have refused to do that—who show a compelling desire to follow Christ in cross-cultural mission rather than living for themselves.

I immediately think of RCA missionaries Lance and Elizabeth Edwards, who have just begun service in Mozambique in the areas of agriculture and HIV/AIDS ministry. Lance, Elizabeth, and their children, Katie and Ashton, are now living in a remote village in one of the poorest countries on earth. There is no question that this family has made a huge sacrifice to serve with the Reformed Church in Mozambique in this challenging setting, and they did indeed struggle to say yes to God's call to serve there. Here is an excerpt from a piece they wrote that gives a glimpse into their conversations with God:

“But God, we don't want to leave our church. At the church in Mozambique, we will not understand the language; there won't be Sunday school or small-group Bible studies. We are being fed, and we are growing here!”

*But my children in Mozambique are physically and spiritually hungry.*

“But God, we have so many close friends; we don't want to give them up to live isolated out in the bush!”

*But Lance grew up in the African bush, and both of you understand the African culture.*

“But what about the kids? They won’t have friends who are like them.”

*But Elizabeth has experience working with AIDS, and there are so many AIDS orphans.*

“But the kids won’t get to have music lessons, or do soccer and ballet...and God, what if they get sick?”

*But my children in Mozambique do not even have enough food to eat.*

“God, we really like the way things are right now. Why can’t we just have a normal job and a house in the suburbs like everyone else we know?”

*Because I have brought you together, and I have given you all the education and experience that will enable you as a couple to fill this need. And my will is not for you to be comfortable, but to serve my people in Mozambique.*

It just so happened that this battle with God coincided with our pastor’s preaching on offering one’s whole life as a living sacrifice. We began to see how God’s purposes had been worked out in our lives, despite the plans we had made. Our perspective changed from “We don’t want to go now” to “How can we not go?” After making a commitment to work with the RCA in Mozambique indefinitely, we have experienced a peace which has surpassed our understanding.

For my family and for me, the Edwards’ conversation with God strikes very close to home. In February 2005 we also answered God’s call to serve as missionaries—with the churches in south Sudan, another difficult setting, a war-ravished country that is experiencing intense levels of human suffering. I can say that some of the Edwards’ questions were our questions. But after responding to God’s call, we too have experienced a strong sense of peace, accompanied now by great excitement to go and serve there.

As people involved in mission, we need to appreciate the intrinsic value of all people. Verse sixteen of 2 Corinthians 5 urges us not to look at others from a human point of view. When we look at others through the eyes of Christ, we don't value them according to their intelligence, personal appearance, social status, or wealth, or even according to how much we have in common with them. Rather, we realize, as explained in verse fifteen, that all persons have value because Christ died for them. We also need to deeply understand that all people have the potential of becoming new creations in Christ, as Paul notes in verse seventeen. As we embrace this scriptural truth, we will realize that we cannot write anyone off as being unworthy of our efforts to show love and mercy (coupled with involvement in social justice). All people have the capacity to turn their lives around as they come to know Christ.

Now, let's look at the way in which we should serve. What are we actually called to do? Paul writes in verse eighteen that we have been given the ministry of reconciliation. Therefore, we need to understand the depth and breadth of what that involves and embody it in our service. Reconciliation means to bring into harmony, and it has to do with our relationship to God and to each other. Verse nineteen explains that the message of reconciliation is that God through Christ has reconciled us to himself. In other words, God has done everything needed to bring us into harmony with himself, and God has entrusted us with the task of letting a lost world know that God deeply loves them and invites them to put their faith in Christ. In verse twenty we are called to be ambassadors—those called to make an appeal to unbelievers.

So how do we actually cross boundaries with the message of Christ's love? The RCA is committed to doing such work in a holistic manner. Wherever we are doing mission—whether in a local or global context—word and deed belong together. We have only to look at the model of Jesus Christ himself to see that he spent much time healing and caring for people's physical needs as well as speaking with them about the good news of God's love for them. It is impossible to prioritize—word and deed are inseparable, essential components of mission.

If your church is like mine, much of your local mission work may be focused on meeting the social needs of those who are hurting. That

being the case, many or most of your members involved in these ministries may not consider themselves as having the gift of evangelism. However, people are most receptive to the message of the gospel when we are meeting their needs in times of crisis or despair. It is as we address their concerns that we earn people's respect and the right to be heard. While I believe that we should never make listening to the gospel a requirement before we give assistance, we must be intentional about looking for natural opportunities to share our faith. As Paul says, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15, NIV).

Let me share with you a time when God opened the doors for my husband, Del, and me to do this. While we were serving as RCA missionaries among the Orma people of eastern Kenya, El Niño hit our area with a vengeance. We experienced catastrophic flooding—fifty thousand people, the vast majority of whom were Muslims, were homeless, and many of them were marooned and unable to access any food. Reformed Church World Service helped us coordinate a relief food operation and an anti-cholera campaign that may have saved thousands of lives.

We went with our African colleagues into these flood-ravaged areas by helicopter and spent several weeks bringing assistance into villages where up to 10 percent of the people had died of cholera. At the time we did not think of ourselves as doing much in the way of evangelism. We spent 99 percent of our time meeting physical needs, stringing IVs from tree branches to patients lying on the ground and trying to save as many lives as possible. However, in each village we identified ourselves as Christians affiliated with the Africa Inland Church. We also publicly prayed for the people and told them we were there because God loved them. After the operation was over, we found out that this had had a tremendous evangelistic impact—several Muslim leaders went to the leaders of the Africa Inland Church, asking to learn more about the faith of the Christians—faith that had enabled the Christians to wade through muddy waters and enter cholera-infested villages to offer assistance.

As I look back on my eleven years of mission service, I believe that this relief operation was one of the hardest things I have ever been involved in. The logistics of getting food into marooned areas were a nightmare—the suffering that we saw was intense. I also think it was one of the

most rewarding things I have participated in. But to be honest, we almost said no. We were so close to saying, “This is beyond us—what can we do to help fifty thousand displaced people?” But thank God that, at least this time, we did listen to his call; we did step out in faith, even before it was really clear how we would be able to accomplish what needed doing, and we received a tremendous blessing.

Is there something tugging on your heart—a sense that God may be calling you to participate in local or global mission? The place to which you are called to serve is where the world’s deep need intersects with your great passion. But sometimes even when we have great passion about something, we find ourselves hesitating to serve. The task may seem too big, and we may feel inadequate. If that is the case, you are probably at exactly the place God needs you to be: totally dependent on God so that you are relying on him for strength. Don’t let anything stop you—boldly step out in faith to follow Christ in mission. He will be right there to provide you with everything you need to accomplish the mission to which he has called you.

## Questions

1. Are you “well-positioned” to be involved in following Christ in mission? Are you:
  - walking closely with Christ, spending time in personal Bible study and prayer and in corporate worship and fellowship?
  - willing to sacrifice: considering others’ need for the gospel as more important than your own comfort?
  - appreciative of the intrinsic value of all people, not putting limits around those you are willing to befriend and serve?
2. Where do you believe your great passion intersects the world’s deep need?
3. If you are not already involved in this kind of ministry, either directly or through support and prayer, what might be some first steps you could take to explore this opportunity?
4. If you do not have a sense of where God might be calling you to serve, is there someone who knows you well, and understands

your gifts and interests, who you could discuss this with and ask to pray for you?

### **Closing prayer**

*Lord, help us to rely on you for guidance and strength as we follow your call to service; keep our vision from being narrow, from only being interested in what we can personally be involved in. Help us to see the world from your perspective, Lord, and thus to also be faithful in supporting, encouraging, and praying for those who are serving you in places we cannot, that we might be involved through them in the Great Commission to make your love known to ends of the earth. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

# 6

## Next Steps

*by Mary Clark*

### Scripture reading

Matthew 28:18-20

### Opening prayer

*Lord, thank you for the insights we have gained as we have gathered to learn more about responding to your call to renewal and growth. Give us the desire to continually seek and follow the leading of your Spirit. Amen.*

You have just completed reading about and discussing the five components of the RCA's ten-year goal. Now what? What will you do with the information you have studied and talked about? How will you use what God has planted in your heart? Perhaps now is a good time to examine why we have set out on this journey as followers of Christ.

For years the RCA has been declining in members. In addition, many of us worship in congregations whose members are more and more “on the senior side of life.” Often our young people are not present in large numbers on Sunday mornings. Why is this? The music is great, the preaching relevant, and the building beautiful. So why don't more people attend worship services? At times it seems we must jump through so many hoops to be attractive to the nonbeliever or nonattender that we are losing the essence of who we are as a body of professing followers of Christ.

What makes this all the more frustrating is the knowledge that North Americans are hungry for spiritual answers. Walk into any major book-

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store these days and check out the number of books written on spirituality. Now remember back a few years—we've gone from a few books to an overabundance. Ten years ago there was a shelf; today there are aisles of books written by anyone who has come across what he or she believes to be The Answer.

How can we reach those who are searching for answers? How do we share the difference our faith in Jesus Christ makes in how we live each day, in how we respond to the world around us?

One of the gifts Christ has given us is that, in our passion to follow him, we are committed to giving ourselves to those less fortunate. As followers of Christ we are called to seek justice for the oppressed and attend to the needs of our world. But how can we expect the world we serve to understand our behaviors of service and servanthood if they do not comprehend our commitment to Christ? He is the reason we serve and seek justice.

Our good deeds are not sufficient to buy us a place in heaven. Our hope comes through our commitment to Jesus Christ, and that relationship leads us into fulfilling his mission on earth. The story in Acts 3 and 4 of Peter and John healing the lame man tells us good deeds are the unstoppable result of faith in Jesus Christ.

When our churches were full, it was easy to become complacent about spreading the gospel in our communities. We focused less on evangelism, and our congregations declined. At the same time, there were so many issues to take our attention. The list of needs and concerns in our neighborhood and the world beyond is long, and the abilities of this denomination to assist are enormous. We are a body of believers who want to help. We raise money, build shelters, go on mission trips, buy blankets, feed the hungry, and work against injustice. We don't need our name on the project if partnering with others will create a better solution. We are really good in the ministry of service, and have been for a very long time.

Someone once said that visiting our churches is like attending another family's reunion. The people are friendly and serve great food, but you know you would never be accepted as a full member of the family.

We greet our guests well; we attempt to include them in small groups; but until we are willing to invest our lives in their lives and move beyond just remembering their names to inviting them into our homes and fellowship, they will remain outsiders. And if they remain outsiders, we lose the greatest gift a congregation can receive: the eyes of the new believer, to help us see how we can be the authentic presence of Christ to the communities we live in. It takes a new vision to move people to change from a close-knit family into a community of believers who are actively living out the Great Commission.

Revitalizing existing congregations and starting new ones has never been more important. The world needs people of faith who are eager to share the gospel that gives meaning to life. As Christ's disciples we must be willing to study, share, learn, and grow into leaders willing to step out in his name. As women and men of the Reformed Church in America, we must be willing to look in the mirror and acknowledge that in our desire to keep our churches comfortable for ourselves, they have become uncomfortable for those outside our doors.

We can't treat the Great Commission as a nice suggestion. It is much, much more than that.

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).

This is Christ, the Son of God, giving us his last commandment.

Go...Make...Baptize...Teach. Through Christ, you have been empowered do this. Your church can be revitalized; you can assist a new congregation; as a child of God and a sister or brother in Christ, you are a leader; you can grow as a follower of Christ; and your passion for following Christ will be the fuel that fires mission across the street and around the world.

The RCA Statement of Mission and Vision describes it like this: "A thousand churches in a million ways doing one thing—following Christ in mission, in a lost and broken world so loved by God."

You are called to be one of the million ways in which the RCA is following Christ in mission. What will your next step be?

## Questions

1. What do you consider special or unique about your congregation?
2. How can you use these qualities as a tool for evangelism in your community?
3. Read Acts 3:1-16 and Acts 4:8-12. Why is Christ the reason we do good deeds?
4. How can you encourage more adults in your congregation to attend a weekly Bible study or discipleship group?
5. Who does your church exist for—its members, or unbelievers? If your answer is both, which group gets priority?
6. During coffee hour, who do you spend your time with—a visitor? Your best friend? The newest members? Why?
7. How much time do your leaders (pastor[s], staff, elders, deacons) spend thinking about, planning for, and doing things for nonbelievers? How can you support them in these endeavors?

## Closing prayer

*Lord God, you have given us the gift of salvation through your Son, Jesus Christ. Forgive us for holding this precious gift so closely to our own hearts that we neglect to pass it on. We acknowledge our tendency to keep our congregations safe, familiar places. Open our eyes to the spiritual needs of our neighbors and communities. Give us the insight and resources to change what needs to be changed in our church and the courage to follow through. In your name we pray. Amen.*

# Additional Resources

Compiled by Jane Schuyler  
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## Chapter One, Revitalization

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## Web

[www.rca.org/revitalize](http://www.rca.org/revitalize) for more information, newsletters, and regional contact names

## Suggested Resources

Natural Church Development resources:

- \* *The ABC's of Natural Church Development*, by Christian A. Schwarz. ChurchSmart Resources.
- \* *Implementation Guide to Natural Church Development*, by Christian A. Schwarz. ChurchSmart Resources.
- \* *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches*, by Christian A. Schwarz. ChurchSmart Resources.
- \* *Break Out Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap*, by Thom S. Rainer. Zondervan.

*The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix*, by Brian D. McLaren. Zondervan.

*The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*, by Reggie McNeal. Jossey-Bass.

*Unlearning Church: Just When You Thought You Had Leadership All Figured Out!*, by Michael Slaughter with Warren Bird. Group Publishing.

*An Unstoppable Force: Daring to Become the Church God Had in Mind*, by Erwin Raphael McManus. Group Publishing.

\*These resources are available through Faith Alive Christian Resources: [www.faithaliveresources.org](http://www.faithaliveresources.org) or (800) 333-8300. The other resources may be special ordered.

## Chapter Two, Church Multiplication

Tim Vink

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### Web

[www.rca.org/multiply](http://www.rca.org/multiply) for more information, newsletters, and regional contact names.

[www.coachnet.org](http://www.coachnet.org), a top website for training and resources on church planting

[www.multiplyingchurches.org](http://www.multiplyingchurches.org), RCA pastor Doug McClintic for resources and insights

[www.cmaresources.org](http://www.cmaresources.org), Church Multiplication Associates

[www.churchsmart.com](http://www.churchsmart.com), for training manuals, seminars, practice books

[www.alliancescp.org](http://www.alliancescp.org), Alliance for Saturation Church Planting

[www.sentinelgroup.org](http://www.sentinelgroup.org), the Sentinel Group has the DVDs *The Quickening* and *Transformations*.

### Suggested Resources

*Church Planting Movements: How God Is Redeeming a Lost World*, by David Garrison. WIGtake Resources.

\**Churches Planting Churches*, by Robert E. Logan and Steven L. Ogne. ChurchSmart Resources.

*The Global House Church Movement*, by Rad Zdero. William Carey Library.

*Houses That Change the World: The Return of the House Churches*, by Wolfgang Simson. C & P Publishing.

“Inside the RCA: Grow Where You Are Planted,” by Ben Ingebretson. *Church Herald*, April 2005.

*Megashift: Igniting Spiritual Power*, by James H. Rutz. Empowerment Press.

*The New Apostolic Churches: Rediscovering the New Testament Model of Leadership and Why It Is God’s Desire for the Church Today*, edited by C. Peter Wagner. Regal.

*What the Spirit Is Saying to the Churches*, by Henry Blackaby. Multnomah.

\**Work in Progress: Architectural Handbook*. Reformed Church Press.

## Chapter Three, Leadership

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### Web

<http://consistory.rca.org>, Consistory Center

[www.rca.org/leaders](http://www.rca.org/leaders), especially for leaders

[www.rca.org/women](http://www.rca.org/women), women's ministries

### Suggested Resources

*Body Building: Creating a Ministry Team through Spiritual Gifts*, by Brian Kelley Bauknight. Abingdon Press.

\**The Compassionate Congregation: A Handbook for People Who Care*, by Karen Mulder and Ginger Jurries. Faith Alive.

*Equipping the Saints: Mobilizing Laity for Ministry*, edited by Michael J. Christensen. Abingdon Press.

*If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat*, by John Ortberg. Zondervan.

\**Leadership from Inside Out: Spirituality and Organizational Change*, by Wesley Granberg-Michaelson. Crossroad.

\**The Ministry of the Deacon: As One Who Serves*, by Betty Voskuil. Reformed Church Press.

\**The Ministry of the Elder: Guiding and Nurturing God's People*, by Robert White. Reformed Church Press.

\*These resources are available through Faith Alive Christian Resources: [www.faihaliveresources.org](http://www.faihaliveresources.org) or (800) 333-8300. The other resources may be special ordered.

## Chapter Four, Discipleship

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[www.rca.org/disciples](http://www.rca.org/disciples), for more information about discipleship for all of God's people

<http://www.rca.org/disciples/spiritgifts>, Every Christian—Called by God, Gifted for Ministry

### Suggested Resources

\**Being Disciples of Jesus in a Dot.Com World: A Theological Survival Guide for Youth, Adults, and Other Confused Christians*, by Ted V. Foote Jr. and P. Alex Thornburg. Westminster John Knox.

\**Discover Your Gifts: And Learn How to Use Them*, by Alvin J. Vander Griend. Faith Alive. Adult and youth editions.

*Discover Your Spiritual Gifts*, by Bruce Bugbee. Zondervan.

\**Learning for Life: Christian Education and the Practice of Faith*. Reformed Church Press. Also online:

<http://www.rca.org/disciples/learningforlife>

\**Life after Grace: Daily Reflections on the Bible*, by Carol M. Bechtel. Westminster John Knox.

\**LifeKeys: Discover Who You Are*, by David Stark, Jane A.G. Kise, Sandra Krebs Hirsch. Bethany House.

\**Network: The Right People, in the Right Places, for the Right Reasons, at the Right Time (Revised)*, by Bruce Bugbee, Don Cousins, and Bill Hybels. Zondervan.

\**The Sweet Life: A Taste of God in the Ordinary*, by Louis Lotz. Reformed Church Press.

*What You Do Best in the Body of Christ: Discover Your Spiritual Gifts, Personal Style, and God-Given Passion (Revised and Expanded)*, by Bruce Bugbee. Zondervan.

## Chapter Five, Mission

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[www.rca.org/mission](http://www.rca.org/mission), for more information  
[www.rca.org/mission/volunteers](http://www.rca.org/mission/volunteers), volunteer services for individuals and groups  
<http://rcws.rca.org>, Reformed Church World Service

### Suggested Resources

- \**Building a Mission-Minded Church*. Reformed Church Press.
- \**Get Dirty for Jesus: How to Organize a Work Trip*, by Jayna E. Powell. Reformed Church Press.
- \**Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships*, by Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin K. Mayers. Baker.
- \**People, Places, and Partnerships: A Workbook for Your Mission Trip Abroad*, by Sally Campbell Evans. Ecumenical Working Group for Mission to the U.S.A. and Canada.
- \**Transforming Ventures: A Spiritual Guide for Volunteers in Mission*, by Jane Ives. Upper Room Books.
- \**Walk Humbly: An Orientation for Christian Servants*. Reformed Church Press.
- \*When God's People Travel Together series. Includes Bible studies for mission and planning materials for leaders. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

\*These resources are available through Faith Alive Christian Resources: [www.faithaliveresources.org](http://www.faithaliveresources.org) or (800) 333-8300. The other resources may be special ordered.

## Chapter Six, Next Steps

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### Web

[www.rca.org/women](http://www.rca.org/women), women's ministries  
[www.rca.org/ourcall](http://www.rca.org/ourcall), more information about the RCA's goal  
[www.rca.org/multiply/evangelize](http://www.rca.org/multiply/evangelize), evangelism resources

### Suggested Resources

- \* *Acts: Bursting the Boundaries* (two parts), by Philip Apol. Faith Alive.
- \* *Becoming a Contagious Christian*, by Bill Hybels and Mark Mittelberg. Zondervan.
- The Church in Many Houses: Reaching Your Community through Cell-Based Ministry*, by Steve Cordle. Abingdon.
- \* *Discover Acts*. Three parts: "The Early Church;" "The Gentile Connection;" "The Road to Rome;" by Neva Evenhouse, revised by Carol Veldman Rudie. Faith Alive.
- \* *Hard Questions People Ask about the Christian Faith*, by Case Van Kempen. Faith Alive.
- \* *Into the World: The Acts of the Apostles*, by Carol J. Miller. Kerygma.
- \* *Radical Outreach: The Recovery of Apostolic Ministry and Evangelism*, by George Hunter. Abingdon.
- \* *So You've Been Asked to Share Your Faith*, by Diane and Brent Averill. Faith Alive.
- A Story Worth Sharing: Engaging Evangelism*, by Kelly A. Fryer. Augsburg Fortress.

\*These resources are available through Faith Alive Christian Resources: [www.faithaliveresources.org](http://www.faithaliveresources.org) or (800) 333-8300. The other resources may be special ordered.

## **Our Mission**

The Reformed Church in America is a fellowship of congregations called by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be the very presence of Jesus Christ in the world.

Our shared task is to equip congregations for ministry—a thousand churches in a million ways doing one thing—following Christ in mission, in a lost and broken world so loved by God.