A Season of Reflection
A devotional series based on the goals of Transformed & Transforming

The following pages contain devotions designed to help your consistory, classis, or regional synod reflect on the RCA’s ministry plan, Transformed & Transforming.

Each devotion highlights one of the three priorities:

• Cultivating transformation in Christ
• Equipping emerging leaders of today and tomorrow
• Engaging in Christ’s kingdom mission

These priorities grew out of a denomination-wide discernment process that began in 2010 to determine God’s call for the RCA beyond the 10-year goal the RCA had adopted in 2003.

The discernment process went forward through 2013, and over the years more than a thousand RCA members throughout the U.S. and Canada added their voices—sharing their understanding of God’s direction for the RCA at 24 Discovery events, the 2012 Conversations event, and General Synods 2012 and 2013.

Of the final result—the Transformed & Transforming document approved by synod in 2013—general secretary Tom De Vries says, “My prayer is that those who participated in the process see their fingerprints on the final document, that it communicates clearly that their voices have been heard.

“I invite and encourage you to join me in prayer. Please pray that the RCA will engage fully in the vision that God has laid before us, trusting that God will do beyond what we can ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.”

Note: The prayers incorporated in these devotions were originally produced by delegates to General Synod 2013 as they met in all-synod advisory groups to consider, react creatively to, and modify Transformed & Transforming.
Devotion 1: Plant Seeds. Sing Songs.
Cultivating Transformation in Christ

“Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise from the end of the earth! Let the sea roar and all that fills it, the coastlands and their inhabitants.”
Isaiah 42:10

Images of seed-time and harvest helped Transformed & Transforming come alive for a 2013 General Synod delegate from Iowa:

Growing up on a farm, cultivating corn and beans was one of my favorite jobs. It was somewhat tedious, but I felt like I was doing something productive. The ground looked fresh and black after each swath. And the weeds were gone.

This [Transformed & Transforming] is living out the Great Commandment: CULTIVATING transformation—the soil is fresh again, the weeds are gone. GROWTH (and ultimately good fruits) will be the result.

We move toward the fifth century of RCA mission and ministry with this focus:

Called to sow the seeds of the gospel (Mark 4:3-8) and even to be the seeds ourselves (John 12:24)...dying to ourselves and rising to Christ like a seed. And, like the old four-row cultivator in the cornfields of Iowa, cultivating transformation is the process that enables and encourages and empowers growth. It is the corn with deep roots that survives the droughts.

Out of cultivation and good stewardship of the soil, there comes the good fruits...there comes another generation of leaders. New seeds coming from the old seeds—older farmers teaching younger farmers the old secrets, and the younger farmers teaching the older farmers the realities of the new context. Learning the new technologies. Equipping all generations of leaders to become next generation leaders (Luke 10:2).

And, completing the circle, we engage in mission. Like the bumper sticker I saw recently in the church parking lot of a small, rural town: “Plant seeds. Sing songs.” The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) is imaged as the “mission” of seed-planting and harvest, and it is interconnected with the image of wheat and vine, or bread and cup. It is worshipful work. Transformed and transforming.

Reflect

Others at synod described Transformed & Transforming as the new song that God, through the Spirit, is causing to emerge in our denomination. What images come to your mind as you reflect on what it means to cultivate transformation in Christ?
Prayer

Lord, we thank you for letting us hear your voice through your people.

Lord Jesus, in your sovereignty, graciously work through us to accomplish your mission in the world. May we become passionate disciples, filled with the power of your Spirit and the truth of your Word.

Holy Spirit, we ask that you transform us through the Word, both individually and corporately, in order that we might effectively work for the transformation of the world, until Jesus comes again.

Come soon Lord Jesus! Amen.
Devotion 2: Passing the Baton

Equipping Emerging Leaders of Today and Tomorrow

“You have often heard me teach. Now I want you to tell these same things to followers who can be trusted to tell others.”

2 Timothy 2:2 (CEV)

In his address to the 2013 General Synod, synod president Tom Smith had this to say about the “equipping leaders” priority of Transformed & Transforming:

Baby boomers (born between 1945 and 1964) are now passing the baton to the millennials (born between the early 1980s and early 2000s). After my seminary graduation, classis meetings seemed to be made up of pastors and elders who, to me, were ancient. My thoughts were, Look at this; what a bunch of old guys! Today I see an old guy in the mirror every morning.

Here’s my challenge to boomer pastors: Finish strong and finish relevant! Comments have been made to me by other boomers who take pride in the fact that they don’t text, Facebook, or tweet. Boomers, we need to stay in the game and be relevant to the culture today. Here’s an idea for how to do that: Invite a millennial pastor into a mutual mentoring relationship. Your goal is not to get them to come with you back to the glory days of the ’70s or ’80s, but to encourage them in spiritual practices that you’ve valued and developed. You might have a worn-out Thompson Chain Reference NIV Bible; they might be reading the Bible from an iPad. After 25, 30, or 40 years of ministry, you have gathered experience in relationships and people skills. Pass those on.

And listen to the millennials as well. They’re experiencing the world in an entirely different way than we did as young baby boomers. In fact, a millennial might be able to mentor you in the ways of the twenty-first century. It’s a win-win.

Here’s my challenge to millennial pastors: Begin strong and learn from the best practices of the Boomers around you. And then be better than us! Do that by being willing to learn from us, and willing to teach us as well. Don’t write us off just yet, okay? We’re in this together. Your success is our success. It’s all about the kingdom.

In a relay race, there is an exchange zone where the baton must be passed. The runner with the baton has to run at full speed into the exchange zone, and the receiver has to run at full speed alongside so that they can make the exchange. Boomers, we have to run at full speed right until the end of our part of the race. We can’t walk at the end. Millennials, you have to run with us for a while. Don’t race on ahead; we have to run together.

Reflect
In what ways might leaders of different generations support and encourage each other?

Prayer

Renew our vision, Lord.
We’re called to live like Jesus lives
To love the way he loves:
Including and embracing all of his people.  
O Holy Spirit, be our Guide.

Renew our vision, Lord.  
Our God is calling for the young  
To lead his church in mission,  
To minister both near and far,  
To reach a world that needs him so.

Renew our vision, Lord.  
God is calling us to go  
To take the gospel to the lost.  
We are his hands, his feet, and his heart.  
We are the love of God.  
Renew our vision, Lord.
Devotion 3: The Glory of God as Our Primary Passion

Engaging in Christ’s Kingdom Mission

“The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.”

Isaiah 61:1-4

Members of an all-synod advisory group at General Synod 2013 wrote this in response to Transformed & Transforming:

We, who have been deeply involved and continue to be involved in discerning the will of the Holy Spirit in the world…

…who have utilized the Word of God in both the Old and New Testament to inspire instruction to our fellow Christians regarding cultivating transformation in Christ, equipping the next generation of leaders, and engaging in developing Christ’s kingdom mission…

…who continue to seek to wholeheartedly engage in developing passionate, lifelong believers…

—with open hearts, we long to embrace the diversity of all peoples; we lovingly embrace the diversity of all peoples; we hear your call to develop with intentionality the youth and young adults who will be the leaders of our church in the future.

Our hearts burn to promote justice, compassion, and reconciliation throughout the world. We feel God’s power pulling us toward expanding the mission of the church both locally and globally. We share the desire to embrace mission throughout the world by multiplying mission and planting new churches that put the love of Christ into action.

Yet, these things we confess to be in error: We have overlooked the glory of God as our primary passion and our primary purpose. We have undervalued the work of the Spirit and the instruction of the Word while elevating our own roles and agendas in the work of the kingdom.
We call ourselves to repentance then, trusting fully in the sovereign grace of Christ to transform us into his image, both individually and as a denomination. Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear what the Spirit says to the Reformed Church: To you, as you persevere on the journey you have undertaken in a spirit of repentance, I declare: I will work a change in you and then I will deepen the change I have worked, and you will know yourself moved by my spirit to do justice, to practice compassion, to seek reconciliation.

Reflect

In what specific ways is God calling you to engage in Christ’s kingdom mission? What challenges do you face in answering that call?

Prayer

Heavenly Father,  
guide our steps.  
Lead us forward,  
for our trust is in you.  
Give us transformation:  
body, mind, and spirit.  
Show us justice  
and reconciliation.  
Give us compassion  
and deep change.  
Let age teach youth and then together  
walk forward.  
Move our faith.  
Let the lost hearts feel your touch  
and help us be your hands.  
Lord, our trust is in you.  
Give us the tools of your mercy.