

THE CHICAGO 2015 COVENANT

We are committed to equipping congregations as they disciple youth to join in seeking first the Kingdom, and we call upon the Christian Reformed Church in North America to refresh its commitments to youth in strategically discerning ways.

Introduction

In 2014, the Board of Trustees of the Christian Reformed Church in North America adopted five central challenges that it committed to addressing, which included these two:

- Many in the younger generations are increasingly disconnected from the CRC and are exiting. Desired future: Congregations will engage youth and young adults in the life of the church.
- There is an increased awareness in the church that something is missing with regard to discipleship, spirituality, and being spirit-led. Desired future: Congregations will focus on holistic lifelong faith formation.

We the undersigned gathered in Chicago under the leadership of CRC Faith Formation Ministries from April 22-24, 2015 to articulate our shared vision and commitments in addressing these two challenges.

A vision for youth ministry

Discipleship: Discipleship is an intentional process which takes a person where they are and takes them where they need to go in Christ. We long to be disciples who mature into the blessings and sufferings of the Father, Son and Spirit in order to be a blessing in this hurting world. We are grateful for the privilege we have of participating in discipling relationships with teens as we walk together with integrity and authenticity (recognizing how central relationships are to the discipling process).

Congregations: We believe that healthy youth ministry takes place in congregations that are shaped by grace and committed to preparing God's people for works of service. All of us from the oldest to the youngest are sinners called to come to the cross to find new life in Jesus Christ. All of us from the oldest to the youngest are called to mature in that grace our entire lives. We are grateful for the Christian Reformed practice of making a covenantal vow as a congregation at the baptism of a child.

Youth Ministry and Leadership: We are grateful to be entrusted with the privilege of serving in CRC youth ministry, and we long to serve in contexts in which:

- Decision-making bodies at the congregational, classical and synodical level respect the place of youth ministry as one significant dimension of the life of the church.
- Support structures that sustain healthy youth workers (paid and volunteer) and youth ministries are established.

Trans-congregational support ministries (e.g., Faith Formation Ministries, Youth Unlimited, many more): We long for support ministries which cultivate personal relationships with congregational leaders,

respect the uniquenesses of local contexts through careful listening and come alongside as encouragers and equippers.

Covenantal call and commitment

It is our sense that we may have come to a “kairos” moment in transitioning to a renewed denominational approach to youth ministry, building on many strong developments during the past two decades.

We, the participants in the Chicago 2015 youth ministry consultation, together issue a call to action and make these commitments to the Christian Reformed Church of North America.

A call to action

We call upon denominational leaders and congregations to:

1. Actively engage the challenges adopted by the Board of Trustees, working towards stronger youth ministry embedded within holistic, lifelong faith formation.
2. Clearly recognize what leadership support structures will enhance capacity for both paid and volunteer youth ministry leaders to flourish, and take steps to put these structures in place.
3. Appoint champions/advocates for healthy youth ministry in the context of intergenerational faith formation at the congregational and classical levels.
4. Invite transcongregational ministries that support these goals to walk alongside them, and challenge these ministries to provide rich and faithful service.

A Covenant

We the undersigned commit to:

1. Work towards the vision described here, and to share this vision in every way that we can so that we as a denomination cultivate a shared vocabulary for discipleship, for congregational health, for youth ministry and for leadership.
2. Engage our personal discipleship intentionally and wholeheartedly as we live into our callings as role models in our own contexts.
3. Pray for the youth ministry that takes place in the CRC.
4. Continue to refine a vision and strategy for denominational youth ministry, working with the best resources available to us.
5. Challenge and invest in trans-congregational support ministries so that they do all that they can to encourage and equip youth ministry in local congregations in a manner that is authentic, personal, biblically-grounded and servant-like.
6. Challenge the denomination to develop church order and polity which strengthen our capacity to address the significant challenges of our time.
7. Being held accountable for these commitments by forming small groups of the Chicago cohort that meet every four months for a time of recommitment and prayer.