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the christian reformed church

who we are
and what
we believe



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WHOEVER YOU ARE: WELCOME!

This congregation belongs to a whole network of churches called the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA for short). We're like an extended family spread out across the United States and Canada. Although there are variations and differences among us, we still count ourselves as one.

Perhaps you are quite familiar with "churchy" things and simply want to solidify or renew a relationship with this congregation. Maybe you have just moved to a new place by yourself or with your family: you're looking for a church that's a good fit, and you need to learn a little more. Or maybe this is the first time you have ever gone to church at all, and you wonder what it's all about. You're ready for an introduction. Whatever your background, we're glad you've come. Think of this little booklet as your written tour guide to the CRC.

We've covered the essentials under these five headings:

- **Being Together** tells you where we come from and who we are.
- **Believing Together** will help you understand the most important things that we as a church believe to be true.
- We don't simply gather and believe; we also accomplish things. **Building Together** explains how we pool our resources so that we can employ and support people working to change the world in different ways, both at home and far away.

- As a denomination we've crafted a mission statement and a vision statement. Both are described in **Becoming Together**.
- Finally, we'll explore what's involved in being a member of this congregation in **Belonging Together**. How does that happen? What do you need to do?

Being Together

We call ourselves the Christian Reformed Church in North America. What does that mean?

- We call ourselves *Christian* because we are followers of Jesus Christ. We believe that Jesus was the Son of God and that he is the center of human history.
- We're called *Reformed* because we grow on a branch of the church tree that emerged from the Protestant Reformation in sixteenth-century Europe.
- We're a *Church* because we believe God has called us together to be a people who belong to him and live for him.
- *North America* tells you where we are situated; but it also tells you we're connected with other Reformed denominations in other places around the globe.

As denominations go, the Christian Reformed Church is not very big. It includes just over one thousand congregations across the United States and Canada. About 75 percent of the churches are in the United States; 25 percent are in Canada. We're one of only a few binational denominations: rather than split into different churches at the 49th parallel, we're united. Almost 300,000 people belong to the CRCNA—not a large number when you consider the population of our two countries. But by God's grace we can accomplish a lot when we work together.

Where Did the CRC Come From?

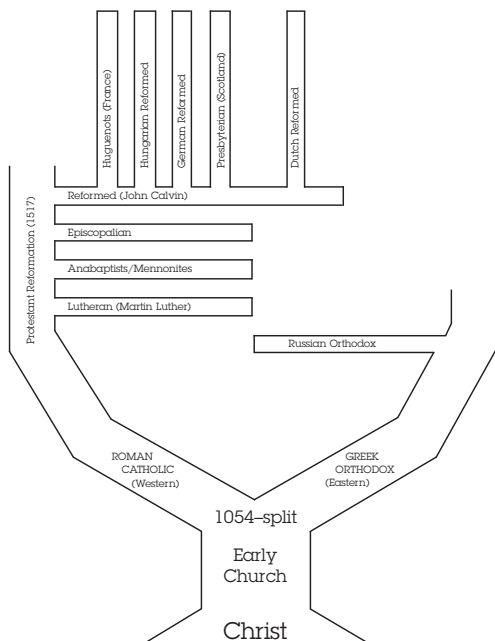
Picture the Christian church as a tree. The church began with followers of Jesus Christ in the first century A.D. But there were already strong roots growing before the coming of Jesus Christ: we read the story of God's work among his people, the Israelites, in the Old Testament. The New Testament tells us many things about the early church. Beyond the first century, the church grew and spread throughout the present-day Middle East and into Africa and Europe. For the first thousand years after Christ, the church remained unified in one solid trunk. Shortly after the first millennium, though, the church separated into two main limbs: an Eastern Church and a Western Church.

The Western Church, centered in Rome, was called the Roman Catholic Church. Throughout the Middle Ages, the church became entangled with political power, money, and influence. The resulting corruption led a German monk, Martin Luther, to begin a protest movement to purify the church and reform it back to Scriptural teaching. The movement Luther started was called the Protestant Reformation.

The Reformation spread through various European countries. Many present-day denominations, including the CRC, are branches that spring from this time period. The Reformation churches in Scotland were called Presbyterian. Not surprisingly, in Germany they were called Lutheran. In England they became the Anglican Church. And in the Netherlands they were called Reformed churches. Sometimes the Reformed and Presbyterian churches are also known as "Calvinist" because of their association with the French Reformer

John Calvin, who began a Reformation movement in Geneva. Each branch of the Reformation church has a significant person associated with it.

Another stream of the Reformation broke with the Romans Catholic practice of baptizing infants and became a branch of the tree called Anabaptist. Several North American denominations such Mennonite and Baptist are the fruit of this branch.



In the 1840s, a group of pastors and farmers left the Netherlands with their families to begin a new life in North America. They settled in a place now called Holland, Michigan. By 1857 they had officially begun the church now called the CRC. Like many immigrant churches, this denomination at first worshiped in its mother tongue, and its identity was closely tied to its ethnicity. Gradually this ethnic imprint has diminished,

and the CRC has become much more typically North American.

For the first century of its history, the Christian Reformed Church was primarily located in the United States. This changed by the 1950s when the end of WWII brought hundreds of thousands of Dutch immigrants to Canada to seek a better life. Many of these found a home in newly formed Christian Reformed congregations set up to welcome them. These immigrants were quick to adapt to their new context, and the flourishing denomination became well grafted into the North American context.

A third wave of immigration also affected the CRC: this time not from the Netherlands but from Korea. As Korean Presbyterians immigrated to North America, they found themselves most at home in the context of the CRC. These churches particularly flourished in California, and now about 10 percent of CRC congregations are made up of people with an ethnic Korean background. Like the Dutch immigrants of the 1840s, the Koreans began by worshiping in their mother tongue. But for successive generations, English is becoming the language of worship.

In this changing North American context, the CRC has intentionally become increasingly multiethnic. People from diverse ethnic groups and different corners of the world now find their church home in the CRC. In any given week CRC congregations worship in fifteen languages besides English, including Korean, Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Laotian, Swahili, Navajo, French, and Zuni. In this way the CRC is beginning to approximate the heavenly picture of people from all nations and languages praising God together.