



CEDAR HILLS FUTURE WITH THE RCA

Overview

As a congregation, we belong to a denomination - the Reformed Church in America (RCA). We have been part of the RCA since our congregation was organized in 1959. Belonging to the RCA means that we share a common history, set of beliefs (theology), practices (governance/polity), and purpose (mission). In recent years a division over our theology has deepened into two distinct groups - conservatives and progressives.¹

While the RCA has historically been a conservative denomination, over time the progressive voice has been growing. Last year's annual meeting (General Synod), approved a restructuring of the denomination that will ask churches to partner with other like-minded congregations (progressives with progressives, conservatives with conservatives). All the churches will continue to be part of the RCA. Churches that are not comfortable with this restructuring will be allowed to leave without penalty. (Gracious separation). This restructuring will be worked out in the next couple of years.

Because of this restructuring every church in the RCA is being asked to discern if they want to stay in the RCA or if they want to leave the RCA.

Frequently Asked Questions:

1. Q. What is required of each local congregation?
A. Each congregation must discern our future relationship with the RCA. We must affirm our desire to remain a member or we must choose to leave.

2. Q. What are some of the key elements influencing this decision?

¹ While labels can be used to create further division, we will use them in this document as a way to simply identify two groups. This is not meant to create prejudice, but clarity. While these terms define the groups they can lead to oversimplification. For ease of discussion, we suggest that these terms are the preferred terms used by the two groups involved. By using these labels as shorthand, we do not want to minimize the reality of complexity and nuance in this issue. The use of the terms progressive and conservative in this document are NOT descriptive of social or political views - these terms describe specific religious views that may or may not overlap with other uses of the terms conservative and progressive.

A1. **History.** We have a long history with the RCA. The thought of making a change causes grief. Change is hard.

A2. **Mission.** The RCA has a long history of cutting edge missions around the world that have had great impact. For years we have been blessed by partnering with missionaries through the RCA. This can continue whether we stay or leave.

A3. **Cost.** Belonging always has costs. Our assessments to the RCA have grown to over \$55,000 a year. This cost comes with little discernible return. In leaving we can seek a less costly partnership.

A4. **Bureaucracy.** Another cost of belonging to the RCA is the increasing complexity of the bureaucracy. The Denomination regularly bogs down in matters that have long been settled for our congregation. Often these bureaucratic snags drain energy while leaving important issues unresolved. They also distract, at times, from more important matters related to carrying out our mission.

A5. **Partnership.** We desire a partner that will actually help us carry out our calling and our mission to make disciples. The RCA has offered little in terms of practical support. We long for partnerships that will be more fruitful.

A6. **Theology.** We love Reformed Theology. In our mind 'Reformed' = biblical. As the denomination becomes more progressive, we see a move away from Historic Biblical Theology.²

A7. **Uncertainty.** There is no way to avoid uncertainty in this process. With the restructuring and with churches leaving, the RCA of the future will not be the denomination it is now. Staying or leaving both create uncertainty.

3. Q. Can we become an independent congregation?

A. The RCA requires churches leaving the denomination to join another denomination or network. We believe that there is wisdom in this requirement. We long to partner with other churches who are like minded in theology and mission. We want to grow in kingdom impact and we believe that God does this when like-minded congregations unite in mission.

² Historic Reformed Biblical Interpretation insists that the Bible has authority in all that it intends to teach. We discern biblical truth by digging in to understand the author's intended meaning. The more we can understand this - the closer we come to truth. This method of interpretation says that the authority is in the text and that authority comes from the author. Application on this view is a second step that comes after we've understood the truth. Progressive Biblical Interpretation insists that the Bible has authority which may be subordinated to tradition, reason, and experience, including the insights of contemporary science, psychology, and sociology. The Bible is not inerrant, but must be understood in light of what we know now. In this way interpretation and application are often combined and truth becomes relevant. Progressives take the Bible seriously, but read through a very different lens than conservatives.

4. Q. What is our mission?

A. We are called to make disciples who love, belong, and serve. "Then Jesus came to them and said, *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go 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 I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"* (Matthew 28:18-20). We follow this calling so that we glorify God, love one another, and bless our neighbors. This is lived out with:

- Hospitality: We who were once outsiders, welcome all.
- Authenticity: We practice honesty and vulnerability.
- Forgiveness: We who have been forgiven much, forgive much.
- Restoration: God fixes brokenness and gives us a ministry of restoration.

5. Q. Can we keep our mission and stay in the RCA?

A. While there is much uncertainty about the future of the RCA and the reorganization, we believe that the denomination will become even more progressive in the years to come.³ The progressive call to "welcome and affirm" asks us to embrace everyone as they are. Our vision for disciple making is to "welcome and disciple." We welcome everyone as they are AND we call everyone to grow in Christ-likeness. "Then Jesus said to them all: 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me'" (Luke 9:23).

6. Q. Isn't this issue really about gender identity, the definition of marriage, and the ordination of LGBTQ leaders?

A. The issue of gender identity was certainly one of the issues that led to these discussions. We believe this is merely a symptom of a larger, more significant problem. Because of the change in theology and the governance/polity of the denomination, the RCA has been unable or unwilling to address false teaching. In the future the RCA will likely be unwilling to do so.

7. Q. If we stay, can we reconsider this later?

A. Yes, but waiting may create difficulties if the offer of gracious separation is taken off the table. Our leadership has been discussing this for some time and

³ Dozens of conservative congregations have already petitioned to leave the RCA and dozens more are in the process of discerning. Some leaders involved in the process estimate that up to half of the current RCA congregations will leave, representing 70-80% of the membership. The congregations that remain will certainly be far more progressive than those currently in the RCA.

the actions of this year's General Synod make now the opportune time to make a decision.

8. Q. If we leave, how soon can this happen?
A. The process of leaving the RCA is very complex and concludes with a congregational vote that requires affirmation from at least 70% of the members. The process usually takes 4-6 months.

9. Q. If we leave, where can we go?
A. We are still researching partnerships that we believe can be fruitful in helping us carry out our mission. We believe that there are several great options that we are exploring. We will evaluate potential partnerships with priority given to like-mindedness in theology and in mission. We are not looking at other mainline denominations, but at networks such as The Alliance of Reformed Churches (ARC), The Kingdom Network, and a Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO (A Covenant order of Evangelical Presbyterians)).

10. Q. What is our hope for the future?
A. We are optimistic because God is working. We are part of building God's kingdom and we are being used by God to bring that kingdom to earth as it is in heaven. Two verses inspire hope in us. Matthew 16:18. Jesus said, *"I will build my church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it."* Jeremiah 29:11. *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*

We know that discussing our future with the RCA is hard work that will cause grief for some. We believe that now is the time for us to engage in this discussion as a congregation. Thank you for your prayerful consideration and respectful discussion of these matters. Please pray for clarity as we discern next steps related to our future.

Feel free to chat with any of our Elders or staff if you have specific questions.

Blessings,
Board of Elders