

Additional CRF Instructions for New Church Starts

(not yet organized by the classis)

Developed by RCA Church Multiplication

With hundreds of new congregations planted in the last decade, the RCA exhibits a great variety of models and contexts for ministry. These instructions are meant to guide your experience with working with the same annual report form that our established churches complete, since your gospel ministry is equal in such significant ways, your data is inspiring, and the opportunity to learn from our new churches is very high.

- If you are a multi-site or satellite congregation, you will not fill out an independent Consistorial Report Form. Your data will be included in the totals of your founding church, so that we avoid doubling the information.
- If you are a missional community or organic church with data that is distinct from any other RCA church, you are urged to complete the categories here as best that you can with the model of ministry you are employing. Try to keep that reporting approach the same year by year so progression can be easily seen.
- If you are a newly planted congregation not yet organized by the classis, your data is important for inclusion to give an accurate picture of the gospel work being developed in every classis. We understand you do not have an installed consistory, but your governance team is preparing the way for that stage still to come. You will **not** need to provide information about elders and deacons until you are organized by the classis. Please follow the guidelines below.

CRF Part 1a, “Membership Statistics”

The *Book of Church Order* (Chapter 1, Part 2, Article 8, Section 2; 2019 edition, pp. 35-36) describes the classis supervision of new congregations in this way: “The classis shall form a transitional governing body of a new congregation that shall administer the affairs of that congregation. ... When appointing a governing body the classis shall provide elders to oversee the administration of the sacraments and to admit persons as members of that organizing church. The governing body shall administer the membership of that organizing church under the authority of the classis, until such time as the organizing church shall be organized as a local church.” This is the proper role of your governance team until a consistory is formed, or perhaps a special classis appointed team in some cases.

CRF Part 1a, Lines 1-3: New congregations (church plants) can and should have members; they are the recognized core group of people committed to Christ and the mission of that congregation. They gather regularly for worship and are serving in mission and ministry. Confessing members are known Christian disciples and leaders who have been baptized and are living out their profession of faith openly before Christ and his church. The governance team that includes ordained ministers and elders from a parent church or classis churches can serve in this capacity to recognize your growing membership roll. Keeping this membership data up to date through the year is essential for tracking progress of the core disciples and leaders in the church plant. At organization, this group forms the charter membership of the church.

CRF Part 1a, Line 4: Baptized members are the children and youth who have received baptism prior to or since becoming a part of this new congregation, but have not yet made a profession of their faith in Christ before a board of elders previously, or with the governance team of the church plant.

CRF Part 1a, Line 6: Adherents are people involved in the life of the church plant to various degrees (belonging before believing; serving on loan from other churches; believers awaiting baptism) but who are not yet considered members of the new congregation. These people are a part of the congregation's circle of influence and ministry impact that may be a source of future members as well.

CRF Part 1a, Line 7: Average worship attendance is described well on the form. This includes all children, youth, and adults present for the weekly worship gathering. Add the totals of multiple services for one complete number here. If worship is conducted in house churches or organic groups instead of weekend gatherings, that can be included instead.

CRF Part 1a, Lines 8-14: These questions all pertain to the growth or decline of the core membership, not adherents or visitors who attend worship. Growth in the total membership can occur through confession of faith, reaffirmation of faith, transfer from another established church body (where the person's membership is no longer held), and adult baptism. There is also a place to record the number of infant/child baptisms (for a baptized membership increase, but not yet a confessing membership increase). Dedications of children would not apply here. Those children would be included as adherents and would seek adult baptism in due time when affirming their faith and new birth as disciples of Jesus.

CRF Part 1b, Financial Stewardship: These questions should be filled out completely by new congregations as described in the form, with the exception of Line 26 as described below.

CRF Part 1b, Line 26: New church starts that have not yet been organized by the classis do not pay assessments, so please enter "0" in this line.

CRF Parts 2a and 2b, Life and Health of the Congregation and Indebtedness: These questions should be filled out by the new congregations as described.

CRF Elders and Deacons: This information does not need to be filled out by new congregations until they have been organized by the classis.

CRF Ministry Contacts: Please fill this form out as described for both the youth ministry contact and the Christian education/discipleship contact.

Thank you very much! You are a vital part of the Reformed Church in America and the kingdom of our Lord and Christ!