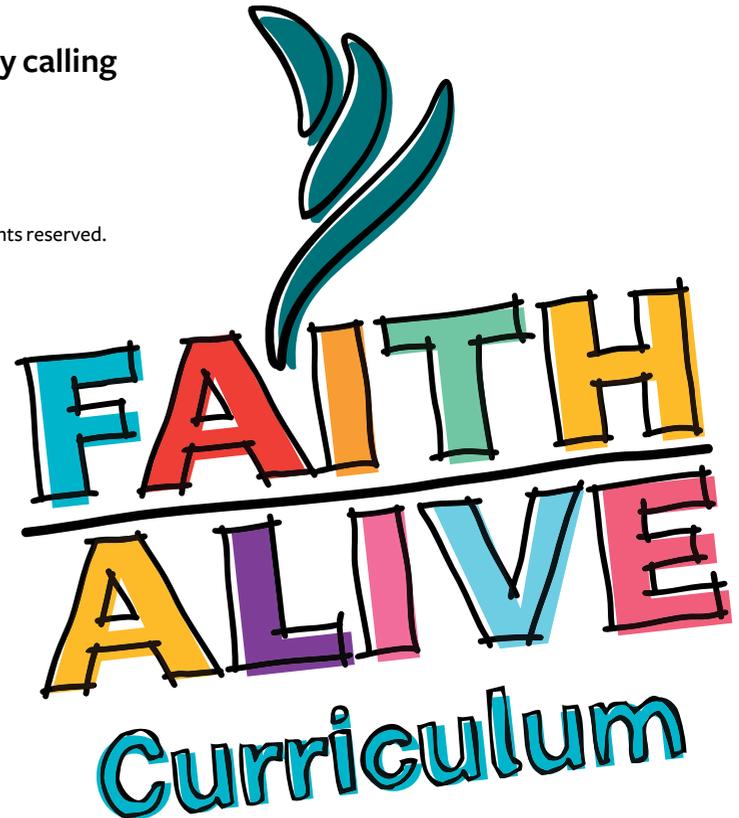


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▶ Tell the Story. Live the Story.

Dear Family,

During the coming four weeks our group will be talking about the church—and how it’s like a family. We’ll be discovering how God uses many denominations, including the one this church belongs to, to build the family of believers in the world. We’ll affirm together that no matter what happens to us and to the church in this world, we can trust our loving God to use all things for good.

As we talk and discover together, we will be creating a “family album” that will better help us picture the church and our place in it. We’ll also be learning or relearning the Apostles’ Creed—the words Christians from all places and denominations use to confess their faith together.

In the coming weeks, you may want to take the opportunity to talk together about your own family. Where do you fit in God’s family, the church? If you’re not already members of a church, how could you explore that possibility together? If you are members, how can you become more richly involved in the life of your church family?

Please continue to pray for our group of young teens.

Sincerely,

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Memory Challenge

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead.

He ascended to heaven

and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Christian Reformed Church

The Christian Reformed Church is a denomination that has about 300,000 members in 1,000 congregations across the United States and Canada.

The denomination is called

- *Christian* because members belong to Jesus Christ and want to be his followers. It recognizes as fellow Christians all people who accept the teachings of the Bible as summarized in the Apostles' Creed.
- *Reformed* because it is part of that historic branch of the Christian church that follows the teachings of sixteenth-century reformer John Calvin, who struggled to return Christianity to its biblical roots.
- *Church* because God has called it to be a fellowship of his people in the world.

Members of this denomination often call themselves "CRC" for short.

Where Did the CRC Come From?

Historically, from the Netherlands. But today, although a majority of members are still from Dutch backgrounds, the CRC can't honestly be called a Dutch church—unless it's also called a Korean church, a Navajo church, a Southeast Asian church, a French-Canadian church,

a Hispanic-American church, and an African-American church, among others.

More important than such ethnic badges is the CRC's place as one branch of the tree that started growing on Pentecost almost twenty centuries ago.

The early Christian church was like the single trunk of that tree. After about a thousand years of growth, the trunk divided into two major branches—the Eastern and the Western churches.

In 1517, the Protestant Reformation divided the Western (or Roman) church into several new branches. One of these Reformation branches, formed under Martin Luther's influence, was called the Lutheran church. Another branch developed under the influence of Ulrich Zwingli and later John Calvin. These churches were called "Presbyterian" in Scotland and "Reformed" in continental Europe.

The Reformed churches flourished in the Netherlands. In the middle 1800s, some of these Dutch Reformed people moved to the United States, and in 1857 they started the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

Coming to North America

A key event that led to the formation of the CRC was the decision of pastors Albertus Van Raalte and Hendrik Scholte to escape religious persecution and famine in the Netherlands. Van Raalte and Scholte immigrated to the United States. In the late 1840s, they settled in and around what is now Holland, Michigan, and Pella, Iowa, respectively, establishing “colonies” on American soil.

It wasn't easy. Inexperienced and crippled by disease, the settlers faltered under the hard task of extracting a living from the untamed ground. Through these first terribly difficult and painful years, the settlers clung to their most prized possessions: their faith and the freedom to live out that faith in their daily life.

Although the immigrants first aligned themselves with the Reformed Church in America, they soon ran into disagreements with their more “Americanized” brothers and sisters. These disagreements grew into a schism. In 1857, the Christian Reformed Church was born.

The CRC in Canada

The Second World War spurred a new immigration of Dutch Calvinists—this time mostly to Canada. While CRC churches had been planted decades earlier in places like Nobleford and Edmonton, Alberta, new churches

sprang up almost overnight in Alberta, Ontario, Manitoba, and British Columbia during this wave of immigration.

Ministries

By combining efforts and ministering jointly as a denomination, the CRC can do much more than it could if it were only working in a local capacity. These efforts are carried out through denominational agencies and include radio and television ministries, missions, relief work, publications, groups that work for justice and for abuse prevention, colleges, and more.

Reformed Church in America

In the small colonial town of New Amsterdam, on a Sunday in 1628, about fifty people gathered around a crude table in a mill loft. Their celebration of the Lord's Supper marks the birth date of the Reformed Church in America. The congregation they founded still continues today as the Collegiate Reformed Church in New York City, the oldest evangelical church in North America with a continuous ministry.

Commercial reasons, not religion, compelled the Dutch to settle the area. But along with these pioneers came their church—a church that has survived on these shores continuously for nearly four hundred years: the Reformed Church in America.

Today, the Reformed Church in America includes 300,000 people of many cultures across North America, remembering their heritage, growing together, reforming always to do the work of the global Christian church.

Historical Highlights

The Reformed branch of Protestantism is rooted in the Reformation of the 1500s. Its primary leader was French reformer John Calvin, who served a Reformation church in Geneva, Switzerland. From there his reform movement spread to Scotland, where it became the Presbyterian

Church, and the Netherlands, where it became the Dutch Reformed Church.

In the 1600s, congregations of the Dutch Reformed Church in North America spread and expanded, even after the English took control of the region from the Dutch. The church sent its ministers to Holland to be ordained and did not hold services in the English language until 1764.

When America became independent, the Dutch-founded church also cut its ties to its European mother country. The Revolutionary War was particularly divisive in parts of the church, and some of the congregations split from each other following the war. A group of parishioners loyal to the British settled in Canada along the St. Lawrence River. The congregations these refugees founded eventually became part of the Presbyterian Church of Canada.

Throughout the first half of the eighteenth century, the church's Dutch beginnings shifted from an everyday reality to a remembered heritage as Dutch-language worship began to fade. The church, incorporated in the United States in 1819 as the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, changed its name in 1867 to the Reformed Church in America, or the RCA.

Ministry and Missions

The first RCA mission programs began in America in 1796, when the RCA and other denominations formed the New York Missionary Society that primarily reached North American Native peoples. Missionaries had reached China, India, Africa, and other parts of America by 1820.

Most of the RCA's influence in America continued to be among settlers and immigrants of Dutch descent throughout the nineteenth century—including two congregations organized with Dutch immigrants in Alberta, Canada, in 1909 and 1912. A mission program to Appalachian families began in 1899 in Jackson County, Kentucky. Ministries to other minority groups began during this time and continued during the early twentieth century, but only the Native American Indian programs and the ministries in Jackson County still are part of the RCA.

To further welcome people from backgrounds other than Dutch, the RCA formed four councils between 1969 and 1980 to help the denomination face and address issues related to race and ethnicity, dealing particularly with people connected to the RCA through Pacific and Asian American congregations, Hispanic congregations, Native congregations, and African American congregations.

Reformed and always reforming, the RCA has moved into the twenty-first century, rooted and established in careful theology and committed to grow as the Spirit leads.

Presbyterian Churches

The root word of “Presbyterian” is “presbyter,” which means “elder,” and reflects the presbyterian form of church government. The Presbyterian Church is organized around the principle of representative democracy, or the rule by elders who are elected annually by the members of each congregation.

“Elders” may in fact be persons of any age (generally young adults and older). They serve on the governing body of the local congregation, called a “session,” for a three-year term. The size of the session depends on the size of the congregation, with nine to twelve members a likely number. “Elder” is a biblical term arising out of the Old Testament descriptions of Israel’s form of government, particularly during the time of Moses.

Presbyterian History

Presbyterians trace their theological roots to the Protestant Reformation in Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and most especially to John Calvin (1509-1564). Calvin was a French theologian who served a church in Geneva, Switzerland, in the mid-1500s. Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* emphasizes the power of God, the love of Jesus Christ, the need for the Holy Spirit, and the importance of the Bible.

Around 1700, Scottish and Irish Presbyterians fled to North America, escaping from forced “conversions” to the Anglican Church and the authority of the British government. These groups settled throughout the new colonies, especially the Carolinas and Ontario; by the time of the American War of Independence, Presbyterians were established in every English colony in North America.

The first American Presbytery was organized at Philadelphia in 1706. The first General Assembly was held in the same city in 1789. The first Assembly was convened by the Reverend John Witherspoon, the only minister to sign the Declaration of Independence.

The first major split in the American Presbyterian church occurred at the time of the Civil War over the issue of slavery. The two branches created by that division were reunited in 1983 to form the Presbyterian Church (USA). But other divisions and mergers have resulted in a number of Presbyterian denominations, some of which we’ll take a closer look at in this handout.

Presbyterian Trivia

United States presidents Woodrow Wilson, Dwight Eisenhower, and Ronald Reagan were all Presbyterians. So was astronaut John Glenn. So was Fred McFeeley Rogers (better known by his TV name, Mr. Rogers).

Presbyterian Church (USA)

Currently the largest Presbyterian denomination is the Presbyterian Church (USA), with national offices in Louisville, Kentucky. It was formed in 1983 as a result of reunion between the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. (PCUS), the so-called “southern branch”; and the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (UPCUSA), the so-called “northern branch.”

The Presbyterian Church (USA) consists of approximately 11,000 congregations across the country. These congregations are arranged into 173 geographical groupings called presbyteries. Presbyteries are likewise grouped into seventeen regional synods. Once every two years, for about a week, commissioners are elected to represent each presbytery at a General Assembly.

As far back as 1837, the General Assembly declared that the church, by its very nature, is a missionary society whose purpose is to share the love of God in Jesus Christ with the world in word and deed. Witnessing to the good news of Jesus Christ throughout the world, Presbyterians engage in mission activities, seek to alleviate hunger, foster self-development, respond to disasters, support mission work, preach the gospel, heal the sick, and educate new generations for the future. In partnership with more than 150 churches and Christian

organizations around the world, the missionary efforts of the Presbyterian Church (USA) involve approximately 1,000 volunteers and staff.

Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)

The Presbyterian Church in America, based in Lawrenceville, Georgia, has a strong commitment to evangelism, to missionary work at home and abroad, and to Christian education. From its beginning, the church has determined to be “faithful to the Scriptures, true to the Reformed faith, and obedient to the Great Commission.”

Organized at a constitutional assembly in December 1973, this church was first known as the National Presbyterian Church but changed its name in 1974 to Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). It separated from the southern branch of the Presbyterian Church in the United States.

The PCA is one of the faster growing denominations in the United States, with over 1,450 churches and missions throughout the United States and Canada.

Presbyterian Church in Canada

The roots of the Presbyterian Church in Canada are found in the Church of Scotland, but its Canadian heritage includes the work and witness of French Huguenot settlers who came to

Canada in the 1600s. Of course, many people have come, and continue to come, into the denomination from other branches of Christianity.

Many Presbyterian churches in Canada are named after Reformers, particularly John Calvin (1509-1564) and John Knox (1515-1572). Calvin has often been called the “father” of Presbyterianism. Calvin lived in Geneva, Switzerland; from there, Presbyterianism spread through Europe. Calvin, like other reformers, worked hard to develop a church where everyone, not just the clergy, shared responsibilities. Schools were established to provide education for both clergy and laity. After studying with Calvin in Geneva, John Knox returned to his native Scotland to establish Presbyterianism. It soon spread to northern Ireland, the United States, and Canada. In 1875 several groups of Presbyterians formed a union and called themselves the Presbyterian Church. The Presbyterian Church in Canada has been independent since then.

Today, the Presbyterian Church in Canada has about 1,000 congregations with members from many national and racial backgrounds. For example, there are now twenty Korean congregations, as well as congregations that worship in English, French, Korean, Chinese, Taiwanese, Hungarian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Ghanaian.

Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC)

Presbyterians come in many varieties, with new branches being formed in every generation. The EPC began in the fall of 1980 and spring of 1981 when a group of pastors and elders held meetings in St. Louis, Missouri, for planning and prayer. They came from mainline Presbyterian denominations like the United Presbyterian (northern churches) and the Presbyterian Church in the United States (southern churches). They wanted to form a church that took seriously the words of Scripture, the theology of the historic confessions of the faith, and the evangelical fervor of Presbyterian founders. They envisioned a denomination that was truly evangelical and truly Presbyterian.

Today, the EPC has over 70,000 active members in some 190 congregations. Beside eight presbyteries in the United States, the St. Andrews Presbytery encompasses the state of Buenos Aires, Argentina. The Office of the General Assembly is located in the Detroit area in Livonia, Michigan.

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Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)

The OPC came out of the Northern Presbyterian church in 1936. Today it is a national church with congregations in all areas of the country.

The greatest struggle within the church at large in the twentieth century was between biblical faith and theological liberalism (or modernism). Although claiming the name of Christianity, liberalism began by questioning the full authority of the Bible and ended up denying every biblical doctrine that modern secular thinking found disagreeable. The OPC was established in direct opposition to liberalism. The word *orthodox* in their name indicates their commitment to “straight” doctrine that is aligned with God’s Word.

From the beginning, the OPC emphasized mission work, both at home and abroad. As a result of church-planting efforts, the OPC has experienced slow but steady growth (which has accelerated in recent years). Today, the denomination includes over 300 churches and mission works in forty-five states (and one Canadian province), organized into sixteen regional churches, each governed by a presbytery. The OPC is currently growing by several churches and mission works annually. Carrying the whole truth of Scripture to the ends of the earth has also been important to Orthodox Presbyterians from the outset. Today the OPC has missions around the world.

The denomination’s offices are located in Willow Grove, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Philadelphia.

Cumberland Presbyterian Church

On February 4, 1810, Rev. Samuel McAdow of Dickson County, Tennessee, together with Rev. Finis Ewing and Rev. Samuel King, organized the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. The congregation was made up of secedent members of the Presbyterian Church and others in the area.

An outgrowth of “The Great Revival of 1800,” also called the “Second Great Awakening,” the new denomination arose to minister to the spiritual needs of a pioneer people who turned from the doctrine of predestination to embrace the “Whosoever Will” gospel of the new church. “Cumberland” came from the area’s name (the Cumberland River valley); “Presbyterian” described the form of government.

The Cumberland Presbyterian Church maintains a four-year liberal arts college, Bethel College, in McKenzie, Tennessee, and a seminary, Memphis Theological Seminary, in Memphis, Tennessee. Many Cumberland Presbyterians have been attracted back into larger Presbyterian denominations over the years. There is a separate polity for some African American Cumberland Presbyterians, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America, but relations between the two groups have for the most part been very cordial, and many of its ministers have trained at Memphis Theological Seminary.