

Adult CE – 1/23/22

Where We Are: Recent RCA history

1. Where we are: The denomination is fracturing because our church polity/church order has been unable to clarify and resolve the question of same-sex marriage. This issue has revealed deeper underlying theological issues and divisions within the RCA.
2. Observations on General Synod Statements
 - a. The General Synod has repeatedly affirmed the biblical definition of marriage as between a man and woman.
 - b. The General Synod has repeatedly affirmed the need for repentance regarding how LGB people have been treated, and called the church to do better in terms of pastoral care for LGB people.
3. Church Order solutions:
 - a. The General Synod (2004) instructed the Commission on Church Order to develop an amendment to the Book of Church Order that would clarify “that marriage is properly defined as the union of one man and one woman, to the exclusion of all others.” (They didn’t).
 - b. General Synod (2016) adopted the liturgy “Order for Christian Marriage” as constitutional. That liturgy describes marriage as between a man and woman. They also voted for a change to the Book of Church Order (BCO), mandating that consistories or governing bodies “shall assure that marriages in a church or congregation are between a man and a woman.”
 - i. Both of those failed to get 2/3 of the classis votes.
 - ii. Church Demographics and creating new classes (see attachment)
4. Confessional solutions:
 - a. General Synod (2017): “to affirm that the Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108 and 109 categorically states that God condemns ‘all unchastity,’ which includes same-sex sexual activity, and that faithful adherence to the RCA’s Standards, therefore, entails the affirmation that marriage is between one man and one woman.”
 - b. Great Lakes Catechism on Marriage and Sexuality.
 - i. Adopted by smaller bodies, but the Commission on Theology declined to receive it as a catechism for the RCA as a whole.

5. Disciplinary solutions

- a. Procedure for church discipline
- b. Why this hasn't/doesn't work
 - i. Who can bring a charge and who judges it
 - ii. Case-by-case nature vs. overarching denominational stance

6. Other significant moves

- a. 1997 - Formula of Agreement with Presbyterian Church (USA), Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), and United Church of Christ (UCC).
- b. Norman Kansfield trial (2005)
- c. Classis of New York recommends marrying same-sex couples (2011)
- d. Classis of New Brunswick officially affirms same-sex marriage in their by-laws (2015)
- e. Official "Room for All" Churches
 - i. 26 in New York
 - ii. 15 in New Jersey
 - iii. 3 in Michigan
 - iv. 1 in Colorado
 - v. 1 in California

7. Vision 2020 team and report

- a. Initial mandate and options
 - i. Option 1: Do nothing. Maintain status quo.
 - ii. Option 2: Restructuring into ‘affinity synods’
 - iii. Option 3: gracious separation.
- b. Actual recommendations
 - i. Form a team to report back to GS 2024 regarding restructuring, possibly into ‘affinity’ synods.
 - ii. Clarified regulations for departing churches.
 - 1. The BCO already contains the process for churches to depart.
 - 2. The General Synod (by a vote of 182-25) clarified that the classis must allow the church to depart with its property and assets. This regulation has a sunset provision in 2026. (This does not require a vote of 2/3 classes).
- c. What this means
 - i. Essentially, option 1 above was chosen.

8. What’s happening right now.

Description	Year	Total Mem	Inactive M	Baptized M	Adherents	Conf.Mem	Bapt(A)	Bapt(I)	Confsns.	Attend	# of Churches
ARC Subtotal	2020	26,563	1,969	7,092	4,292	17,502	67	215	264	11,914	74
Kingdom Network Subtotal	2020	12,055	522	3,238	6,698	8,295	37	77	168	10,096	7
Sending Network Subtotal	2020	4,673	473	1,268	1,942	2,932	23	46	79	3,746	5
(To ?) Subtotal	2020	5,611	189	876	1,530	4,546	41	12	78	4,267	9
Departing TOTAL	2020	48,902	3,153	12,474	14,462	33,275	168	350	589	30,023	95
% of RCA Total	2020	26%	12%	31%	28%	27%	22%	29%	22%	28%	11%
RCA Total	2020	189,262	26,039	40,819	51,435	122,404	759	1,208	2,649	108,505	830

- a. RCA members from 2015 to 2021: 216,000 to 161,000

CHURCH DEMOGRAPHICS

Observations on 2015 demographics

- 2 Regional Synods had over 50% of the members, but only 31% (14/44) of the classes.
- Our Region (Great Lakes) had more members than all 3 eastern regions combined, but we had 7 classes vs. 17 classes in those regions.
- One classis (Zeeland) in our region had more members than the entire region of Albany, but Albany has six classes.
- Four Regions that lean toward historic view of marriage: approximately 159,000
73.6% of members, 61.3% of classes
- Three Regions that lean toward revisionist/affirming view of marriage: approx. 57,000
26.3% of members, 38.6% of classes

2015 average church size by Region

- Albany: 146
- Canada: 128
- Mid-America: 309
- New York: 180
- Far West: 254
- Great Lakes: 427
- Heartland: 357
- Mid-Atlantics: 148