

Town Hall Update

Since January, we've been meeting regularly as a congregation to talk about our future in the RCA.

Branson led us through a seven week series on the RCA, and it's issues. Over the last few weeks we've been meeting in smaller focus groups listening to questions and concerns. Our intention was to meet today and attempt to address everything we heard in those focus groups, but this past week we realized we needed to wait a bit.

I know that will disappoint some of you, because you were expecting answers today.

But here is why we need to slow down a moment.

1. We heard from a number of folks, including CE teachers, who couldn't be a part of the adult CE class, that they felt out of the loop, and wanted more information. Obviously one of the challenges of meeting at this time is that it naturally leaves some people out. On top of that, some folks missed due to illness, vacations, or other such things. In other words, we want to take a moment to bring these folks up to speed so they understand what we're talking about.
2. Another reason we need more time is due to the sheer number of questions we received from these focus groups. We've received questions about the process for leaving the

RCA, where we would go, what the main issue is, and why we would leave now, which there have been problems for years.

In some of the focus groups we talked a lot about human sexuality, because it feels to some folk like that's the main issue in the RCA.

But what I want to take a moment to say today, is that the main issue we face in the RCA is what we do with the authority of scripture. When we talk about the authority of Scripture, we are not talking about how we interpret scripture. What we are saying is that there are folks in the RCA who do not value scriptures authority, and they have had no problem even saying that scripture is wrong about things.

Branson highlighted this in his teaching. There are churches arguing that scripture has no authority regarding how we use our bodies to follow Christ. We've heard pastors say, "The Bible is wrong." I heard a sermon at an RCA church that basically stated Jesus is not the only way to God.

Yes the presenting conversation in the RCA right now has to do with human sexuality, but the underlying issue is how we view scripture, and if we don't have that in common, it makes it hard to exist as a denomination.

Whether we stay or go, you need to understand that churches are already peeling off. From our classis, Remembrance Reformed has already petitioned to leave, another church will

likely do so soon, and at least a few others are having conversations about what to do.

It might also be helpful to say that whether we stay or go, not much is going to change in the way we function as a church. The reality is that those of us who will feel the decision the most are pastors and elders who are involved in classis activities.

So what happens next?

First of all, I'd like to ask for patience. I don't think any of us here have been through a decision like this before, and we are doing our best to figure out how to keep you all informed and engaged in the process.

Here is our revised plan.

1. The week after Easter, we plan to hold one or two crash courses to bring people up to speed in this RCA conversation. If you missed the CE classes, this is a great opportunity to catch up. We plan on offering the class on a week day morning for 2.5 hours. And we also plan to offer the class on a week night for 2.5 hours. It'll obviously be condensed. Even if you already went to the CE classes, but just want to hear things again, this is a great opportunity to keep learning. We'll have those dates to you soon.
2. Following those crash courses, we plan to have the official Town Hall meeting where we address the questions and concerns you have all brought up. We are currently aiming for Sunday, April 24, with a potential back up of Sunday, May 1.

3. Here is what you can expect at that town hall meeting. You will receive, and we will walk you through an FAQ sheet with the questions we've heard, and our best attempts at answering them.
We also hope to have a flow chart. This chart will be another way of looking at the data and decisions to show what could happen depending on the decisions we make.
4. In May to keep the conversation going, we also plan to offer some informal connections. A week day morning, and a week night, where Branson and I are available, with some refreshments, to answer your questions, and chat about what's happening in the denomination.

I mentioned this earlier, but one thing that came up a lot in the focus groups was the process for leaving the RCA.

So let me try to revisit these:

Can Fourth become independent? No. Not an option. BCO states we MUST join another denomination.

If we leave, what happens to our building/property? We keep them.

If we leave, what is the process for leaving?

1. We first need to identify which denomination we would land in. You can anticipate that we'll likely have at least one conversation with you all about this in the future.

2. If we find a denomination that fits us better, and there is consensus around leaving. The next step would be for the consistory to vote. We need 75%
3. If that happens, we inform you, and take an unofficial vote. If we have over 75%, we then begin the formal process with the classis.
4. That process culminates with an official vote monitored by the classis. If over 75% vote to leave, we leave. If not, we stay.
5. There is a lot of behind the scenes detail work that goes into this process, but these are the main points.

Are there other RCA churches going through this process?

Yes. At least 49 churches have already left the denomination to join the ARC. Others have left to join the Kingdom Network. Many others are in process. Remembrance Reformed in our classis has already petitioned to leave. At least one other beside us is investigating.

What happens to pastors?

Our process for leaving is separate from the churches process. Branson, Aaron and I could all leave the RCA, Fourth could stay, and we'd still be pastors here. Or Fourth could leave, and I could stay. But again, nothing changes for day to day ministry.

Who gets to vote?

Only members in good standing. We are going to talk through the age limit, but only members in good standing. If you're not a member of Fourth, but would like a say, now is the time to join us I suppose.

Can I be bold here a moment. If you plan on voting in that congregational meeting, we ask that you do what you can to be informed. A number of us are working hard behind the scenes to ensure opportunities for you to be in the know, to be educated, and to understand what's happening. We need you to work just as hard. Here's what I mean:

READ WHAT WE SEND YOU.

SHOW UP TO EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES.

ENGAGE IN THE LIFE OF THE BODY OF FOURTH NOW.

One of the worst things that could happen is that we get to a point where the congregation is voting, and folks vote yes or no in an uninformed way.