

Introduction to This Issue

Reformed Review is pleased to present to its readers in this issue two substantive articles on the subject of membership decline in the Reformed Church in America (RCA) in the five-year period 2000–2005.

These articles appear at a time when the RCA is close to the mid-point of its ten-year goal “Our Call,” which General Synod approved in 2003. “Our Call” constitutes an ongoing invitation to the church to mobilize its energies and resources for the starting of new congregations and the revitalizing of existing ones. The authors in this issue wish to see their contributions as a response to this invitation. Their work is clearly done out of the conviction that a systematic analysis of the factors implicated in membership decline can enable the church to understand better how to allocate its resources as it seeks to carry out its mission.

Nathan Tintle, assistant professor of mathematics at Hope College, and his two student assistants, Kathryn Harper and Jennifer Rice, open the issue. In their article they apply a sophisticated statistical analysis to the demographic data they have amassed and organized for each region and congregation in the RCA. By means of this analysis they demonstrate that several internal and external factors are related to membership change in the denomination during the period 2000–2005. Most significant among the external factors include population density and change in those regions in which given congregations are located. Internal factors include size of congregation and Sunday school programs.

Tintle and his student Laura Malpass collaborated to produce the second article. Here they focus exclusively on RCA congregations in the three northeastern regional synods, which have experienced the greatest loss in membership during the five-year period. Members in these congregations were surveyed on what they regarded as the most serious challenge facing their church today. Low attendance, finances, youth, and evangelism/outreach are singled out as candidates.

I count it a great privilege to introduce this issue – my first as new editor – of *Reformed Review*. It is my sincere hope that under my editorship this journal will continue to serve as an important venue in which authors can share ideas about matters vital not only to the RCA, but also to the wider family of churches. The two articles in this abbreviated issue give this editor encouraging signs that this hope can be realized.

Christopher Dorn