

Dear Living Springs Members and Friends,

We as the consistory can imagine that this letter petitioning to withdraw from our Denomination – The RCA, for some of us may feel like it comes out of left field. We want to assure you that it has not. This proposal has come out of months and even years of prayer, conversation, and deliberation. The letter to the Classis (that is our regional network of churches in the denomination) that is below, came out of a month of specific prayer and fasting, and it was concluded that this is the most appropriate decision for the future of Living Springs Community Church.

We also want to assure you that this will in no way affect the vision and values of our church, nor will it have much of an impact on our day-to-day ministry. There are probably many of us that are not even aware that we are part of a denomination. Our prayer, conversation, and deliberation has centered around what will be the best home for Living Springs to live out it's unique vision of ***Igniting a movement of Spirit-Filled, Multicultural Churches that radically blesses our community and beyond.*** We have concluded that remaining in the RCA at this time is more of a hinderance to our ministry and mission than it is to remain a part of it.

In addition, we want to assure you that we are not seeking to go “independent” as a church as you will see below. We believe in the strength that comes from being a part of a larger group of churches for accountability, shared ministry/mission and church planting, idea sharing, inspiration, and theological training for next generation leadership. However, we believe that we need to be a part of a denomination, movement, association or network that is life-giving, inspiring, leads from the future and not from the past, and maintains shared convictions and values. Therefore, we are making the following proposal that we as a church will ultimately need to vote on.

Petition of Living Springs Community Church to withdraw from the RCA

On January 19, 2021 the Consistory of Living Springs Community Church approved submitting a petition to withdraw from the RCA.

After much prayer, fasting and discussion, the Consistory of Living Springs has taken official action to investigate disassociating with the RCA and seeks to join with a group of like-minded churches in a life-giving context which would allow for accountability, friendship, and missional effectiveness. The main reasons for this investigation and possible disassociation are:

1. **Theological Fit in the RCA.** At Living Springs we believe the Bible is our final authority in faith and practice and not simply a guide to faith that can be influenced by the winds of culture. There has been a consistent erosion of the Gospel in our denomination that is troubling and exhausting. Some churches or pastors may see Jesus as a way vs. the way to God. Some within the denomination replace the gospel (our sin, our need for a savior and to repent of sin, God's grace and forgiveness through the work of Jesus on the cross, and our transformation through the work of the Holy Spirit) with simply loving people. Many churches and clergy have redefined the Biblical definition of marriage and human sexuality and have been aggressive in demanding that the RCA enforce all churches and members to adhere to this definition. These demands have caused an

impasse that cripples unity. While the RCA as a denomination has continued to uphold the same view of the authority of Scripture as our church, most denomination gatherings are consumed with debate over what the Gospel is. This is exhausting and frustrating and detracts from Mission.

2. **Polity problems.** Not only are more churches shifting from the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but there is also both an inability, because of the polity or Government structure of RCA, to hold these churches accountable to the standards and theology that our denomination has established. There is also no indication that this will change. A 2020 task force was put in place to figure out a way forward through the deep divisions in our denomination. The recommendations of the 2020 vision team has not solved the polity problems that continue to bring endless theological debates and division in our denomination. We have no confidence that the problems that have plagued our denomination for 40 years will change. For 40 years the denomination has taken theological stances, and churches have pushed against them, opposing the gospel, and there is no vehicle for church discipline. We see this battle for the gospel continuing to dominate every denominational gathering and distract from our missional purpose.
3. **Practically, what are we passing on to the next generation?** The average age of RCA members is 67, the average age of pastors is 57, and we have lost a third of our churches in the last decade and 200 of some of the most dynamic churches are probably going to leave the denomination in the months ahead. The reality is that the longer an organization exists, the more complex it can become. Today we are left with a polity structure that is cumbersome, antiquated, and hinders mission. To be clear, there is deep love and appreciation for brothers and sisters in the RCA, so many dear friends, mentors and saints, but the bureaucracy and polity are another story. Our denominational gatherings tend to be consumed with endless debate about what the gospel is. Our gatherings can be exhausting, de-energizing and lack vision. How is the next generation going to experience this? Are we passing along 57 Chevy's to a generation that wants a Tesla? As a Denomination, we are not leading from the future, but straight jacketed by a centuries old structure and polity that lacks inspiration and vision. We need a church home that is so compelling to a next generation of leaders that they couldn't imagine not being a part of it.
4. **New Wineskins.** Jesus warned that "you cannot pour new wine into old wineskins" (Luke 5:33-39). The RCA has served the Kingdom of God beautifully for generations, but its effectiveness has dwindled, and it does not hold the "New Wine" that God is pouring out today. Today it seems as though God's spirit is breathing on networks, associations and movements while denominations are dying. We are in a time of reformation and believe that God is pouring out new wine on his church. We believe that we can join another movement that is Spirit-filled, intentionally diverse and focused on making

disciples, planting churches and impacting communities for Jesus. We hope to connect with a larger movement that provides things like accountability, theological training and ordination, resource sharing, and friendship. Our hope is that a new movement would also provide greater flexibility, far less cumbersome bureaucracy, and far less cost.

5. **Stewardship.** Living Springs pays well over \$50,000 a year into denominational assessments. We would prefer to reallocate those funds into local mission in terms of reaching disconnected people, helping those who are struggling financially, and investing in our local communities while we continue to invest in worldwide mission efforts.
6. **Landing Spot?** We recognize that finding an exact theological match would be almost impossible. Plus, many denominations are only a few years away from facing the issues the RCA is facing today. We do not want to make a switch only to be back to where we currently are. At this time, we feel led to continue partnering with the churches in our current New Thing Classis (Faith church, Calvary Orland, First Wheatfield, and Cornerstone Bourbonnais) to explore the creation of a new network of Churches. The values that we want to embrace are: Our foundation is Jesus Christ, A multiplying movement of Disciples and churches, a multicultural movement with an emphasis on “every tribe, tongue and nation,” relationships over bureaucracy, a desire to stay connected with our Reformed history, and a polity that is lean, vision driven, and in relationship holds leaders accountable.

We can imagine that this letter for some might raise some questions. Therefore, we have scheduled a **Family Meeting for April 25 at 11:30** (following the Sunday Service) to have a time of questions and conversation. Please bring any questions or thoughts to this gathering. The process for withdrawing from the Denomination is below...

- 1) A Letter of petition must be submitted to the Classis (which we have done).
- 2) There is a meeting with the Classis Leadership team and consistory to make sure pastors and Consistory are on the same page. (This is scheduled for April 20)
- 3) Then there is to be a meeting with Classis Representatives and The LSCC congregation for information, conversation and questions.
- 4) At a later time, we will have a Congregational meeting for a vote, as this is a matter that the congregation must approve. This is the process our denomination has in place for petitions to withdraw from the denomination.

Humbly submitted,

The Consistory of Living Springs Community Church

Rev. Dave Izenbart, Rev. Jason Perry, Rev. Ann Bilbrew, Dan Hoekstra, Jeff DeBruin, Glenn Sterrett, Grant Sikkema, Jim Barnick, Keith Piepenbrink, Pastor Robyn Jackson, Jason Perry, Dale Derks, Jeanne Benson, Matt Princehorn, Nate Simmons, Joel Mikell

