



Early Harvest Report from a Corner of the Field

Ten years ago, Classis Central California was a “church-closing classis,” down to twelve existing congregations. Adopting a new vision after a powerful prayer retreat fueled a movement for growth and turned things around.

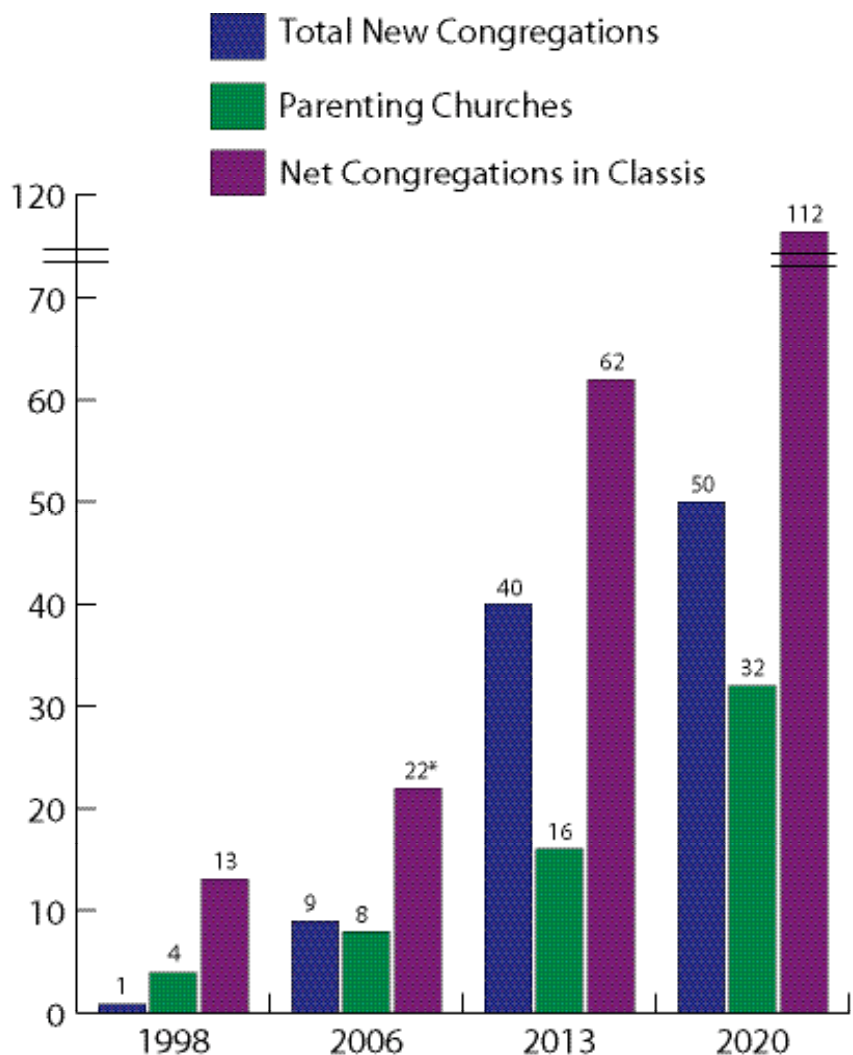
In 1998, the classis initiated a movement of “parenting churches.” The classis identified a calling to become at least thirty-two reproducing churches by 2020, and they started simply by naming four churches with potential to launch new congregations.

The churches that were ready to parent new congregations were called “bright light” churches, and the goal was to double the number of bright light churches every seven years—to go from four to eight to sixteen to thirty-two churches over the course of four seven-year cycles.

Amazingly, in the last eight years, sixteen new congregations have been born out of this vision, far more than originally imagined. In 1998, each potential parent church was growing and had between four and seven hundred worshipers on Sunday. Since then, Church of the Chimes in San Jose has started three congregations. Calvary Reformed Church in Ripon and Christ Community Church in Carmichael have each started two congregations, and Tulare Community Church has started nine. All four parent churches have grown significantly as well.

The total membership of Classis Central California has grown steadily, with over one hundred adult baptisms a year. More than twenty percent of new RCA congregations in the last three years have come from this one classis multiplication movement. By 2013, the RCA’s goal year for starting four hundred new congregations, this classis could be sixty-two churches strong, up fifty from the twelve that existed in 1995.

This graph illustrates the speed with which Classis Central California has been planting new congregations, and it projects continued progress as the “production capacity” of parenting churches doubles every seven years.



*Some church closures still occur.

Parenting Churches Give Eight Advantages to New Church Plants

1. The survival rate of the new church is tripled from 25 percent to over 75 percent.
2. Creativity in methods plus racial and economic diversity are significantly improved.
3. The new church has higher attendance right from the start.
4. More of God's people get involved locally in the mission of planting churches.
5. The new church is more likely to start another new church, sometimes after only three years.
6. New churches are less expensive since they become self-supporting and self-governing in a shorter time.
7. One parent church can plant multiple new churches, in some cases several in one year.
8. Parenting churches fuel a movement's speed faster and with exponential effect.

Taking It to the Entire United States and Canada

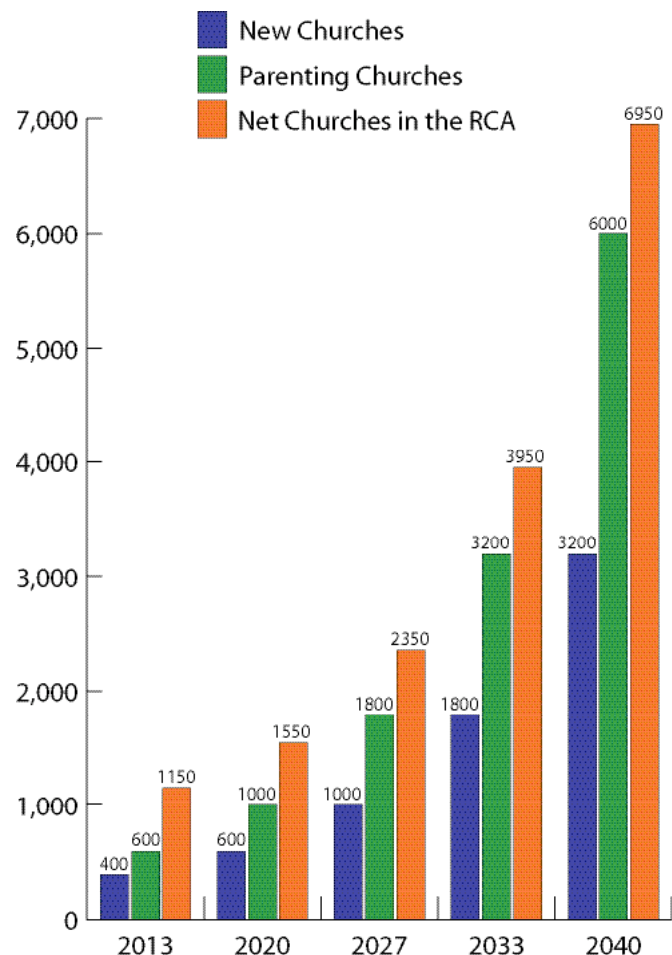
The forty-five classes of the RCA have set a goal to plant **400 new congregations** by the end of 2013. Strategically, this happens through creating a movement of **600 reproducing churches**. These figures assume that 75 percent of the new church plants and at least one-third of current RCA congregations become parenting churches. The "Parent Church Network" of the RCA estimated in 2003 that, so far, 97 percent of RCA churches have yet to directly plant another church. We want to move the number of planting churches from 3 percent to 30 percent by doubling the number of bright light parenting churches every two years.

About forty RCA churches are parent churches right now, up twenty from two years ago. The next thirty-five parenting churches will be developed in 2006 and 2007, starting with a January 2005 training event in San Diego. With the number of parenting churches at seventy-five, the next cycle would double again to 150, then 300 by 2011, in order to help plant ninety-eight new congregations in one year, 2013.

Let's project to the year 2040, when the U.S. population is supposed to be nearing 400 million. Healthy, growing parenting churches should be able to reproduce one new church **every seven years**. As we accomplish Our Call together, the growth could look like the graph at right.

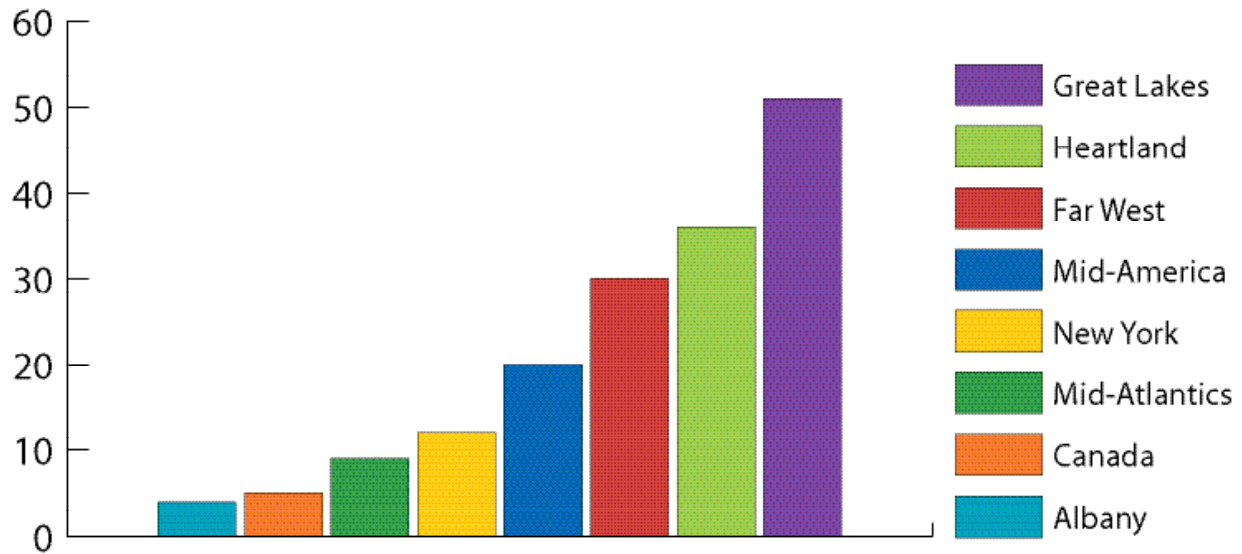
Parenting churches have the potential to fuel a movement of new self-governing and self-supporting churches across North America. These churches (and the churches they start) have a "multiply and send" mentality; they are life-giving mission stations for the kingdom of God. Reproducing churches multiply disciples, leaders, and churches all over the place!

The RCA's 2003 statistical tables show that approximately 167 churches are ready to reproduce. 167 churches already have the right mixture of health, growth, leadership, and size to become parenting churches. An additional 133 churches

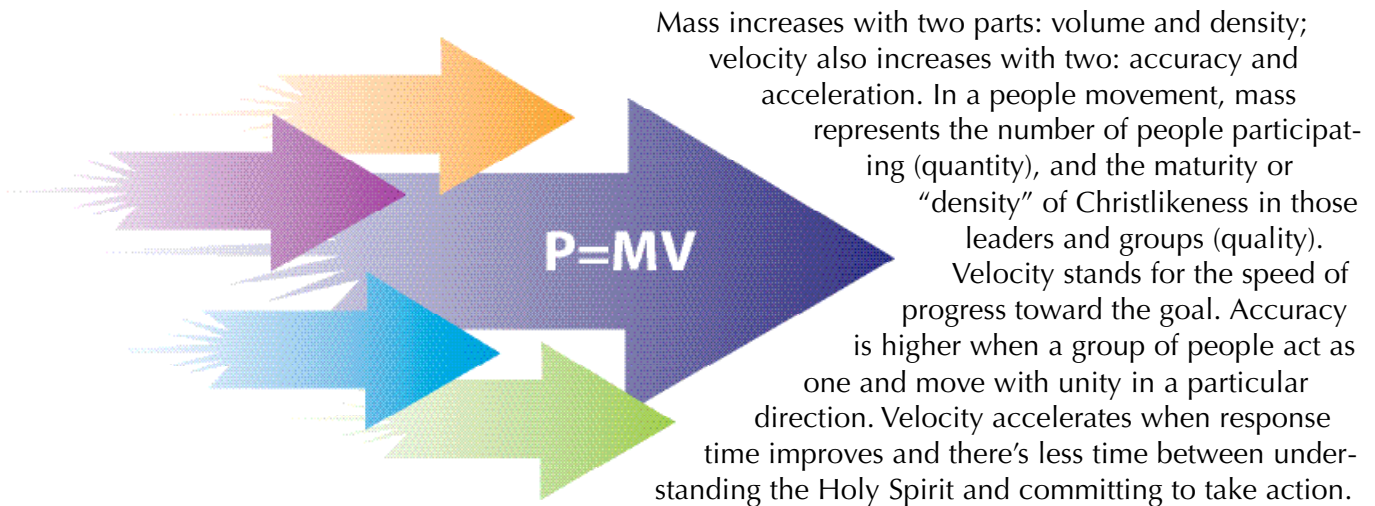


This graph assumes about 200 churches closing in the RCA every seven years.

will be developed into healthy parenting churches through revitalization. Among the eight RCA synods, the breakdown of current bright light churches looks like this:



Fueling a movement like this has a lot to do with momentum. In *An Unstoppable Force: Daring to Become the Church God Has in Mind*, Erwin McManus applies a physics principle to “people movements” such as church planting. In physics, $P=MV$; momentum equals mass times velocity. Growth in mass has a proportional impact on momentum, and velocity increases that impact.



To gain momentum in this church planting movement, we seek to increase the number of high-quality leaders and servants of Christ who are moving in unity toward a common destination, inspired and empowered by the Holy Spirit.