

Fifteen Years of Lay Leadership Training in British Columbia

After more than 15 years in existence, British Columbia's Leadership Development Network (LDN) continues to build up lay leaders for ministry in the province's Christian Reformed churches.

LDN graduate Perry Daciuk of Immanuel CRC in Langley refers to LDN as one of the CRC's best-kept secrets. "Too many still don't know what LDN is or what a phenomenal blessing it is for leadership development and theological training within the CRC," he said.

The British Columbia LDN began in the late 1990s in response to a need for more church planters in the region. Gradually it shifted to a program for all church leaders. It provides Reformed theological training in several ways: a three-year training program, one-day classis-wide topical events, tailored training for local churches, and website resources.

Wilma van der Leek serves as commissioned pastor of education for Classes B.C. North-West and B.C. South-East, the two regional groups of churches that run the LDN program. She has taught over 40 LDN graduates who serve the CRC in a variety of ways—as commissioned pastors, elders, deacons, youth and children's pastors, worship leaders, and in other ministry roles. One graduate is starting a Master of Divinity degree.



KEVIN VAN DER LEEK

Wilma van der Leek, facilitator for the British Columbia LDN.



The logo represents the twelve disciples in a circle with the text of Scripture.

"We have a pretty beautiful thing going here," van der Leek said, "trying to offer a holistic, spiritually formative, and experiential way for lay leaders in the CRC to meet God in Scripture and then become people who can lead others there as well."

Program graduate Carolyn Gerber of Hope Community CRC in Surrey serves her church in the areas of worship planning and small groups. Gerber, a busy mom, felt able to commit to the monthly meeting and homework of the LDN program. "I joined LDN because it was a local opportunity to develop leadership and ministry skills to equip me in my personal spiritual journey as well as enhance the work I was doing for our local congregation," she said.

Melissa Van Dyk of First CRC of Vancouver works full time for Union Gospel Mission in Vancouver's downtown east-side. She explained that the skills learned in LDN become a unique part of its graduates. "The fingerprints of the training are all over everything I do."

—Tracey Yan



Group members pray together at Heart Matters meetings.

Heart Matters: Support for Parents of Children with Mental Health Issues

Raising children is demanding. For parents whose kids have mental illnesses such as borderline personality disorder or schizophrenia, child rearing presents its own set of challenges. The desire for a safe place to share and receive mutual encouragement led Paul and Janette Stalemo of Eastern Hills Community (Christian Reformed) Church in Aurora, Colo., to start Heart Matters, a biweekly support group for parents whose children have mental health issues.

Approximately 12 people attend group meetings. "It is truly a support group. We share resources and experience," said Paul Stalemo. "We don't try to fix each other. We love each other and we try to be encouraging."

While the group occasionally brings in speakers, the purpose of meeting is providing every person the chance to share their daily parenting issues. Parents in the group deal with behavioral issues that may seem shocking to those who have never walked in their shoes. Marc, a member of the group, said, "This group has allowed us to meet other hurting families as we try to understand and empathize with the hurts and struggles that we all face both emotionally and financially. This church and this group full of grace allows us to show up and just be our broken selves. I thank God for our church family."

Even though the everyday struggles for these parents can be exhausting, they assure one another they are not alone. Lana, who also attends Heart Matters, said, "I would have been lost had the Lord not provided me with such a wonderful group of people to help me on this difficult journey."

—Amy Toornstra