

**Synod of the Great Lakes
Meeting and Minutes
Convened at Remembrance Church
Grand Rapids, Michigan
Sixtieth Annual Session
May 4, 2015**

FORMATION OF THE SYNOD

Roll Call/Seating of Delegates

The Assembly convened in the chapel of Remembrance Church at 4575 Remembrance Road N.W. Grand Rapids, Michigan on Monday, May 4, 2015. Delegates were asked to be seated and to introduce themselves to others seated around the same round table. President Gordon Christian called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. Attendance was taken by noting the nametags that were not picked up. The President declared that a quorum—a majority of the minister delegates and a majority of the elder delegates—was present. The delegates to this assembly meeting are listed below. The names of absent delegates were given to the Leave of Absence Committee.

GREAT LAKES CITY CLASSIS

2014-2015

Rev. Scott Crane, PO Box 168, Dimondale, MI, 48821
Rev. Tom Elenbaas, 2900 Baldwin, Hudsonville, MI, 49426
Rev. Dan Sewell, 22960 Lorain, Fairview Park, OH, 44126
Rev. Dean VanFarowe, 1918 W. 65th Street, Cleveland, OH, 44012

2015-2016

Mr. Mark Elsesser, 8706 Beech Avenue, Brooklyn, OH, 44144
Mr. William Hop, 1372 Lynn Drive, Middleville, MI, 49333
Ms. Allison Pooasawtsee, 910 Mulford Drive, Grand Rapids, MI, 49507
Mr. Steve Zylstra, 4349 Walter Road, Wayland, MI, 49348

HOLLAND CLASSIS

2014-2015

Mr. C.H. Falstad, 995 East 8th Street, Holland, MI, 49423
Rev. Brian Keepers, 300 N. 168th Street, Holland, MI, 49424
Mr. Larry Kooiker, 3040 152nd Avenue, Holland, MI, 49424
Rev. Larry Schuyler, 513 East 8th Street, Suite 32, Holland, MI 49423

2015-2016

Mr. Bob Ellis, 17051 Bellwood Court, Holland, MI, 49424
Mr. Don Fredricks, 6289 Mista Drive, Allendale, MI, 49401
Rev. Janelle Lopez-Koolhaas, 347 Washington Avenue, Holland, MI, 49423
Rev. John Schmidt, 172 W. 15th Street, Holland, MI, 49423

MUSKEGON CLASSIS

2014-2015

Mr. Jimmy Gretzinger, 15379 Meadowwood Drive, Grand Haven, MI, 49417
Rev. Dave Kingma, 470 Divison Avenue, Coopersville, MI, 49404
Mr. Ken Kuzma, 18423 Main Street, Spring Lake, MI, 49456

2015-2016

Rev. Amy deGroot-Bowling, 8662 Sheridan Street, Montague, MI, 49437
Rev. Randy Bremmer, 13080 Acadia, Grand Haven, MI, 49417
Mr. Ken Giddis, 4687 Church Street, Montague, MI, 49437
Rev. Jim Vander Meiden, 2150 Baldwin, Jenison, MI, 49428
Mr. Dave Hazecamp, 1521 Porter Road, Muskegon, MI, 49441

NORTH GRAND RAPIDS CLASSIS

2014-2015

Rev. Bob Karel, 1465 Three Mile Road, Grand Rapids, MI, 49505

Ms. Francene Lewis, 5616 7 Mile Road, Belmont, MI, 49306

Mr. Jack Mouthaan, 13433 Sparta Avenue, Kent City, MI, 49330

2015-2016

Rev. Kristie Keil, 8297 Coldwater Road, Flushing, MI, 48433

Ms. Pam Kragt, 1040 Roger, Grand Rapids, MI, 49544

Dr. Branson Parler, 1728 Country Club Road, Grand Rapids, MI, 49505

Rev. Jessica Shults, 202 Cummings, Grand Rapids, MI, 49534

Rev. David Veldt, 1427 Marlin NW, Walker, MI, 49534

NORTHERN MICHIGAN CLASSIS

2014-2015

Ms. Barb Ajg, 1401 Peninsala Drive, Traverse City, MI, 49686

Mr. Frank Ayre, 1411 West Lake Drive, Fremont, MI, 49412

Rev. Jarred Van Noord, 8033 Church Road, Ellsworth, MI, 49729

Rev. Brad Vander Waal, 1110 N. Saginaw Road, Midland, MI, 48640

2015-2016

Rev. Mike De Ruyter, 1100 N. Saginaw Road, Midland, MI, 48460

Rev. Tom Jasperse, 605 Hemlock, Fremont, MI, 49412

Mr. Ken DeKok, 4906 Rasmussen Road, Ludington, MI, 49431

Mr. Rick Shooks, 7468 Atwood Road, Elsworth, MI, 49729

SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN CLASSIS

2014-2015

Mr. Ted Fiebiger, 5475 Ravine Road, Kalamazoo, MI, 49009

Rev. Kent Frens, 910 Jenks Blvd, Kalamazoo, MI, 49006

Ms. Terri Kopanski, 5350 North Sprinkle Road, Kalamazoo, MI, 49004

Ms. Karen Witvoet, 10722 Center Street, Plainwell, MI, 49080

2015-2016

Rev. Lon Bouma, 831 W. G Avenue, Kalamazoo, MI, 49009

Rev. Vic Downing, 921 W. Kilgore Road, Portage, MI, 49024

Mr. Jack Groenveld, 134 Dunham Drive, Battle Creek, MI, 49015

Rev. Jonathan Loper, 2951 Promenade Drive, Kalamazoo, MI, 49009

ZEELAND CLASSIS

2014-2015

Mr. Marv Allen, 8579 76th Street, Hudsonville, MI, 49426

Rev. Jim Dykstra, 7979 Quincy Street, Zeeland, MI, 49464

Mr. Marv Koomen, 4401 104th Avenue, Zeeland, MI, 49464

Rev. Nate Meldrim, 7224 Taylor Street, Hudsonville, MI, 49426

2015-2016

Rev. Marc de Waard, 4991 Oak Street, Box 1, Hamilton, MI, 49419

Rev. Tom Dekker, 3554 M-40, Hamilton, MI, 49419

Mr. Tom Den Bleyker, 3875 45th Street, Hamilton, MI, 49419

Mr. Bob VanderZwaag, 3580 104th Avenue, Zeeland, MI, 49464

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

President:

Mr. Gordon Christian

Vice-President:

Rev. Dean Van Farowe

Past-President:

Rev. Kevin Kleinheksel

Past Past-President:

Mr. Glenn Emmert

Finance Committee Chairperson:

Mr. Irv Boersen

At-Large Members:

Rev. Eric Cook

Mrs. Phyllis Garvelink

Regional Executive:
Stated Clerk/Parliamentarian (non-voting):

Mr. Rob Holland
Mr. Dave Mejeur
Rev. Dan Sewell
Rev. Greg Stamm
Mr. Mik Sutton
Rev. Rick Veenstra
Rev. Howard Moths

SYNOD STAFF (non-voting)

Dr. Burt Braunius	Coordinator for Commissioned Pastors, Part-Time
Mrs. Alison DeBoer	Administrative Assistant, Full-Time
Rev. Dr. Doug McClintic	Regional Church Multiplication Consultant, Full-Time
Rev. Howard Moths	Stated Clerk, Part-Time
Rev. Rick Veenstra	Regional Executive/ Leadership Development Consultant, Full-Time
Mr. Bill VerHulst	Treasurer, Part-Time
Rev. Art Wiers	Regional Church Health Consultant, Full-Time

Privilege of the Floor

Since non-delegates do not have access to the floor, the following motion was made and seconded:

R - 1

To grant the privilege of the floor to those non-delegates and members of the GLR task forces, committees, and ministry teams who have been asked to present reports to the Synod. (ADOPTED)

Motion to Limit Debate

The GLR Executive Committee recommended a motion to Limit Debate following the practice of the General Synod. According to *Robert's Rules of Order*: "An assembly at any session can change the limits of debate, for that session only, by means of a main motion adopted by two-thirds vote without notice." (*RONR*, 11th ed., p. 390) The Executive Committee recommended that the assembly vote to limit debate to two minutes each time a delegate speaks to any motion that comes before the Assembly. Since delegates may speak twice to a single motion, this would limit debate to four minutes per delegate for each motion.

R - 2

To limit debate to two minutes each time a delegate speaks to any motion that comes before the Assembly. (ADOPTED)

Approval of the 2014 Assembly Minutes

The minutes of the Assembly of the Synod of the Great Lakes that was held on May 5, 2014, were posted on the RCA Great Lakes Region (GLR) website under the Assembly tab and were mailed to anyone who requested a copy. The minutes were reviewed and approved for publication by the GLR Executive Committee. The president asked for any additions or corrections to the minutes. Since none were offered, he declared that the minutes of the 2014 Assembly will stand approved as printed.

Appointments of Standing Committees and Tellers

The following committees and tellers were appointed by the Executive Committee. The standing committees met before the assembly meeting to conduct their business.

Classical Minutes Committee

Bob Karel, chair
Scott Crane
Bob Ellis
Francene Lewis
Howard Moths (staff)

Resolution/Leave of Absence Committee

Tom Elenbaas, chair
James Dykstra
Don Fredricks

Study Committee

Not appointed

Tellers

Amy deGroot-Bowling, chair
Marv Allen
Mike DeRuyter
Ted Fiebiger
Allison Poosawtsee
Larry Schuyler
Howard Moths (staff)

Terri Kopanski
Doug McClintic (staff)

Presentation of New Business

The *Rules of Order* of the Synod of the Great Lakes allow for presentation of new business at this point in the agenda. No new business was presented.

Approval of the Agenda

The agenda for this meeting was printed at the beginning of the Assembly workbook. A motion was made from the floor:

R - 3

To approve the agenda as printed in the workbook. (ADOPTED)

OPENING PRAYER AND WORSHIP

Gordon Christian read verses from Psalm 8 and 9 opened the meeting with prayer. Worship was led by Matthew Eastman from Remembrance Church. He led the Assembly in the singing of three worship songs.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Gordon Christian, reporting

One of the responsibilities of the president of the regional synod is to prepare a report on the state of religion within the bounds of the regional synod and present it at the annual Assembly. As Gordon presented his report, he asked our vice-president, Dean Van Farowe, to take the chair.

We come now to the President's Report. I don't mind sharing with you that I have been very anxious about this for quite some time; easily since February of last year. Part of the problem for me has been the freedom that surrounds this part of the agenda. There is a requirement for the president to make a report, but nothing specific as to what must be reported.

I was grateful to have access to the individual classis reports that have recently been submitted. While these varied widely in form and focus, most acknowledged some significant events taking place in the respective classis, and also included a challenge, or goal, for the members to seek together. That seems to be a suitable approach and so I will endeavor to do the same.

So what are the significant events happening in the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes? While there are several I could choose from, for the sake of the high number of reformed pastors in attendance, I have organized my comments into three main points. And so that I do not confuse the rest of you, I will immediately deviate from those points for a quick side note.

I must admit that I am a relative novice when it comes to involvement in the Regional Synod. Just three years ago I was here as a first-year delegate, knowing next to nothing about how the regional synod operated and thinking that I must be the most unqualified delegate of all times.

Hopefully I can accurately claim to have gleaned some important things over the past few years, but one thing I have learned for certain is that there is a great deal of hard work that is being expended throughout the synod at all of its various levels. In fact, some of this work is arduous, and at times even tedious and discouraging. While we cannot likely change that fact today, we can do something to ensure that this work is not done without thanks.

In our region we have committed ourselves to a VISION expressed in seven words: STARTING AND STRENGTHENING CHURCHES BY DEVELOPING LEADERS.

The staff employed by the regional synod cannot do this work alone. We rely on teams of individuals and leadership appointed by each classis to carry out this work. Although all of those who engage in this work are not in this room, I am asking that the synod staff and anyone who has served as part of one of the teams of the regional synod or classis teams to please stand so we can express our appreciation through a round of applause. Thanks so much to all of you for the important work you do. On behalf of the Executive Committee, may I simply say that you are greatly appreciated.

The first key item that I want to highlight is the evaluation of the work of the Regional Synod that has been in process for much of the past 12 months. In the early fall of last year, the Executive Committee partnered with

Dr. Megan Mullins of VIP Research and Evaluation to conduct this evaluation and I can confidently say that we have been pleased and impressed with her work every step of the way.

As you may have noticed in your agenda, Megan will be presenting some of what we learned a bit later, so I won't go into much detail now. I will say that we put a considerable effort into making this evaluation as detailed and comprehensive as our resources allowed. 60-minute interviews were conducted with much of the synod staff and were also attempted with two key members from every classis. Additionally, an electronic survey was sent to every pastor on record at every church in the Synod of the Great Lakes. We received responses from just over 50% of these pastors and Dr. Mullins has assured us that this is a satisfactory mark. But I think it does allude to the issue that garnered the most comments by far; and that is communication.

In addition to the information and thoughts that Megan will present shortly, you will have an opportunity later to discuss the topic of communication, both from and within the synod, and as you do this we are asking that you would share your thoughts and insights about how this communication might be improved.

Conducting this evaluation has been an important and intentional project for us. But it won't mean much unless we interpret the results properly and take appropriate action. And so I commit to you, even though I am the off-going president, that the Executive Committee will strive to do just that, and I challenge you to hold us accountable to that endeavor.

The second issue taking center stage is that of classis reorganization. Those of you who attended last year may recall that this assembly approved two recommendations in this area. One of these was to combine the Lake Erie and South Grand Rapids Classes into the Great Lakes City Classis. Another allowed us to proceed with the intent to form an international classis. Over the past year, the first appears to have progressed with much success, at least in terms of organization and administration. The latter has seen a number of hurdles, but is still championed by some folks who continue to feel strongly that it is worth pursuing.

To be sure, the processes surrounding these initiatives were difficult at times, and regrettably, have been trying and troubling to some. But by God's grace, I believe some important lessons have been learned, and I am hopeful that the way forward will be better for all.

As I mentioned earlier, my view of things pertaining to this synod is limited by a lack of extended experience. And although it is too early to know the impact, or outcome, of these proposals, it is my opinion that each of them was brought forward believing that we were following the Lord's leading and with a deep desire to bring the Gospel of God's grace to a significant number of people who we may not be reaching very well.

My challenge in this regard, is that no matter your starting point on either of these classis issues, as we later hear about and together discern our way forward (today and in the year ahead), may we keep that goal - that of most effectively bringing the gospel to these people - among the foremost in our thoughts.

The final item I feel compelled to highlight is one that has been sort of simmering on the back burner for a while, but has recently been taking a more prominent position, both nationally and within the RCA. The issue is the question of how our denomination will respond to the debate over human sexuality, and in particular with regard to homosexuality.

Homosexual behavior, along with other extra-marital practices, has been normalized in our culture and there is pressure for the church, including the RCA, to accept and celebrate what has historically been seen as sinful. Indeed some denominations have already followed these cultural changes by amending their positions and practices.

As with other debates in the church, opposing views are strongly held and both sides use Scripture in their defense. It can be hard to miss the often loud and forceful voice of the "open and affirming" side of this argument. But I believe that there is another voice that is growing within our denomination that seeks to offer a different view.

Despite what we are led to believe, it is possible for a church to have a position that bridges the gap between intolerance and endorsement, between bigotry and full embracement. It involves following Christ's example of showing radical love while maintaining the integrity of God's righteous requirements.

We have been challenged as leaders of the Great Lakes Region to bring this voice to the General Synod Assembly. We know that other views will likely be expressed there as well. That fact has added urgency to the creation of the overture to the General Synod you received in a special mailing, which we will discuss this afternoon. As mentioned in the letter with the overture, there is overwhelming support for this action amongst

the leadership of the Synod of the Great Lakes. We believe it is vitally important to make this statement at this time, especially in light of recent events.

As churches struggle to show compassion without compromise to persons who are struggling with their sexual identity, our assemblies must decide who will serve as office holders in the church. Office holders must serve as examples of faithful service and holy living and submit to a higher standard in both life and doctrine.

Obviously, the Executive Committee desires that this overture move forward, but that can only happen by the will of this assembly. Our hope is that you have been in prayer about this prior to today's meeting.

May we, as one body, be moved by the Spirit to act on this matter, and in everything we do, in a way that is in accordance with God's will and that brings praise and glory to His name.

The report of the President is automatically referred to the Executive Committee for their consideration. After the report is finished, Gordon resumed the chair.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE REPORT

Gordon Christian, reporting

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS TAKEN IN THE PAST YEAR

The *Rules of Order* of the Synod of the Great Lakes (GLR) state that among other duties, the Executive Committee shall "administer the affairs of the Regional Synod between sessions of the assembly." Since the 2014 Assembly meeting, the Executive Committee has met three times. A summary of each meeting is printed below. All meetings were held in the large conference room of the Synod of the Great Lakes.

At the June 30, 2014 meeting, the committee:

- Approved the Minutes of the May 5, 2014 annual Assembly Meeting of the Synod of the Great Lakes for publication.
- Reviewed a summary of the evaluation forms completed by the delegates at the Assembly meeting on May 5, 2014.
- Voted to hold the next annual GLR Assembly on Monday, May 4, 2015.
- Reviewed the evaluation of the work of the regional synod completed as part of the May 5, 2014 Assembly meeting and decided to continue this evaluation process through the use of a consultant following the Guiding Principles (AP1.a.3) that require that "Every five years the Executive Committee will arrange a full assessment of the work of the regional synod by a competent consulting group."
- Approved an arrangement with Rick Veenstra that his role as Regional Executive be reduced to 80% of his current time commitment at 60% of his salary/benefit cost. Rick Veenstra is intending to serve in the capacity of Regional Executive until he reaches age 70 in 2017.
- Reviewed a draft of a succession plan that was developed to assist in planning for the retirement of Rick Veenstra.
- Gave significant attention to prayer and the study of Scripture using Amos 5:21-24. Members of the group discussed the injustices and issues that keep them up at night and how we are called to respond to those concerns.
- Reviewed progress in the strategic merger of two classes, Lake Erie Classis and South Grand Rapids Classis, in the forming of the new Great Lakes City Classis. Voted to transfer all the churches of Lake Erie Classis to South Grand Rapids Classis, effective June 30, 2014, with the exception of Church of the Master, Warren MI, and New Hope Reformed Church, Powell OH. Voted to transfer the Church of the Master, Warren MI, to the Classis of North Grand Rapids Classis, as requested. Voted to send a letter to the General Synod and the Regional Synod of Albany expressing our approval of the transfer of New Hope Reformed Church from the Classis of Lake Erie to the Regional Synod of Albany, as approved by the 2014 General Synod.
- Voted to transfer all the ministers of Word and sacrament who are members of the Lake Erie Classis to the South Grand Rapids Classis, with the exception of sixteen ministers who chose to be transferred to other classes.
- Decided that the liquid assets remaining in the Special Funds of the Lake Erie Classis be disbursed proportionally based on the number of confessing members of each church at the end of 2013, and sent to the classis of membership of each church that belonged to the Lake Erie Classis.
- Decided that all of the assessments due to the Lake Erie Classis from all of the churches of the Lake Erie Classis be paid to the South Grand Rapids Classis for the remainder of 2014, and that the South

Grand Rapids classis pay all assessments due to the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes and the General Synod for the remainder of 2014.

- Voted to disband the Lake Erie Classis and appoint the Executive Committee of the South Grand Rapids Classis to act in the name of the Lake Erie Classis until such time as the corporation of the Lake Erie Classis is dissolved, with the understanding that South Grand Rapids Classis shall act in accordance with the motions approved by the Assembly and Executive Committee of the Synod of the Great Lakes.
- Supported work to restore relationships that have been damaged with members of the Holland Classis, and to work cooperatively with the Holland Classis to achieve the goal of organizing the Great Lakes International Classis.
- Agreed that the minutes of the GLR Executive Committee will be forwarded to the stated clerks of the classes within the regional synod after the members have been given the chance to make additions or corrections to the minutes with the goal of improving communication with the classes.

At the November 10, 2014 meeting, the committee:

- Celebrated something that has not happened in our regional synod for at least 25 years. In 2013, according to the statistics from the annual consistorial reports, the GLR, as a whole, grew by 139 confessing members in comparison with 2012.
- Reviewed the seven major goals of the regional synod that include the metrics of: 1) organizing churches, 2) adult baptisms, 3) pastors and church staff members participating in a coaching relationship, 4) a new plan for a Transition Ministry Services Team, 5) congregations participating in the Ridder Church Renewal, 6) congregations participating in a LumineX Collaborative, and 7) and pastors involved in the Leadership Development Journey.
- Reviewed a new plan for Transition Ministry Services for churches that are between installed ministers. This plan will offer churches the opportunity to contract directly with the regional synod for either full-time or part-time transition ministry work that will include consulting in conflict management, leadership development, church health assessment, succession planning, and organization of a search process.
- Designated a housing allowance for Richard Veenstra, Arthur Wiers, Douglas McClintic, and Scott Lokers to be paid as part of their 2015 compensation.
- Authorized the date of December 1, 2014 for a transition from full-time to part-time compensation for Rick Veenstra.
- Received a report on the contract with Megan Mullins of VIP Research to conduct an evaluation of the work of the regional synod that will include interviews and online surveys to analyze to the work of the regional synod. <http://vipreval.com/About>.
- Reviewed changes to 2014/2015 Ministry Fund budget that included new line items for the SGL evaluation process and the development of new GLR websites.
- Reviewed a report on the formation of the Great Lakes City Classis from the merger of the South Grand Rapids Classis and the Lake Erie Classis. The Classis met for the first time on October 21, 2014 and voted to change the name of the combined classis to the Great Lakes City Classis.
- Heard a report that the Commission on Judicial Business of the General Synod determined that the complaint filed by Holland Classis against the action of the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes to form the Great Lakes International Classis was without merit, particularly in light of Book of Church Order (BCO) Chapter 1, Part III, Article 2, Section 3, which provides that "[t]he regional synod shall form, combine and disband classes, and may transfer churches from one classis to another within its bounds."
- Heard a report on the Restorative Circle with the Holland Classis that was held on Tuesday evening, September 16, that included an agreement that members of the Holland Classis Executive Committee will meet with the GLR Executive Committee. The group also agreed to gather a post-circle on Tuesday evening, November 18, at Semelink Hall at WTS.
- Met with members of the Holland Classis Executive Committee and agreed that the regional synod will take steps to prepare Beechwood Reformed Church and the church plants to be launched as the Great Lakes International Classis. Holland Classis promised to fully cooperate with the formation of the International Classis. The regional synod promised that no final action will be taken to organize the new classis before March 16, 2015 and that the RSGL will continue to move ahead with the formation of the International Classis in dialogue with Holland Classis.
- Decided to move forward with the implementation of the Great Lakes International Classis by appointing a small task force and by asking Holland Classis and Beechwood Church to form small working groups to assist in this implementation.

- Discussed the homosexuality debate in the RCA and ways to communicate the position of the RCA on same-sex attraction and marriage to the average person in the pew. A summary of the RCA's position and an update on the RCA's attempt to find "A Way Forward" was provided and members were asked to inform their constituents about the policy and current progress of the General Synod working group. More information can be found at <https://www.rca.org/homosexuality>.
- Voted to appoint Glenn Emmert as our regular delegate to the 2015 General Synod and to invite suggestions from the members of GLR Executive Committee for the appointment of two women as corresponding delegates and one youth as a corresponding delegate.
- Responded to the request of the General Synod Commission on Nominations to nominate someone to serve on the GSC from the minister delegates to the 2014 General Synod. Mike VanBuren was nominated and has accepted the nomination.

At the March 16, 2015 meeting, the committee:

- Met with Megan Mullins of VIP Research to review her evaluation of the work of the regional synod which included interviews and online surveys. Dr. Mullins provided three written reports on the functioning of the Synod of the Great Lakes: 1) Installed Pastor Perspectives, 2) Staff & Classis/Lay Leadership Perspectives, and 3) Integrated Summary of Research Results.
- Reviewed the written report submitted by Rick Veenstra on the eight goals of the Core Leadership Team (CLT) of the Synod of the Great Lakes for 2014, and compliance, progress, or non-compliance for each of the goals.
- Reviewed a list of eight Great Lakes Region Goals for 2015 presented by Rick Veenstra and Doug McClintic, including a report on church planting within the region with the goal of starting and organizing 25 new churches and sending out 25 missionary church planters to under-resourced and unreached people groups.
- Voted to employ Rick Veenstra in 2016 under the conditions outlined in his Living Generously Plan, working 80 percent of the time for 60 percent of his pay.
- Heard a report from the Classis Leader of the Great Lakes City Classis on the process of transitioning to a single classis and serving under-resourced churches with cross-cultural partnerships.
- Heard the report that about 600 people participated in an Organic Outreach event on March 6-7 at Corinth Reformed Church that was sponsored by the Great Lakes City Classis and the Synod of the Great Lakes.
- Heard a report on the development of the Great Lakes International Classis which included the GLIC Proposed Rules of Order and Guiding Principles. (*See the report that follows this section for the response to that report.*)
- Voted to affirm the 2015/2016 proposed budget and 2016 Assessment of \$17.50, the 2016 Ministerial Salary and Benefit Guidelines, and the 2016 Church Staff Salary and Benefit Guidelines as presented by the Finance Team.
- Nominated four at-large members from Holland, N Michigan, SW Michigan, and Zeeland Classis. (*See the Nominations Report.*)
- Nominated five persons who are not ministers for the office of vice-president. Three accepted the nomination. (*See the Nominations Report.*)
- Received the report that Suzan Couzens (Byron Center) and Carol Riemersma (Coopersville) have agreed to serve as women corresponding delegates, and Hunter Brumels (Holland) has agreed to serve as the youth corresponding delegate to the 2015 meeting of the General Synod.
- Heard a report from the Overtures and Judicial Business Committee (OJBC) regarding two appeals and two overtures that will be presented to the May 4 Assembly with recommendations, following the Rules of Order of the Synod of the Great Lakes that assign the responsibility of reviewing overtures to the OJBC.
- Appointed an Evaluation Implementation Team to respond to the assessment by Megan Mullins and decide what will be reported to the May 4 Assembly regarding the regional synod evaluation by VIP Research.
- Voted to approve a request for assessment relief from Northern Michigan Classis for the First Reformed Church of Fremont for the year 2016.

NOMINATIONS AND ELECTION

Election of At-Large Members of the GLR Executive Committee

According to our *Rules of Order*, the Executive Committee has twelve members: the president, the vice-president, the Regional Executive, the two most recent past presidents, the chairperson of the Finance Committee, and six at-large members. The GLR *Rules of Order* state: *Six at-large members of the Executive Committee will be elected at the regular session of the assembly for three-year terms and will be eligible for re-election one time. Terms for the at-large members begin on June 1 and end on May 31. At-large members will be chosen for their gifts, from the confessing members of the churches in the Regional Synod at large and need not come from the body of delegates at the assembly. At-large members will be nominated by the Executive Committee with the goal of including at least one member from each of the eight classes on the Executive Committee. If the election of the assembly results in any classis not having a member on the Executive Committee, the Executive Committee shall appoint another at-large member from that classis. All such appointments shall be subject to approval of the Regional Synod at its next regular session. The person so appointed shall serve only as long as it is necessary to ensure that each classis has a member included on the Executive Committee.*

In addition to the requirement that one member be elected from each of the classes within our region, the GLR Executive Committee discussed the need for other forms of diversity in the leadership of the regional synod: ministers/elders, men/women, and racial/ethnic participation. The balance between ministers and elders has been maintained through the years. The committee was happy to receive the nomination of two women, but recognizes that men are still the large majority of members, and the committee lacks racial/ethnic participation. We are expecting to receive a proposal on cultural agility and sensitivity from Earl James that will help us work together with others on this goal in the short-term and long-term. The committee is committed to assure that requisite gifts, skills, and diversity are present in the leadership of our regional synod.

Phyllis Garvelink will be completing her second term on this committee on May 31. When asked for a suggestion for a nominee to replace Phyllis, Holland Classis offered the name of Judy Nelson. Judy, a specialized minister of the Holland Classis, has agreed to serve on the GLR Executive Committee if nominated and elected. The GLR Executive Committee voted to nominate Judy.

Judy Nelson became the first Workplace Chaplain at Tyson Foods in Zeeland, MI in March. She is a recent graduate of Western Theological Seminary (M.Div.), attending seminary after a long professional career as a Speech Pathologist in the public schools. She feels extremely blessed to have been able to answer the call into ministry later in life. Judy and her husband Chris raised four sons in Saline, MI and are the happy grandparents of two little ones in Holland. Prior to going to seminary Judy was active as a lay leader in many areas of ministry including women's ministries, prayer and missions. Judy continues to enjoy softball and rollerblading, has been in the same book-group for over 25 years (now commuting to Ann Arbor for monthly meetings), and loves coffee, Thai food, and music.

R - 4

To elect Judy Nelson to serve her first three-year term as an at-large member of the GLR Executive Committee. (ADOPTED)

Mik Sutton will be completing his second term on this committee on May 31. Northern Michigan Classis suggested Laurel Van Haitsma as a replacement for Mik. Laurel has agreed to serve as a member of the GLR Executive Committee, if elected. The GLR Executive Committee voted to nominate Laurel.

Laurel Van Haitsma has been a member of Mason County Reformed Church (MCRC) of Scottville, MI for the past 27 & 1/2 years, serving by the side of her late husband, the Rev. Rick Van Haitsma for 26 of those years. They also served at Beechwood Reformed Church in Holland, MI for 12 & 1/2 years. Laurel is a 1972 graduate of Hope College. She has two married sons, Bryan (& Erika) and Jared (& Lori), and 8 grandchildren with #9 expected in August. Laurel is currently serving as coordinator of the Hand2Hand backpack feeding program and is a mentor for Kid's Hope, both outreach programs at MCRC. She also serves on the Board for Covenant Christian School of Ludington, MI, where she previously taught 3rd-4th grades for 10 years. Having now walked the path of widowhood, God has created a passion in Laurel's heart for widows and is waiting on God's leading on how to develop a bereavement ministry. Her favorite pastimes are reading and walking the trails at the Ludington State Park or walking the breakwater to Ludington lighthouse.

R - 5

To elect Laurel VanHaitsma to serve her first three-year term as an at-large member of the GLR Executive Committee. (ADOPTED)

Dave Mejeur will be completing his second term on this committee on May 31. SW Michigan Classis suggested Curry Pikkaart, Senior Pastor at Hope Reformed in South Haven. Curry has agreed to serve as a member of the GLR Executive Committee, if elected. The GLR Executive Committee voted to nominate Curry.

Curry Pikkaart has been the Pastor of Hope Reformed Church of South Haven, MI since the fall of 2005. Having graduated from Western Theological Seminary in 1974, he has served all but 2 of his 41 years of pastoral ministry in the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes. During that time he has served as President of the RSGL and of both North Grand Rapids and Southwest Michigan Classes. He has been blessed for over 45 years by his wife Barb, who in turn are blessed with 3 sons and 8 grandchildren. While he loves studying to preach, teach, and write he also loves the outdoors and the wonderful South Haven beaches. An avid sports fan, he coached youth soccer for many years. He and Barb are looking forward to more time, travel, and projects together following his retirement from full-time pastoral ministry in September. In retirement they will continue to live in South Haven ('South Heaven' as some call it) and Curry hopes to continue to be active in the RCA. And, being retired, he'll have more time for a cup of coffee, donuts from the Golden Brown Bakery, or some fabulous Sherman's Ice Cream. So when you visit the South Haven beaches, look him up.

R - 6

To elect Curry Pikkaart to serve his first three-year term as an at-large member of the GLR Executive Committee. (ADOPTED)

Glenn Emmert will be completing his service as Past Past-President on May 31, 2015, and Kevin Kleinheksel, who was a member of Zeeland Classis when elected to the GLR Executive Committee, transferred to the Holland Classis. Zeeland Classis suggested the name of Bob VanderZwaag for the open at-large member position. Bob is willing to serve as a member of the GLR Executive Committee, if elected. The GLR Executive Committee voted to nominate Bob.

Bob VanderZwaag was born and raised in the Holland/Zeeland, MI area, and has been a part of Community Reformed Church of Zeeland since 1978, serving as a youth leader, Sunday School/Catechism teacher, deacon, elder, search committee chairperson, Kids Hope USA Program Director, and a number of other committees. Currently he serves as an elder and as a Spiritual Formation Team member at Community, along with serving on the Executive Committee of Zeeland Classis, and as President of the Michigan County Social Services Association. Bob recently retired after 41 years in the field of education, serving in the Zeeland Public Schools, at Cornerstone University, and most recently as the Administrator of Borculo Christian School in Zeeland, MI. Bob graduated from Grand Valley State Colleges (University) in 1973, and received a MA degree from Michigan State University in 1981. Bob has been married to his wife Sandy for 38 years, has three adult children, and is further blessed by 6 grandchildren - all of whom live within 25 miles of the VanderZwaag homestead.

R - 7

To elect Bob VanderZwaag to serve his first three-year term as an at-large member of the GLR Executive Committee. (ADOPTED)

Election of the President and Vice-President

Brief biographies of those nominated by the Executive Committee are printed below. This year we must elect the vice-president from among those delegates who are not ministers of Word and sacrament. Additional candidates may be nominated from the floor at the Assembly meeting for the office of vice-president.

2015 Presidential Candidate

Dean Van Farowe has been Pastor of Calvary Reformed Church in Cleveland, Ohio since 2000. A native of Hamilton, MI, he graduated from Northwestern College (IA) in 1996 and Western Theological Seminary (M.Div.) in 2000. He and his wife Christine were married in 2002, and have been blessed with three elementary-aged children, Zechariah, Elijah, and Anna. He looks forward to long walks with his wife, coaching his boys' basketball team, and helping his daughter with her piano practice. Calvary, Cleveland, is known for its Christ-centered discipleship & counseling ministries, its ethnic diversity, and its pantry & karate programs.

2015 Vice-Presidential Candidates

Dave Mejeur is a member of Southwest Michigan Classis. He was born and raised in Kalamazoo and has been a lifelong member of Centerpoint Church of Kalamazoo, MI (formerly Third Reformed Church), where he has served as elder and deacon. He has also served as a member of the executive committee of the Classis of Southwest Michigan. Dave and his wife Kris have three married children and ten grandchildren. Two of the children make their home in the Hudsonville/Jenison area and one lives in the Kalamazoo area. Dave has worked in the pharmaceutical industry for thirty-five years at the same location, for four different companies.

Branson Parler serves as an elder at Fourth Reformed Church in North Grand Rapids Classis, where he and his family have attended since 2009. He is completing his seventh year as a professor of theological studies at Kuyper College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He graduated from Calvin Theological Seminary (Ph.D.) in 2010. He and his wife Sarah have been married for almost 12 years, and they have four children: Eliana (6), Ruby (4), Christian (2), and Ephraim (10 months). He thoroughly enjoys his vocation as a professor and the opportunity to help the next generation of church leaders ask good questions, cultivate a sense of wonder at God's love and grace, and embrace the value of growing in community. With four small kids, there's not much time for hobbies, but he enjoys playing basketball, being the czar of various fantasy football and March Madness competitions at Kuyper, garage-saling with his wife, just hanging out with his family, and reading good novels as well as all the nerdy theology books he possibly can.

Mik Sutton has been a member of Mason County Reformed Church (MCRC) in the Northern Michigan Classis, since 1980. Mik served in the field of Special Education for 32 amazing years, initially as a teacher, then as a consultant, and lastly as a supervisor of special education and transition services. Mik received a B.A. and M.A. in special education from Western Michigan University and, later, an M.A. in Educational Leadership from GVSU. In 2006, Mik retired and entered the RCA Commissioned Pastor Program. After he completed his studies, he was commissioned as Pastor of Intercession and care at MCRC in December of 2008. In October of 2009, he was commissioned as the senior pastor of Grant Reformed Church in Grant, Michigan, and served there until July of 2013. Since then, Mik has developed a weekly prayer outreach that covers people, churches, ministries, and organizations. He also does pulpit supply, funerals, visitations, and leads a weekly men's small group. Mik has served on the MCRC Consistory, and as a member of the boards for Mason County Habitat for Humanity, Mason County Library, the Northern Michigan Classis, and Words of Hope. Mik and Polly, married for 37 years, have five adult children, three grandchildren, and two great grandchildren. They continue to live on their small farm near Walhalla. They enjoy family, friends, traveling, camping, kayaking, and serving in accordance with the Lord's call.

ELECTION OF THE PRESIDENT

The current vice-president, Dean Van Farowe, was presented as the sole candidate for the office of president. Delegates used the provided ballots to vote for the President of the Synod of the Great Lakes. Dean Van Farowe was elected as President on the first ballot.

GREAT LAKES INTERNATIONAL CLASSIS REPORT

Kevin Kleinheksel, reporting

At the November 10, 2014 meeting of the GLR Executive Committee, a motion was approved to ask Rick Veenstra to appoint a small task force to work toward the formation of the Great Lakes International Classis (GLIC) and to ask Holland Classis and Beechwood Church to form small working groups to assist in the implementation of this new classis. The GLIC Task Force met twice on December 15, 2014 and February 9, 2015. Members of the task force include the following people: Mike Ellis, Jim Lankheet, Hugo Vasquez, Sharon Knibbe, Jeanette Beagley-Koolhaas, Rick Veenstra, Kevin Kleinheksel, and Howard Moths.

The task force discussed two steps in the process of establishing the GLIC: 1) the classis is formed as a corporate entity, and 2) churches and ministers are transferred to the newly formed classis. The amendment that was approved by the GLR Assembly on May 5 created the following conditions before the process of forming the Classis may be completed: "when two additional churches are organized among the church plants, so that the classis has no less than three organized local churches." The group delegated the task of the formation of the classis as a corporate entity to a smaller group (GLIC Interim Leadership Team). The GLIC Interim Leadership Team met on January 7, and approved provisional *Rules of Order* and *Guiding Principles* for the Great Lakes International Classis.

On February 9, Mike Ellis (VP of the Beechwood Consistory) reported that Beechwood Reformed Church held a congregational meeting on February 8 to vote on a proposed change in their bylaws to make the church accountable to the new Great Lakes International Classis when it is formed. The vote was just short of the required 2/3 vote in favor. The Beechwood Consistory met the evening of February 9 and decided that Beechwood needs to pause their part of establishing this new classis until they have had time to listen and address the concerns of the members in our congregation. Jim Lankheet suffered a heart attack on February 2, creating additional uncertainty about the participation of Beechwood Church.

Jeanette Beagley-Koolhaas reported that the process for organizing Iglesia Alas de Águila is moving ahead under the supervision of the Holland Classis Church Supervision and Support Committee. Conversations are beginning with the Nepali-Speaking Community Church following the process for receiving a congregation by adoption approved for use by the 1996 General Synod (1996 MGS, pp. 358-360). The Holland Classis Church Supervision and Support Committee met on February 19 to discuss the process for organizing Iglesia Alas de Águila and adopting the Nepali-Speaking Community Church. It is possible that the Nepali-Speaking Church may choose to be received by the Great Lakes City Classis, instead of the Holland Classis. If that happens, additional action will be required by the Assembly of the Synod of the Great Lakes before the Nepali Church could become part of the International Classis.

In December, the GLIC task force had discussed the possibility that the GLR Executive Committee would set the date for the organization of the new classis on April 1, 2015, anticipating that three churches would be ready to populate the classis. Given the uncertainty about the participation of the Beechwood Church and the organization or adoption of two additional churches, the organization of the classis will need to be delayed to a later date. The task force discussed several other possibilities. It might be possible to move ahead with the organization of the International Classis without the participation of Beechwood Church. However, that would require the identification of at least two other churches to join with Iglesia Alas de Águila. Hugo Vasquez expressed a desire to explore other options for populating the new classis with churches that share the same vision.

The group decided to request that the regional synod Executive Committee lay out a path for other organized churches who share the vision to become a part of the Great Lakes International Classis. The task force is not suggesting that we hurry the organization of the new classis, but rather to keep all options open for populating the classis in the future.

The GLR Executive Committee met on March 16 and discussed ways to move forward with the organization of the International Classis. The 2014 GLR Assembly only authorized the formation of the GLIC with Beechwood and its plants. If other churches (particularly those from other classes) are going to join the GLIC, or if Beechwood Reformed Church does not intend to participate in the formation of the new classis, then action will be required by the GLR Assembly.

Robert's Rules of Order allows an assembly to "amend something previously adopted" if it is desired to change a part of the text, or to substitute a different version. The motion "to amend something previously adopted" can be applied to any motion adopted at a previous meeting which has a continuing force and effect. This motion to amend requires a 2/3 vote for approval, unless prior notice of such a motion has been given at a previous meeting, or in the call to the current meeting. With prior notice given, the motion to amend may be carried by a majority vote. The recommendation below constitutes prior notice. (RONR, 11th ed., pp. 305-309)

The GLR Executive Committee recommended the following motion to the May 4, 2015 Assembly meeting:

R - 8

To amend the motion previously adopted by the GLR Assembly on May 5, 2014 that reads: "To form a new classis to be named "Great Lakes International Classis" and to transfer Beechwood Reformed Church and all its current church plants and projects into the new classis. During the transition period of May 6, 2014 through December 31, 2014, all assessments will be paid to Holland Classis, and the systems and structures for new classis will be put into place. Beginning on January 1, 2015, or when two additional churches are organized among the church plants, so that the classis has no less than three organized local churches, the new Great Lakes International Classis will begin functioning as a classis with assessments paid from the membership of that classis," with the substitute motion to read: "To authorize the GLR Executive Committee to develop a new plan for the formation of the Great Lakes International Classis including other churches not named in the original

proposal in conversation with the classes within our region, and to report back to the 2016 Assembly meeting.” (NOT ADOPTED: 26 in the affirmative, 27 in the negative)

REGIONAL SYNOD ASSESSMENT BY VIP RESEARCH

Megan Mullins, reporting

The GLR Executive Committee contracted with Megan Mullins of VIP Research to conduct an evaluation of the work of the regional synod that included interviews and online surveys. At this Assembly, Megan presented a PowerPoint presentation that summarized the results of her research and asked the delegates to respond to the questions: 1) How can communication be improved? And 2) What local issues, topics, or needs should the regional synod address? The delegates discussed the questions and wrote down answers on large sheets of paper. Each table reported on their discussion to the whole Assembly, making suggestions in areas where the regional synod could be of more help. The Executive Committee has appointed an Evaluation Implementation Team to respond to the assessment by Megan Mullins that includes Gordon Christian, Dean Van Farowe, and Erik Cook. The responses of the small groups will be reviewed by this team.

ELECTION OF VICE-PRESIDENT

Dave Mejeur, Branson Parler, and Mik Sutton were nominated by the Executive Committee as candidates for the office of vice-president. Nominations for the regional synod vice-president were opened from the floor. No additional nominations were made by the delegates. The names Branson Parler and Mik Sutton appeared on the second ballot. The vote on that ballot was tie, so the delegates were asked to vote again before lunch. The third ballot was also ended in a tie vote. After lunch the Executive Committee made the recommendation to determine the election of vice-president by drawing names. The motion was made, seconded, and carried to approve that recommendation. The name of Branson Parler was drawn, and he was elected as vice-president of the regional synod.

BREAK

REGIONAL EXECUTIVE REPORT

Rick Veenstra, reporting

Rick presented an oral report on the work of the regional synod along with the written reports below. He talked about the VISION of the regional synod expressed in words: **STARTING AND STRENGTHENING CHURCHES BY DEVELOPING LEADERS**. He included the following remarks

For the first time since at least 1988, the Great Lakes Region (GLR) as a whole grew by 139 confessing members from 2012 to 2013, according to the RCA statistics in the “orange book”. The GLR has been growing for several years if multiplication numbers are included, but this is the first time that the actual statistical record has grown from one year to the next. I believe this means that our vision, in partnership with others, to start and strengthen churches by developing leaders is the right vision for the GLR. I also believe that our efforts over the years are in alignment with the new RCA emphasis on Transformed and Transforming, since our efforts are represented in four of the eight RCA initiatives that are currently underway.

I believe we are witnessing cultural transformation in the GLR. We are becoming a culture of transformation, life-long learning, collaboration, innovation, willingness to risk and speaking the truth in love. Therefore, I believe that we need:

- More and better coaching
- More and better networks of support, accountability and learning
- More and better assessments of pastors and congregations
- More and better transitions in congregations
- More and better Ridder Church Renewal processes
- More and better Faith Walking retreats
- More and better Leadership Development Journey opportunities
- More and better LumineX Collaboratives
- More and better communication/web presence
- More and better innovation/experimentation
- More and better spiritual empowerment through prayer

These are the challenges that are before us in my view!

During my tenure we have been judiciously using reserve dollars. We have not raised assessments during my tenure for six years. On December 1, I moved to 80 % work and 60% remuneration in order to live generously and use the assets in other ways in the GLR, primarily improving our web presence and a strategic innovation retainer with a young company named Lanio. The bulk of the increase relates to the addition of a Leadership Development line in the budget (we have been using reserve dollars) and the 25.25.25 Vision that you will hear about from Doug McClintic, following my report to the Assembly. WE are also developing a Transitional Ministry Services Team that is essentially self-supporting, which you will hear about from Art Wiers, following my report.

CORE LEADERSHIP GOALS for 2014

1. Facilitate with classis leaders three church plant organizations in 2014. UPDATE: The Bridge in Portage organized in the summer of 2014. LifeQuest in Holland organized in early 2015. (The Bridge in Allegan is waiting to organize as soon as Roger Bird completes his Commissioned Pastor process) (Alas, Holland is waiting to organize and the Nepali Church is waiting for adoption)
I report progress on this goal.
2. Maintain 4-6 LumineX Collaboratives in 2014. We will measure results in churches moving to the right on the church health continuum toward fitness center churches, actual church plants, actual fresh starts and actual mission redevelopment projects. UPDATE: 1. Luminex Kalamazoo moved into the active planting phase (phase 3) 2. Luminex Detroit is in the implementation phase (phase 2) 3. Luminex Cleveland is in the implementation phase (phase 2) 4. Luminex Downtown Grand Rapids is in the initial phase (phase 1)
I report compliance with this goal.
3. Multiply the CLT for LumineX leadership with at least three additional persons. UPDATE: 1. Randy Weener is apprenticing. 2. Amy Schenkel is apprenticing. 3. Scott Pontier has agreed to be an apprentice. 4. Clayton Smith and Dale Slings are potential apprentices for Kalamazoo #2.
I report progress with this goal.
4. Develop the RLT as a high-performance team through which we start and strengthen churches by developing leaders. UPDATE: Dan Ackerman (Zeeland Classis Leader), Mike Gafa (NGR Classis Leader) and Don Poest (New City Classis) are now members of the RLT. We continue to strive to identify and recruit apprentices for this team. Rick and Art meet with each member of this team on a regular basis to develop healthy support and accountability. Members of the RLT serve faithfully to help clarify and drive the vision, mission, and values of the RSGL in each of our classes.
I report progress on this goal.
5. Develop a new strategy for transitional and redevelopment ministries in the GLR. UPDATE: Scott Lokers and Tim Meendering are the first two members of our new Transition Ministry Team. They are both serving as full time STM and this team is already providing specialized consulting services for churches in transition. We are in the process of recruiting a third member for this team. Art is in the process of writing a review of our redevelopment ministry efforts over the past five years. Our observations are that much effort and sacrifice in this area of ministry has produced modest and often disappointing results. So we are moving toward more resourcing for Fresh Start opportunities which have been much more productive and fruitful and less or no resourcing for intentional redevelopment ministries.
I report compliance with this goal.
6. Deepen the impact of Ridder Church Renewal (RCR) in the GLR by participation in the RCR Sustaining Team and coaching/consulting with RCR leaders and pastors. We will measure results by observing churches moving toward fitness center churches. UPDATE: Scott Lokers now serves as Ridder and Faith Walking Point Person for the GLR. The new modules launch in October of 2015. Pastors' lunches are now occurring throughout the region in Muskegon, Grand Rapids, Holland/Zeeland and Kalamazoo. The introductory event is set for April 24-25 at Maranatha.
I report progress related to this goal.
7. Employ Rodger Price to facilitate/teach up to four "twenty-four hour" leadership development processes in 2014. UPDATE: We were unable to fulfill this goal and decided to use Rodger Price as

our coach individually and as a team. We also decided to use Meredith Nieuwsma to lead an on-line Leadership Development Journey.

I report non-compliance with this specific goal for the above reasons.

8. Develop a new CITY classis, if God so leads in 2014. UPDATE: We have formed the GL City Classis under the leadership of Randy Weener. We also continue to shepherd the possible formation of the Great Lakes International Classis. A report from the Task Force is included in the agenda for the meeting on March 16.

I report compliance with this goal.

CORE LEADERSHIP TEAM GOALS FOR 2015

1. Facilitate with classis leaders 2-3 church plant organizations in 2015.
2. Maintain 4-6 LumineX Collaboratives in 2015.
3. Multiply LumineX leadership with at least three additional persons in 2015.
4. Add at least one person to the new Transitional Ministry Services Core Team of Scott Lokers and Tim Meendering, along with Art, Doug and Rick, under Art's leadership in 2015.
5. Launch Ridder Church Renewal Modules I and II in 2015 with at least fifteen congregations.
6. Offer at least one Leadership Development Journey opportunity in 2015 with at least six pastors.
7. Develop a new Great Lakes International Classis, as God leads us.
8. Develop a Learning Community for regional staff in the synods of the Heartland, Mid-America and the Great Lakes.

I have a few remarks relating to the proposed Overture to the General Synod of the RCA. I, along with the Core Leadership Team (Art Wiers and Doug McClintic) and the members of the GLR Executive Committee, believe that clarity and the RCA position on human sexuality is needed now, in the light of recent events in our culture and our denomination. The overture seeks clarity. I believe that all people should be welcomed and loved by the Body of Christ, the Church. Christians are simply sinners saved by grace who are charged by God to reach others who also need that grace, found only in Jesus Christ. I believe that unrepentant sin, including sexual sin, is not compatible with holding church office. Homosexual behavior is an example of such sexual sin, along with the use of pornography, promiscuity, and adultery. I believe that sexual activity belongs within the bounds of a marriage relationship between a man and a woman, having been so designed and affirmed by God. I believe these statements represent the current position of the RCA, which needs clarity, and the historic position of the Christian Church since the first century. I believe that you deserve to know where I stand on this important issue that we are facing today.

STARTING AND STRENGTHENING CHURCHES BY DEVELOPING LEADERS

Art Wiers and Doug McClintic, reporting

Art Wiers, Church Health Consultant RSGL, presented an oral report along with the following information.

Our region is moving from decline to growth through the development of leaders who are increasingly Kingdom focused and who are working to keep Christ's mission at the center of all we do in the church. Our core leadership team (Rick, Doug, and myself) focus most of our time and energy on the development of leaders and I believe that will continue to be the most important contribution the work of the region can offer for the increase of Christ's Kingdom and fulfilling His mission.

Moving forward it is my goal to work with the regional leadership team to encourage every currently serving pastor to be well coached and involved in a network where they receive support, accountability and learning opportunities. Between now and the conclusion of this year it is my goal that the regional team point persons along with myself will have a face to face visit with each pastor to make them aware of our support for their work and willingness to help resource them as leaders. We will also be certain our pastors and church leaders are aware of leadership development opportunities like Ridder Church Renewal and Leadership Development Journey. I am committed to increased and more effective communication with classis leaders in an effort to serve each classis as effectively as possible.

Transition Ministry Services continues to develop as we now have Scott Lokers and Tim Meendering on this new team. As we build this team we are offering increased availability of specialized transition consulting for churches that face unexpected challenges or some who may desire to work on succession planning for their lead pastor. We currently have two churches doing intentional succession planning for their lead pastor,

Brunswick Reformed Church in Ohio and Hope Reformed Church in South Haven, and we trust there will be more that will benefit from this resource offered through transition ministry services. It is our goal to make these services available and affordable to those churches that would benefit from them.

What encourages and excites me the most is getting to see God at work in and through our efforts. Some examples that come to mind:

- The remarkable development of Ridder Church Renewal and the transformation of leaders through this effort
- The Luminex Collaboratives that offer opportunities for more churches and pastors to be involved in church planting.
- The creative and strategic mergers that are taking place like Grace Ann Arbor and Crosswinds Canton.
- The Prayer Summit (RCA and CRC) last fall where 80 churches, 400 attendees, and 69 college students joined together on a Friday and Saturday in Holland Michigan to commit to developing more effective prayer ministries in our churches.
- The joy of discovering and working with a leader like Daryl Cripe who is willing to help resource some of our congregations to move to increased health and growth.
- An increased focus on moving toward the cities of our region which includes the merger of two classes in our region this past year.
- Fellow servants like you who will give an entire day to help us better serve each classis and each church in our region.

God is at work throughout our region for which I give praise and thanks. It is my joy and privilege to serve on a terrific team and to be involved in so many places and so many ways for the sake of advancing the mission of Christ. Last summer I went through a serious back injury and wondered if I would be able to return to serve in this capacity. Thank you for your prayers and support during my recovery and most of all I thank the Lord to be able to continue in this good work which I trust He will lead and bless.

Doug McClintic distributed a brochure on Ele's place, a healing center for grieving children and teens. He talked about the block party trailer that can be reserved for evangelistic outreach in neighborhoods for \$150. He read a draft of on a report on church planting within the region with the goal of starting and organizing 25 new churches and sending out 25 missionary church planters to under-resourced and unreached people groups. He also talked about the Luminex Global Collaborative and an upcoming trip to Hungary. Ron Roden from Third Reformed Church commented on the ministry of Ele's place. Ron serves as a member of the board of Ele's Place.

OVERTURES AND JUDICIAL BUSINESS COMMITTEE

Russell Camp, reporting

The Overtures and Judicial Business Committee (OJBC) of the Synod of the Great Lakes met twice in the past year – on November 18, 2014 and March 16, 2015. Each classis appoints one member to the OJBC. Members may serve a maximum of two consecutive four-year terms. The stated clerk serves ex-officio, without vote. Russell Camp serves as chair and Irv Boersen serves as vice-chair.

2014.06.10 Zeeland Classis and Spring Valley Appeal to the General Synod

The Zeeland Classis and Spring Valley Church (SVC) filed an appeal with the General Synod against the decision made by the judicatory of the Synod of the Great Lakes on May 5, 2014 when it approved the following recommendation of the OJBC:

To adopt the decision of the Overtures and Judicial Business Committee of the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes that Phillip and Diane Forner are members of the Spring Valley Community Church in good and regular standing and are under its care and are subject to its government and discipline, as administered by its board of elders.

The General Synod Commission on Judicial Business (CJB) determined that the case and its attendant papers were in order and invited the parties to submit briefs setting forth any arguments they deem appropriate to the case. The written brief of the Regional Synod was filed with the CJB before the November 26, 2014 deadline. The CJB sent a notice of a hearing for Monday, February 16, 2015 in Chicago. Russell Camp and Howard Moths attended the hearing in response to the appeal on behalf of the regional synod. The CJB is writing a report to be considered by the General Synod when it meets at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Illinois on June 11-16, 2015.

September 2, 2014 Appeal filed by Phil and Diane Forner

An appeal was filed with the regional synod by Phil and Diane Forner on September 2, 2014 against the decision of the Zeeland Classis not to hear and decide the appeal of Spring Valley Church's "understanding" of the BCO and their subsequent determination that was communicated to the Forners on June 12, 2014. The OJBC considered if the case and its papers are in order. The committee discussed the relationship of this appeal to the one pending before the General Synod (*above*), and determined that this appeal addressed the same issue – the status of the membership of Phil and Diane Forner in the RCA. The motion was made, seconded, and carried to postpone consideration of this appeal until all appeals related to the membership of the Forners in the Reformed Church in America have been exhausted.

Overtures Received by the Regional Synod

On March 6, 2015, the Synod of the Great Lakes received two overtures from the Holland Classis. The OJBC met to consider how to respond to those overtures and to prepare a report with recommendations, following the *Rules of Order* of the Synod of the Great Lakes that assign this responsibility to the OJBC.

OVERTURE 1

The Holland Classis overtures the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes to change its Rules of Order so that each of its classes appoints one representative to the Synod's Executive Committee.

Reasons:

1. The Rules of Order currently do not require the Executive Committee to consult with its classes regarding who would be serving on the Executive Committee though that person is considered to be "representing" the Classis. If a name is solicited from a classis, such names are considered suggestions which are non-binding on the Executive Committee nomination procedure.
2. A self-appointed committee can lead to the committee being isolated from the bodies it is trying to represent. Under the current Rules of Order, the membership of Synod Executive Committee is set by the Executive Committee itself. We believe that this arrangement is one of the reasons communication has broken down between the Regional Synod and its classes.
3. In the governance model currently in use, the role of the Executive committee is to set policy that is carried out by the staff and to hold the staff accountable for its work among the classes. We believe that this responsibility would be better achieved by having classis-appointed representatives on the Executive Committee than the current system where the staff assists in recruiting members to the Executive Committee.
4. Classis representation on the committee can be a basic way to provide diversity (geographically, gender, and theologically) and create an awareness of the need for diversity.

In response to this overture, the Overtures and Judicial Business Committee of the regional synod recommends the following motion to the 2015 GLR Assembly:

R - 9

To instruct the Overtures and Judicial Business Committee to propose changes in the *Rules of Order* of the Synod of the Great Lakes so that each of its classes nominates one representative to the Synod's Executive Committee to be approved by the Assembly. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The General Synod Council includes one member recommended by each regional synod and elected by the General Synod, along with at-large members nominated to ensure diversity (*BCO*, 3.1.3.1).
2. If our *Rules of Order* are amended to allow nomination by the classes of members who will serve on the regional synod Executive Committee, it would increase a sense of classis ownership in work of the regional synod.
3. Referral of this question to the OJBC will allow time to draft amendments to the GLR *Rules of Order* that will provide for direct classis nomination along with consideration of other means to provide the gifts and diversity needed on the GLR Executive Committee while keeping the committee at a reasonable size.

OVERTURE 2

The Holland Classis overtures the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes to rescind its action of May 5, 2014

which created a new Classis called, the Great Lakes International Classis, and refer the recommendation back to the Executive Committee for further study.

Reasons:

1. The action was taken without regard for the prerogative of the classis. BCO Part III. Article 2. Section 4 states that “the regional synod shall create whatever organization it desires for the furtherance of the work of the gospel within its bounds, provided such organization does not infringe upon the prerogatives of the several classes or churches.” While the Holland Classis acknowledges that the regional synod has a right to create a new classis, we submit that the regional synod infringed on the prerogative of the Holland Classis when it acted unilaterally to create a new classis by removing one of Holland Classis’ churches (Beechwood) and four of its church plants (Iglesia Alas de Aguila - Holland, Iglesia Alas de Aguila – Wyoming, Iglesia Alas de Aguila – Allendale, and Iglesia Alas de Aguila – 28th Street). In so doing, this action diminished the ability of Holland Classis to fulfill what it imagines itself becoming; that is, “a multicultural church freed from racism,” a goal of the RCA as a whole. The Classis was not requested to act on the transfer of these church bodies. The synod declared the church and congregations to be transferred by its action of approving the new classis.
2. The action was taken without regard for the prerogative of the churches. BCO Part II. Article 2. Section 2 states that “the classis that shall exercise a general superintendence over its enrolled ministers and over the interests and concerns of the churches within its bounds, and shall enforce the requirements of the Government of the Reformed Church in America.” We submit that by approving the recommendation last year, the regional synod infringed on the prerogative of a local congregation (Beechwood) and the Holland Classis church plants in that nothing appears in minutes of these faith communities saying that they desire to leave Holland Classis to create or become a member of a new international classis.
3. An action that was taken without consideration of the prerogative of the Holland Classis impacts the prerogatives (visions, missions, and strategic directions) of all classes and congregations (i.e. church plants) of the regional synod. Every classis of the regional synod is developing creative ways (including the planting of new churches) to become more and more a multicultural denomination freed from racism. Some creative efforts have included planting new multicultural congregations in the classis and others have included planting churches outside the traditional geographical boundaries (i.e. The Holland classis is developing multicultural congregations in Allendale, Wyoming, and Grand Rapids.). We believe that when diverse groupings of people stop working independently and start working together in gospel mission that relationships develop across ethnic perspective, that transformation truly begins to take place, and that we become more and more multicultural and freed from racism. In that the action of last year’s regional synod did not prohibit the regional synod from arbitrarily and unilaterally assigning all “international” churches (irrespective of classis) to an “international classis,” it thereby potentially curtails the prerogatives of congregations to remain engaged with other RCA churches in their geographical area and the prerogatives of RCA classes becoming more multicultural and freed from racism inside and out.
4. The original recommendation brought to the floor of the Assembly (May 5, 2014) was “premature” and needed more time to develop.
 - a. The GL Synod staff has stated several times to our Church Multiplication Team that the greatest problem of the new church starts throughout the synod is “pre-mature launch.” In other words, the churches started before they were ready and not yet strong enough to support the responsibility of ministry. The International Classis is a pre-mature launch. With one established church and two congregations that need to be organized to meet the requirement of three churches, this new classis does not have the organizational strength to be a classis. It will need to take resources from other classes in the Synod, both human energy and financial support in order to sustain it.
 - b. The recommendation that was approved lacked the necessary details about how the classis would be formed and who would populate it. For example, who would install the pastors of Beechwood Church? There weren’t and still aren’t enough ministers within the classis to accomplish this basic responsibility. Who is expected to be members of the Classis?
 - c. As an example, look at what is required to organize a local church. The classis must be satisfied that Articles of Incorporation are readied and/or submitted to the State, that Bylaws have been developed for the operation of the church, a membership list has been submitted to the Classis, office-holders have been selected, etc. Were any details about the formation of this Classis prepared for the synod last year? We suggest the recommendation was lacking in detail and a rush to approval overshadowed synod’s need for more information.

- d. The details of the motion that was passed last May was created on the floor of the Assembly by amendments rather than presented as a thought-through plan of action presented to the Assembly.
- e. Why the rush? We don't understand the need to rush into the creation of this new classis. Why, when congregations do not have the strength to organize and pastors are still in training to prepare for their commissioning, is it necessary to form a new classis and burden these pastors with this new organization? Why can't we have a conversation among classes about a strategy for a multi-cultural future before acting on this one proposal? Why, when time is the greatest asset, is not more of it used so this classis can begin on solid footing and the Great Lakes Synod have a strategy in whose development all classes have participated?

While considering this overture, the OJBC was informed of a recommendation approved by the GLR Executive Committee regarding the Great Lakes International Classis that will be presented to the 2015 GLR Assembly as follows:

To amend the motion previously adopted by the GLR Assembly on May 5, 2014 that reads: "To form a new classis to be named "Great Lakes International Classis" and to transfer Beechwood Reformed Church and all its current church plants and projects into the new classis. During the transition period of May 6, 2014 through December 31, 2014, all assessments will be paid to Holland Classis, and the systems and structures for new classis will be put into place. Beginning on January 1, 2015, or when two additional churches are organized among the church plants, so that the classis has no less than three organized local churches, the new Great Lakes International Classis will begin functioning as a classis with assessments paid from the membership of that classis," with the substitute motion to read: "To authorize the GLR Executive Committee to develop a new plan for the formation of the Great Lakes International Classis including other churches not named in the original proposal in conversation with the classes within our region, and to report back to the 2016 Assembly meeting." (See the report of the GLR Executive Committee earlier in this workbook.)

In the light of this action by the GLR Executive Committee, the Overtures and Judicial Business Committee recommended that the Assembly vote to deny the overture. Since the recommendation of the Executive Committee was defeated, the chair of the committee suggested that the Assembly may want to consider alternatives.

R - 10

To deny this overture from the Holland Classis. (NOT ADOPTED)

Reason:

1. Because the recommendation of the GLR Executive Committee to the May 4, 2015 Assembly has addressed the concern within the overture.

Since the Assembly did not adopt the recommendation of the GLR Executive Committee above, the discussion continued regarding how to respond to the overture. Since it was time to break for lunch, discussion of the overture was delayed until the time for Unfinished Business at end of the meeting.

During Unfinished Business, a motion was made and seconded to approve the Overture #2 submitted by the Holland Classis: "To rescind its action of May 5, 2014 which created a new Classis called, the Great Lakes International Classis, and refer the recommendation back to the Executive Committee for further study."

A motion was made and seconded to amend the overture by adding the words: "To charge the GLR Executive Committee to work with the classes and congregations to explore ways to help the Synod of the Great Lakes to move more purposefully into a multicultural future (free from racism) and to report back to the 2016 Assembly meeting." (NOT APPROVED: 24 in the affirmative, 28 in the negative)

VOTED: To approve Overture #2 as submitted by the Holland Classis was ADOPTED.

Overtures and Judicial Business Committee

Russell Camp, Irv Boersen, Rob Teitsma, Jared Van Noord, Susan Vogel-Vanderson, Case VanKempen, and Tim Vink.

LUNCH AND FELLOWSHIP TIME

Glenn Emmert led the Assembly in a prayer before the meal. Lunch was served to all the delegates and guests buffet-style.

Gordon Christian called the meeting to order after lunch. The Assembly completed the election process for the office of vice-president by electing Branson Parler as vice-president. Gordon opened the afternoon session with prayer, including a prayer request that was received for a student at Western Seminary. Rick Veenstra introduced Mike Gafa, who serves as the Classis Leader for North Grand Rapids Classis

FAITH-BASED STRATEGIC PLANNING

Mike Gafa, reporting

The Case for Planning

Steven Covey taught that we must always begin with the end in mind. But is what Covey advocates biblical? Or more to the point, is planning biblical? Let's turn to scripture ...

Proverbs 21:5: "The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty."

Planning does in fact have a place in the Christian life, and helps us to avoid making hasty decisions that lead to poverty – to ruin.

Proverbs 16:3: "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed."

It's imperative that we submit our plans unto God. Why?

Proverbs 19:21: "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails."

In summary then, diligent plans lead to gain, but our plans must always be set apart for the Lord and held loosely, because invariably God's purpose prevails.

Three Approaches to Planning

It seems to me that there are three approaches to planning that churches can take: fear-based, fact-based, and faith-based. And while we know that the right approach is to make plans that are faith-based, in truth many churches make plans that are rooted in fear, and/or in fact, more so than faith.

1. Fear-Based Planning ...

Proverbs 29:25: "Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe."

Fear causes paralysis; it keeps us stuck in place. Fear can drive a person to take his talent and bury it in the ground, and fear can drive a church to either not plan at all, or to make the same plans and budgets time and time again. They may look a little different, and we may even present them differently, but really they're not - because fear has a way of keeping us stuck in place.

2. Fact-Based Planning ...

Proverbs 29:25: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding."

As an administrator, I am all too familiar with the tendency to make fact-based plans. What we want is data, and lots of it! That way we can make data-based plans and data-based budgets and data-based goals and data-based charts ... and become increasingly myopic. But data isn't the problem; rather, the problem comes when we become more data-driven than Gospel-driven; more reliant on facts than faith; more trusting of what we can see than what we can't see. That's when spiritual blindness sets in.

3. Faith-Based Planning ...

Hebrews 11:1-2: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for."

Unlike fear-based planning that results in paralysis, or fact-based planning that results in blindness, faith-based planning results in commendation! Faith is what God commended the ancients for, and faith is what God commends us for. But it's not easy, is it? Fear can overcome us and facts can overwhelm us, and when either happens, faith takes a backseat. Our plans must be rooted not in fear or fact, but in faith.

Planning Cycle & Alignment Model

Strategic planning in the church is a delicate undertaking! If you establish a viable planning process and simply repeat it year over year, your planning will quickly become stale and uninspiring, with little room to think creatively and be led by the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, if you introduce a new planning process every year, your planning will lack continuity and cohesion, and will instead bring about chaos and uncertainty. Both of these approaches are flawed, but there is a third approach that takes the best of both: Begin by establishing a basic framework that lends itself to a viable, repeatable planning process, and then be intentional to allow ample room to seek and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. The planning cycle is built around six essential steps – preparation, assessment, long-range planning, annual planning, alignment, and execution. The average time required for each of the first five steps is around a month, while the "execution" step typically spans a full twelve months. While there is flexibility in defining a planning

framework, we must always start with the Great Commission and Great Commandment. All that we do must flow from, and point back, to Jesus' commission and command for us.

The F.A.I.T.H. Filter is a tool that encapsulates five critical aspects that our plans must successfully pass through prior to being finalized. The filter helps to ensure that our plans are ...

Flexible... held loosely; able to change as the Holy Spirit leads us.

Aligned... with the Great Commission, and with our mission, vision and values.

Intertwined... synergized and cohesive so that all of our plans represent a plan.

Transformational... so that lives are changed by the grace and truth of Jesus Christ.

Holy... set apart to God, consecrated to God ... fully surrendered to God.

Our plans need to be Flexible - held loosely. Why? Because we need to allow space for God to change our plans, and to accept that even if our plans are on the mark, God's timing likely won't match ours.

And our plans need to be Aligned - with Scripture, with the Great Commission, and with our mission, vision, and values. But more than that, as we look up and down the planning model, we need to make sure that all of the planning elements are properly aligned.

Our plans need to be Intertwined - synergized and cohesive to the point where our plans become a plan – a single plan, one that is comprehensive, cohesive, and church-wide.

Our plans need to be Transformational – they need to help bring people to Christ, and grow people in Christ. Our plans should be substantial enough to bring transformation to our church, community, and beyond, because good plans always serve to move us from “here to there.”

Finally, our plans must be Holy – set apart to God. Granted, unlike scripture our plans aren't “God-breathed,” but they should be divinely inspired, prayed up, and fully surrendered to God.

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

Irv Boersen and Bill VerHulst, reporting

Irv Boersen presented the report of the committee with regard to the compensation guidelines.

During the past year the Finance Committee has dealt with the following issues:

- Reviewed the report of the Financial Review Committee
- Reviewed and approved some changes in the 2014/15 budget.
- Reviewed the investment manager's report on earnings for 2014, and the current portfolio with the Synod's investment manager.
- Reviewed the financial statements for the year ended September 30, 2014.
- Updated the Minimum Salary Guidelines and Schedule for Ministers of Word and sacrament for 2016.
- Updated voluntary compensation guidelines for church staff of SGL churches for 2016.
- Reviewed and recommended approval of the Ministry Fund Budget and assessment for 2015/16, to the Executive Committee.
- Reviewed the financial statements for the three months ended December 31, 2014.

SALARY GUIDELINES

The 2016 Compensation Guidelines were changed to increase clarity and consistency in the language and to bring the guidelines in conformity to the requirements within the RCA *Book of Church Order*. The committee recommended a 2.3% change from the 2015 guidelines. (*See Appendix.*) The committee recommended:

R - 11

To approve the proposed 2016 Compensation Guidelines for Ministers of Word and sacrament and recommend them to the classes within our region. (ADOPTED)

The Executive Committee requested that the Finance Committee annually review and update the voluntary guidelines published to assist churches in setting reasonable compensation guidelines for certain other church staff members. The committee completed that review and recommended a 2.3% change from the 2015 guidelines. (*See Appendix.*) The committee recommended:

R - 12

To approve the proposed 2016 Church Staff and Benefits Guidelines, and recommend them to the churches to be implemented on a voluntary basis. (ADOPTED)

Bill VerHulst presented the financial reports and proposed budget for the regional synod.

2015/16 BUDGET

Our committee reviewed the needs and requests for the Ministry Fund budget for 2015/16. The Finance Committee looked at each budgeted line item with the purpose of determining if there are ways to lower the costs. In light of the economic conditions – and the fact that many of our congregations and classes are struggling to do ministry, the 2015/16 Ministry Fund Budget reflects the fiscal responsibility to control operational and programmatic costs.

We also have experienced a small, steady decline in confessing membership in recent years. Although we did see an increase last year, one large church transferred to another Synod. The committee decided to propose the 2015/16 budget assuming a loss of 696 confessing members, or 1.54%, from 45,196 in 2014, to 44,500 in 2015. The committee believes that this would be a realistic and conservative approach for estimating the 2016 assessment.

The proposed 2015/16 budget reflects this estimate and proposes an increase of \$1.00. This budget reflects minimal salary increases and changes in uses of consultants.

MINISTRY FUND

The 2016 proposed assessment of \$17.50 in our regional synod represents an increase of \$1.00 over 2015, and will continue to be one of the lowest of the RCA's regional synods. (*See Appendix.*) The committee recommended:

R - 13

To approve the 2015-16 Ministry Fund Budget and the \$17.50 per confessing member assessment. (ADOPTED)

The committee wants to continue to do whatever can be done to control future assessment increases. Each member of the Finance Committee has been appointed by their respective classis and has been involved in the development of this budget and has carefully reviewed the related expenditures.

Please feel free to contact Bill VerHulst anytime – bverhulst@rcagl.org

FINANCE COMMITTEE

Irv Boersen, chair (MUSK)

Bob Zielinski (GLCC)

Chuck Brower (ZEE)

Bill VerHulst, staff

Bob Carlson, vice-chair (HOL) Mike Gafa (NGR)

Darwin Evers (SWM) Vacant (NMI)

TEAM MANDATES THAT WORK

Dan Ackerman, reporting

Rick Veenstra introduced Dan Ackerman, who serves as the Classis Leader for Zeeland Classis.

General view of where we have been/are in church leadership

Typically churches have worked with standing committees as established by *Robert's Rules of Order* or the *Book of Church Order*. Often these committees become known by the noun form (Finance; Education; Service) that describes them rather than the mandate or mission they are expected to carry out. The tendency from this "noun based" identity has been for committees to take the identity of the noun (a name) and miss the opportunity to be the "verb" or action.

Changes in society that push change in the church

There are changes in our society and congregational life that are forcing us to rethink standing committees and "noun" based committees. Some of those forces/changes are people's view of time. Time is moving from a responsibility to a gift that people offer. The view of value leads to the question of what was accomplished. Think of the question, "Was something a waste of time?" as a critique of time and value. This is accompanied by people's views of commitment. Formerly, 3-year terms empowered by stability were expected. Today, many people can't see beyond a single school year and are fearful of committing to anything – especially something that may take a weekly commitment for more than 3-4 months. People's view of work and belonging is changing. The use of "third place" coffee shop at work and in life breeds the idea that task and belonging fit together. This is matched with the idea that most people have outcomes and evaluations at work.

Mandates

Mandates should be characterized by a specific focus, limited scope, outcomes and measurability. In order to provide this specificity, mandates that work will require a clear sense that the mandatory is giving authority, responsibility, and accountability in equal measures by use of the mandate.

In order for this to happen, mandates need to be built around and answer key questions:

- Who is going to get it done Authority
- What needs to be done? Authority
- How much can be spent getting it done? Responsibility
- What are the boundaries to getting it done? Responsibility
- How will we know when it is done? Accountability

Mandates that are built around answering these key questions will provide clarity and the opportunity for success in the lives of those who build mandates and those who work to fulfill the mandate.

ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION & BREAK

OVERTURE TO THE GENERAL SYNOD

Gordon Christian, Reporting

The officers of the regional synod presented a rough draft of an overture that was initiated at a meeting on Thursday, April 2. That meeting was called to consider a request of a pastor within our region for a response to the recent events in the news and in the RCA that have pushed the LGBT agenda to the forefront. We were asked to take the lead on this issue decisively and assertively from our officially stated position on homosexuality. Overtures to the General Synod are due ten days following the annual meeting of regional synod (BCO, Chapter 3, Part II, Article 2, Section 7). The proposed overture was revised during the conference call through discussion and voting. The revised overture below was approved by the Executive Committee and presented to the Assembly for consideration.

The Regional Synod of the Great Lakes overtures the General Synod to bring moral clarity to the General Synod statements on human sexuality by adding the following statements:

1. All people are loved by God, and we are called to love and welcome them for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, so that by the power and working of the Holy Spirit, they might someday become like all believers – sinners saved by the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Repentance of sin is an essential step in accessing the offer of full forgiveness, and necessary if we would faithfully pursue serving Christ as the Lord and Savior of our lives.
2. All sexual activity outside of the bounds of a marriage relationship between a man and a woman is sinful, including pornography, adultery, promiscuity, and homosexual behavior. Although all sin is the same in the sight of God, sexual sins place our call to honor Christ in unique jeopardy (1 Corinthians 6:18-20).
3. Persons who choose to engage in sexual sins, and are unrepentant regarding this sin, must not be elected or allowed to continue to serve as office holders in the church. Although all believers receive a ministry to witness to Jesus as Savior and Lord, office holders serve as examples of faithful service and holy living and submit to a higher standard in both life and doctrine.

Reasons:

1. The rapid changes in attitudes in our society call for clarity in the voice of the church with regard to human sexuality. All statements made by the church call for pastoral sensitivity and Biblical faithfulness. We dare not sacrifice one for the other.
2. The General Synod instructed the Commission on Theology “to draft a paper on human sexuality from a Reformed perspective to be presented to General Synod 2015” (*MGS 2013*, R-54, p. 181). The preliminary report planned by the Commission may not address this subject with the moral clarity necessary at this time (*MGS 2014*, pp. 284-285).

R - 14

To approve the overture above and send it to the General Synod. (ADOPTED: 35 in the affirmative, 20 in the negative)

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

The report of the Overture and Judicial Business Report was completed. (*See above.*)

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS

Classical Minutes Committee

Bob Karel, reporting

Minutes of the classes within our region were examined by the committee before the meeting. Minutes from all seven classes were submitted and found to be in order. The committee members completed feedback forms that will be sent to each classis Stated Clerk.

Resolutions/Leave of Absence Committee

Tom Elenbaas, reporting

The committee recommended approval of the following five resolutions:

R - 15

To thank Glenn Emmert for his four years of service on the Synod of the Great Lakes Executive Committee as vice-president, president, past president, and past past president. (ADOPTED)

R - 16

To thank Phyllis Garvelink for her six years of service on the Synod of the Great Lakes Executive Committee as an at-large member. (ADOPTED)

R - 17

To thank Dave Mejeur for his six years of service on the Synod of the Great Lakes Executive Committee as an at-large member. (ADOPTED)

R - 18

To thank Mik Sutton for his six years of service on the Synod of the Great Lakes Executive Committee as an at-large member. (ADOPTED)

R - 19

To thank Remembrance Reformed Church for making its facility available for this year's assembly. (ADOPTED)

An excused absence was granted to the following delegates who requested one: Erik Cook (GLR Executive Committee), Dan Sewell (Great Lakes City Classis), and James Vander Meiden (Muskegon Classis).

The following delegates were absent without excuse from the 2015 Assembly meeting: Ken DeKok (Northern Michigan Classis), Ken Kuzma (Muskegon Classis), and Kent Frens (Southwest Michigan Classis). A message regarding unexcused absences will be sent to the Stated Clerk of the appropriate classis. In response, we were informed that Rev. Kent Frens had a family emergency on Sunday evening and was out of town all of Monday.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Delegates were asked to turn in their evaluation forms and reimbursement forms for the Assembly meeting. Delegates were given the opportunity to recycle their nametags, three-ring binders, and workbook papers.

READING OF THE JOURNAL

Howard Moths read the minutes of this session by title: *The 60th Annual Session of the Synod of the Great Lakes Minutes, Convened at Remembrance Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan, May 4, 2015*. The Executive Committee will review and approve the minutes before publication.

SEATING OF THE NEW OFFICERS

Gordon Christian invited the past-president, Kevin Kleinheksel, to come forward to seat the newly elected officers. Kevin invited Dean Van Farowe, the newly elected president, and Brandson Parler, the newly elected vice-president to come forward. Kevin congratulated them on their election and formerly seated them as officers.

CLOSING PRAYER

Kevin Kleinheksel closed the Assembly meeting with prayer.

ADJOURNMENT

Dean Van Farowe took over as the presiding officer. The motion was made, seconded, and carried to adjourn this Assembly of the Synod of the Great Lakes. The meeting was adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

Howard H. Moths
Stated Clerk, Synod of the Great Lakes