

**Synod of the Great Lakes
Meeting and Minutes
Convened at Remembrance Church
Grand Rapids, Michigan
Sixty-First Annual Session
May 2, 2016**

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 2, 2016. Delegates were asked to be seated and to introduce themselves to others seated around the same round table. President Dean Van Farowe 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. * designates a second year delegate.

GREAT LAKES CITY CLASSIS

Mr. Glenn Bartman, 3310 Raven Avenue, Wyoming, MI, 49509
Rev. Dan Beyer, 12200 West M-179 Highway, Wayland, MI, 49348
Rev. Jay Carroll, 1040 Orchard Avenue, Aurora, OH, 44202
Rev. Darrell Dalman, 21 Murray Street, Kentwood, MI, 49548
Mr. Steve Granlund, 4000 Westbrook Drive #227, Brooklyn, OH, 44144
Mr. William Hop, 1372 Lynn Drive, Middleville, MI, 49333 *
Ms. Jeanette Meringa, 6750 Union Avenue, Grand Rapids, MI, 49548
Rev. Peter TeWinkle, 2010 Kalamazoo Avenue, Grand Rapids, MI, 49507

HOLLAND CLASSIS

Mr. Don Fredricks, 6289 Mista Drive, Allendale, MI, 49401 *
Mrs. Phyllis Garvelink, 6378 146th Avenue, Holland, MI, 49423
Rev. Janelle Lopez-Koolhaas, 347 Washington Avenue, Holland, MI, 49423 *
Mr. Gary Morris, 630 State Street, Holland, MI, 49423
Rev. Jill Russell, 77 West 11th Street, Holland, MI, 49423
Rev. John Schmidt, 172 West 15th Street, Holland, MI, 49423 *
Rev. Leigh VanKempen, A4643 Pine Drive, Holland, MI, 49423
Mr. Daniel Woolsey, 351 Stone Harbor Road, Holland, MI, 49424

MUSKEGON CLASSIS

Rev. Randy Bremmer, 13080 Acadia, Grand Haven, MI, 49417 *
Rev. Paul Burmeister, 1306 Mills, North Muskegon, MI, 49445
Rev. Amy deGroot-Bowling, 8662 Sheridan Street, Montague, MI, 49437 *
Mr. Ken Giddis, 4687 Church Street, Montague, MI, 49437 *
Mr. Jim Heckethorn, 5429 Staple Road, Twin Lake, MI, 49457
Ms. Jan Hendrick, 13485 Lakeshore Drive, Grand Haven, MI, 49417
Mr. Richard Kuiper, 632 Lake Avenue, Grand Haven, MI, 49417
Rev. Jim Vander Meiden, 2150 Baldwin, Jenison, MI, 49428 *

NORTH GRAND RAPIDS CLASSIS

Rev. Kathy Bartels, 1465 Three Mile Road, Grand Rapids, MI, 49544
Mr. Tom Boehm, 6316 Springmont Drive, Hudsonville, MI, 49426
Ms. Lin Cline, 250 Sunset Hills, Grand Rapids, MI, 49354
Rev. Kristie Keil, 8297 Coldwater Road, Flushing, MI, 48433 *
Ms. Pam Kragt, 1040 Roger, Grand Rapids, MI, 49544 *
Rev. Jennifer Petersen, 1050 Pulawski, Grand Rapids, MI, 49504
Rev. Jessica Shults, 202 Cummings, Grand Rapids, MI, 49534 *
Ms. Wilma Nelson, 192 Rollingwood Drive, Rockford, MI, 49341

NORTHERN MICHIGAN CLASSIS

Rev. Mike De Ruyter, 1100 N. Saginaw Road, Midland, MI, 48460 *
Mr. Bert Jackson, 4872 South Ferris, Newaygo, MI, 49337
Rev. Tom Jasperse, 605 Hemlock, Fremont, MI, 49412 *
Mr. David Meyering, 9125 West Meyering Road, McBain, MI. 49657
Rev. Chip Sauer, 100 Oak Street, Charlevoix, MI, 49720
Mr. Rick Shooks, 7468 Atwood Road, Elsworth, MI, 49729 *
Mr. Mik Sutton, 6303 East Hansen Road, Fountian, MI, 49410

SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN CLASSIS

Mr. Dan Bussema, 4200 West Michigan Avenue, Kalamazoo, MI, 49006
Ms. Jan Drolen, 3706 Tartan Circle, Portage, MI, 49024
Mr. Randy Eding, 09093 Riverben Drive, South Haven MI, 49090
Rev. Mark Hofstra, 200 Pine Street, Deactur, MI, 49045
Rev. Jonathan Loper, 2951 Promenade Drive, Kalamazoo, MI, 49009 *
Mr. Alan Jackson, 2410 Hunters Woods, Kalamazoo, MI, 49048
Rev. Brian Stone, 6800 Springbrook, Kalamazoo, MI, 49004
Rev. Mark Vanderson, 5676 Quail Hollow Circle, Kalamzoo, MI, 49009

ZEELAND CLASSIS

Ms. Kay Bolman, 1684 South Trillium Circle, Zeeland, MI, 49464
Rev. Marc de Waard, 4991 Oak Street, Box 1, Hamilton, MI, 49419 *
Rev. Tom Dekker, 3554 M-40, Hamilton, MI, 49419 *
Mrs. Sandra Houston, 1611 Highland Drive, Holland, MI, 49423
Rev. Chris Peiters, 4515 104th Avenue, Zeeland, MI, 49464
Mr. Bob VanderZwaag, 3580 104th Avenue, Zeeland, MI, 49464
Mr. Keith Walters, 940 Knoll Drive, Zeeland, MI, 49464
Rev. Barbara Yandell, 13100 Lubbock Lane, Austin, TX, 78729

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

President:	Rev. Dean Van Farowe
Vice-President:	Dr. Branson Parler
Past-President:	Mr. Gordon Christian
Past Past-President:	Rev. Kevin Kleinheksel
Finance Committee Chairperson:	Mr. Irv Boersen
At-Large Members:	Rev. Eric Cook
	Mr. Rob Holland
	Mrs. Laurel Kempkers
	Rev. Judy Nelson
	Rev. Curry Pikkaart
	Rev. Dan Sewell
	Rev. Greg Stamm
	Mr. Bob VanderZwaag
Regional Executive:	Rev. Rick Veenstra
Stated Clerk/Parliamentarian (non-voting):	Rev. Howard Moths

SYNOD STAFF (non-voting)

Mrs. Alison DeBoer	Operations Manager, Full-Time
Rev. Dr. Doug McClintic	Church Multiplication Consultant Catalyst, Full-Time
Rev. Howard Moths	Stated Clerk, Part-Time
Rev. Rick Veenstra	Regional Executive/ Leadership Development Catalyst, Full-Time
Mr. Bill VerHulst	Treasurer, Part-Time
Rev. Art Wiers	Church Health Catalyst, 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 employed as classis leaders, stated clerks, or RCA staff that are present, and 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)

Approval of the 2015 Assembly Minutes

The minutes of the Assembly of the Synod of the Great Lakes that was held on May 4, 2015, 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 2015 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

Leigh VanKempen, chair
Randy Bremmer
Rick Kuiper
Mik Sutton
Howard Moths (staff)

Study Committee

Not appointed

Tellers

Amy deGroot-Bowling, chair
Tom Boehm
Mike De Ruyter
Jan Drolen
Bill Hop
Chris Pieters
Jess Shultz
Howard Moths (staff)

Resolution/Leave of Absence Committee

Marc deWaard, chair
Don Fredricks
Phyllis Garvelink
Chip Sauer
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 - 2

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

OPENING PRAYER AND WORSHIP

Dean opened the meeting with prayer. Our opening worship was led by Ray Hudson from First Christian Reformed Church of Gross Point and New city Fellowship Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The delegates sang the songs, *You Are Good, How Great is Our God, How Great Thou Art*, and *Here I Am to Worship*. Dean concluded the worship time with another prayer.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Dean Van Farowe, reporting

As Dean presented his report, our vice-president, Branson Parler, took the chair.

One of the responsibilities of the president of the regional synod is to prepare a report for the annual Assembly on the state of religion within our bounds. I have read the reports on the state of religion from the presidents of the classes and offer this report. Let's begin by entering into God's word: 1 Corinthians 2:1-5:

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him

crucified. And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

Introduction: Costly Grace

I like a good book! The first chapter, the engaging middle, the conclusion. But in the award-winning biography *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*, by Eric Metaxas, it's the foreword by Tim Keller that I remember most. Keller introduces this biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a key leader in the resistance in Nazi Germany, by describing the church in Germany at the time of Bonhoeffer's seminal work, *The Cost of Discipleship*:

It is impossible to understand Bonhoeffer's book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, without becoming acquainted with the shocking capitulation of the German church to Hitler in the 1930s. How could the "church of Luther," that great teacher of the gospel, have ever come to such a place? The answer is that the true gospel, summed up by Bonhoeffer as costly grace, had been lost. On the one hand, the church had become marked by formalism. That meant going to church and hearing that God just loves and forgives everyone, so it doesn't really matter much how you live. Bonhoeffer called this cheap grace. On the other hand, there was legalism, or salvation by law and good works...

Both of these impulses made it possible for Hitler to come to power. The formalists in Germany may have seen things that bothered them, but saw no need to sacrifice their safety to stand up to them. Legalists responded by having pharisaical attitudes toward other nations and races that approved of Hitler's policies. But as one, Germany lost hold of the brilliant balance of the gospel that Luther so persistently expounded – "We are saved by faith alone, but not by faith which is alone".

One of the reasons, says Keller, that the German church lost its way is that an impersonal forgiveness was being proclaimed, rather than salvation through the sacrificial Christ, the crucified one. The work of Christ was divorced from the person of Christ, to tragic results. The people developed a faith that was alone, not prepared to lay down their lives for the Jewish people, cheap instead of costly grace. Christ's costly grace changes us from the inside out, and we want to live the same way.

In our Scripture today, the apostle Paul tells of his resolve back when he was in Corinth: to know nothing while he was with them except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. He didn't preach a formal system of theology, but a person: Jesus Christ, the Lord, the Savior. Jesus Christ was his gospel. Paul reiterated this gospel in later letters:

From Romans 1:1a, 1:1c, 1:3-4 – Paul...set apart for the gospel of God...the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord...

From 2 Timothy 2:8 – Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David—that is my gospel, for which I suffer hardship.

Reflection: Costly Grace In Our Regional Synod

Let's reflect on the ministry of the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes through the template of Christ's costly grace. Is Christ being preached and Christ being lived? In what ways might we be tempted to fall away from the full gospel? And in this tumultuous time in the Reformed Church in America, as we pray for a constitutional way forward in regards to same-sex marriage & ordination, these same questions are crucial.

I will share two reflections on costly grace in our Regional Synod.

1. In your workbooks is a Theological Vision for the Core Leadership Team. As Bonhoeffer saw, a Christ-centered gospel is critically important to mission, to know what we believe, and then choose missional activities from those beliefs. Karl Barth once observed that in John Calvin's ministry, his Institutes came first, followed by his church polity and mission work in Geneva. In the same way, this Theological Vision sharpens and guides our mission to Develop leaders to start and strengthen churches.

We can see this same attention to theological development in the Classes of our Region: examples include vital commissioned pastor programs; scores of new seminary students; careful attention to spiritual growth among pastors & elders; listening to our wise older pastors; and engaging in Ridder Church Renewal. We must be ever vigilant in knowing the truth, and there is evidence of good work in this arena! Praise God!

2. The Synod is sacrificially starting and strengthening churches. Our Core Leadership Team has set a brave example of self-sacrifice. Rather than sit in their offices in Grand Rapids, they are constantly on the road,

connecting with us and training us. Our Synod Executive has given up part of his salary this year; our staff is not afraid to stick its neck out for the gospel, calling us to the next level. They often say, "Never underestimate the power of the status quo," and they embody that statement.

The same sacrifices are occurring in the Classes. You've heard the old joke: How many Reformed people does it take to change a light bulb? Answer: Change???

In the case of our Classes, there is much evidence that we are willing to change. Some examples include developing missional pray leaders in each church; engaging in fresh ministry in hurting neighborhoods; starting non-English speaking churches, and a new commitment to hire a Classis leader. But my favorite example was a Classis leader comparing Edward Jones Investment outlets within his Classis boundaries to RCA churches. He counted 17 towns & cities with Edward Jones but no RCA churches, and he called his classis to change that. There is a clear sense among us that deep change is needed, and corresponding prayer, goals, and money are being invested. Edward Jones, expect that your clients will receive not only investment help in their towns, but the greater help of the gospel as well. ☺ Sacrificial missionaries are rising up!

I can report a costly grace among our Classes.

Of course there is much work to be done. I found two especially challenging statistics:

- In one particular Classis, only 53% of its members are attending worship.
- In another, the participation of women in their churches is declining.

These stats are sobering. How might a costly grace help improve them?

Reflection: Costly Grace In Our Denomination

We can also apply costly grace to our denominational deliberations regarding a constitutional way forward for same-sex marriage & ordination.

For many of us, this discussion is foremost on our minds & hearts today. We come with strong feelings. We come with many questions. We ache for resolution. We fear that our proclamation of eternal life is being buried under this everlasting discussion. We know that it must be resolved.

Today we will not have formal discussions on the Special Council's recommendations. We have been instructed not to offer an overture because this is a time of restraint until after General Synod. Last year's Regional Synod approved an overture on human sexuality which included the following statement:

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.

The staff and officers continue to unanimously support this statement, along with the important pastoral care dimensions of our past RCA statements on human sexuality.

The work of processing the report of the Special Council will be left to the delegates to General Synod. We are setting up an evening meeting later in May for General Synod delegates from our region to dig deeper into the Council's recommendations, so they can have a full understanding of the issues as they go to Illinois in June.

At any rate, Paul's gospel is instructive: we are saved by grace, not by our sexual orientation. We who hold to a traditional position on marriage are prone to a sort of legalism: we throw the law at people who struggle with their orientation, rather than know them relationally. Let's not make this mistake. Let us sinners sit at table with other sinners. Let us teach the grace of Christ and not law for salvation.

On the other hand, we know that the grace of Christ is costly. It calls us to lay down our lives for Christ and repent of sin. There is a cost in all areas of discipleship, including human sexuality. But this is also good news: when we don't offer this call to lay down our lives, said Bonhoeffer, "we quench the joy of discipleship."

Conclusion: The Gospel Demonstrated By The Spirit Of God And Power

So Christ is a giver of a costly grace: we are saved by grace through faith alone, but not by a faith which is alone. This gospel cannot be maintained by words alone. Paul again:

My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

Our Great Lakes Region and our denomination need a demonstration of the Spirit and of power. We cannot trust our future to human hands and human plans. We must seek the face of God with prayer & fasting. Greg Stamm will lead us into that work now. May we continue it when we leave this place today, so that the gospel of costly grace in Jesus Christ our Lord will be proclaimed in power and in the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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

A SEASON OF PRAYER

Greg Stamm introduced a season of prayer, asking the delegates to read Nehemiah 1:4-6 in unison. He asked the delegates to pray together around their tables for ten minutes for the things that are broken in our world and denomination. After prayer, Greg asked the delegates to write down words that describe the areas of brokenness and place the Post-It Notes on a board in the back of the room. The delegates sang *How Great Is Our God* as they placed their notes on the prayer wall. Delegates were asked to participate in large group sentence prayers. Greg Stamm closed this time in prayer.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE REPORT

Dean Van Farowe, 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 2015 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 1, 2015 meeting, the committee:

- Approved the Minutes of the May 4, 2015 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 4, 2015.
- Reviewed a proposal in response to the Assessment by Megan Mullins of VIP Research for improving communication and referred the suggestions to the Evaluation Implementation Team composed of Gordon Christian, Eric Cook, Judy Nelson, Dean Van Farowe, and Rick Veenstra.
- Asked Rick Veenstra and Randy Bremmer to speak in support of the overture approved at our 2015 SGL Assembly to the 2015 General Synod at the Special Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business at the General Synod meeting. The overture was designed to bring moral clarity to the General Synod statements on human sexuality.
- Set the date for our next annual GLR Assembly meeting on Monday, May 2, 2016 at Remembrance Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.
- Engaged in a Bible study led by Dean Van Farowe that included Genesis 1:26-27; 10:32-11:1 and a discussion of the origins of ethnicity from the unity of creation, following our commitment as part of the Guiding Principles (AP1.a.1) “to continually seek the wisdom and leading of Christ as the Lord of the Church. To this end, significant attention will be given to prayer and the study of Scripture as a group.” Dean asked the question: Where are you working and/or seeing (difficult) progress in multi-ethnic ministry or life? We talked about ways to diversify this committee and the GLR Assembly meeting.
- Discussed the action of the May 4, 2015 GLR Assembly: “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.” In response, the Great Lakes City Classis (GLCC) Executive Team is moving in the direction of using the cluster model in relationship to the congregations and leaders of ethnic churches that would like to work within the GLCC. The GLCC is drafting a plan for the ethnic churches within its bounds, and would be open to other ethnic plants joining this cluster if it was deemed in their best interest.
- Reviewed two documents presented by Rick Veenstra: 1) explaining the Mission Principles of the Great Lakes Region of the RCA; and 2) listing of Core Leadership Team Goals for 2015.
- Reviewed a report from the Succession Planning Team. The team includes Rick Veenstra, Alison DeBoer, Dean Van Farowe, and Kevin Kleinheksel. Lord willing, Rick Veenstra will reach the age of 70 years in May of 2017. It is his hope that no later than June 30, 2017, a new Regional Executive will be hired and assume the responsibilities of the position.

- Engaged in a time of prayer, with many members participating.

At the November 9, 2015 meeting, the committee:

- Reviewed progress in completing the list of Core Leadership Team Goals for 2015 present by Rick Veenstra. The group discussed two documents that came out the first meeting of the learning community – a manifesto for the Great Lakes Regional Synod written by six people who were present from our region.
- Discussed a report from the Evaluation Implementation Team. A new course of implementation was adopted and the Accountability Principles that address the evaluation process were amended.
- Approved housing allowance amounts for members of the regional synod staff.
- Reviewed a report from the Succession Planning Team, and discussed the characteristics needed in the next Regional Executive, and the process and timing of the interview process.
- Appointed Dean Van Farowe, Kevin Kleinheksel, Irv Boersen, Curry Pikkaart, Judy Nelson, Rob Holland, Bob VanderZwaag, Hugo Vasquez, and Nate Bull to the Regional Executive Search Team.
- Reviewed the year-end reports of the fiscal year ended on September 30, 2015. The budget was exceeded by around \$21,000 in both revenue and expenses.
- Decided to continue a study of a proposed change in the assessment formula, with the goal of presenting a recommendation to the 2016 SGL Assembly meeting.
- Reviewed the proposed amendments to the SGL Rules of Order presented in a report from the Overtures and Judicial Business Committee in response to the referral from the 2015 SGL Assembly: “To instruct the 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.”
- Reviewed the Guiding Principles adopted by the SGL Executive Committee as part of our commitment to using the Accountable Leadership Model.
- Voted to recommend an overture to the General Synod for adoption by the 2016 SGL Assembly to include Regional Synod Executives as Corresponding Delegates to the General Synod with the understanding that the reasons may be amended at the March meeting.
- Voted to appoint Jack Van Slambrouck to serve a second term on the Commission on Judicial Business, and to appoint Lee DeYoung to serve a second term on the Commission on Nominations for the General Synod.
- Voted to appoint delegates to the 2016 General Synod that will be held June 9-14 on the campus of Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Illinois. Each regional synod is entitled to one regular voting delegate (BCO 1.IV.1), two women corresponding delegates (BCO 3.I.9.11a), and one young adult corresponding delegate (BCO 3.I.9.11b). Branson Parler agreed to serve as our regular delegate. Judy Nelson and Laurel Kempkers agreed to serve as our women corresponding delegates. Eric Robert agreed to serve as our youth corresponding delegate.
- Responded to the invitation to recommend two persons from our region for possible selection to the special council that will convene in the spring of 2016 for “the express purpose of describing a constitutional pathway forward to address the question of human sexuality as it relates to ordination and marriage, and to empower this council to bring recommendations to the General Synod of 2016.” We suggested the names of Branson Parler and Laurel Van Hartsma.
- Discussed plans for the 2016 Regional Synod Assembly will be held on May 2, 2016 at Remembrance Reformed Church in Grand Rapids.

At the March 14, 2016 meeting, the committee:

- Reviewed two documents presented by Rick Veenstra: 1) “A Theological Vision for the Core Leadership Team (Art, Doug and Rick) of the Great Lakes Region” that includes a list of methods for fulfilling the Great Commission and the Great Commandments, nine beliefs that undergird the vision, fourteen values, and ways to measure church health and growth; and 2) the “Core Leadership Team Goals for 2016” that were revised on 1/4/16. Rick explained the reason for creating these goals and the way they will be used to keep the staff of the regional synod accountable for their work.
- Reviewed a report from Rick Veenstra on progress in completing the 2015 GLR Goals. He reported that we are in compliance with the goals, with one exception which is in progress.
- Monitored the performance of the GLR Executive Committee in comparison to the Guiding Principles and approved a revision of the Mission Principles in our Guiding Principles to reflect the shift in our goals to leadership development in the region.

- Received a report from Irv Boersen who is serving as the chair of the Regional Executive Search. He reported that the search team is conducting a targeted search for a new Regional Executive, beginning within our region. The team is working on the application and interview process. The team welcomes suggestions for the regional executive position. The goal is to hire someone by January 1, 2017. Rick plans to fully retire by the end of June, 2017.
- Spent 30 minutes in small group prayer for three areas: 1) for our region, 2) for the General Synod, including the special council on human sexuality that will be held on April 15–18, and 3) for the Kingdom – what God is doing around the world.
- Request From Holland Classis For Assessment Relief
- Approved a request from the Holland Classis for a reduction in its 2016 Great Lakes Synod assessment bill of \$3,237.50 (\$17.50 x 185 members) in response to a request from the Pillar Church of Holland to recognize their error and change the classis assessment to the church for 2016 to be 185 members, instead of 370 because of a misunderstanding the Consistorial Report Form.
- Reviewed and affirmed the recommendations from the Finance Committee for presentation to the 2016 Assembly, including the region synod budget for 2016/2017 and the 2017 Assessment of \$18.50 per confessing member, and the 2017 Ministerial Salary and Benefit Guidelines and the 2017 Church Staff Salary and Benefit Guidelines.
- Our annual assembly is scheduled for May 2, 2016 at Remembrance Reformed Church.
- Reviewed the 2015 SGL Assembly Summary and plans for the May 2, 2016 SGL Assembly. Reports will be written with the first-time delegates in mind. We plan to create space for prayer for wisdom and discernment in response to the report of the special council on human sexuality. We will consider a number of training sessions interspersed through the Assembly meeting, including a presentation of the Classis Supervisor Training by Andrew Bossardet (RCA Coordinator for Equipping Thriving Congregations).
- Reviewed a proposal for Proportional Assessments from Synod of the Far West and the comparison between per-member assessments, assessments on regular giving, and a 50/50 split between the two. Rick introduced the subject and interviewed Bruce Bugbee by phone. The committee decided continue this discussion at our meeting in June rather than present a recommendation to the 2016 Assembly.
- Decided not to nominate any at-large members for the GLR Executive Committee this year, since there will be no vacancies as defined by our current Rules of Order.
- Decided to nominate five persons who are ministers for the office of vice-president. The ministers who are members of the GLR Executive Committee are eligible for nomination, as are all the minister delegates to the 2016 Assembly from the classes. (See the Nominations Report for the list of names.)
- Decided to amend the reasons listed as part of the overture to the General Synod approved at the November 9, 2015 meeting of the GLR Executive Committee to include the Regional Synod Executives as corresponding delegates. (See the attached overture.)
- Decided to set the date for our next meeting on June 27, 2016.

NOMINATIONS AND ELECTION

At-Large Members of the GLR Executive Committee

According to our GLR *Rules of Order*, the GLR Executive Committee consists of twelve members: the president, the vice-president, the synod minister, the two most recent past presidents, the chairperson of the Finance Committee, and six at-large members. Currently, at-large members of the Executive Committee are elected at the regular session of the assembly for three-year terms and are eligible for re-election one time. Terms for the at-large members begin on June 1 and end on May 31. Not counting our regional executive (synod minister) position, the classes are currently represented by the following people on the GLR Executive Committee:

Classis	Committee Members (remaining years after May 31, 2016)
Great Lakes City	Rob Holland (0), Gordon Christian (1), Dean Van Farowe (2), Dan Sewell (1*)
Holland	Kevin Kleinheksel (0), Judy Nelson (2*)
Muskegon	Irv Boersen (1**), Greg Stamm (1*)
Northern Michigan	Laurel Kempkers (2*)
North Grand Rapids	Eric Cook (0*) Branson Parler (3)
Southwest Michigan	Curry Pikkaart (2*)
Zeeland	Bob VanderZwaag (2*)

- * Eligible to serve a second term under our current SGL *Rules of Order*.
- ** Irv Boersen is serving as a member of the GLR Finance Committee in a four-year term that expires on May 31, 2017.

- Rob Holland will be completing his second term on this committee on May 31. We do not need to nominate someone to replace him, since others are serving from the GLCC.
- Kevin Kleinheksel will be completing his fourth year as an officer on May 31. Judy Nelson is serving as the representative from Holland Classis, so we do not need to nominate another person from Holland classis.
- Eric Cook is completing his first term as a member of this committee. Branson Parler is also serving as representative from North Grand Rapids, so we do not need to nominate Eric Cook for a second term of office.

The 2015 GLR Assembly voted: "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." The OJBC will be proposing these amendments to the 2016 GLR Assembly. If approved by the 2016 GLR Assembly, we will develop a transition plan for the nine at-large members of the Executive Committee so that they are serving in staggered three-year terms.

Nominees for the Office of Vice-President of the Regional Synod

This year we must elect the vice-president from among those delegates who are ministers of Word and sacrament. Brief biographies of those nominated by the Executive Committee are printed below.

2016 Presidential Candidate (our current vice-president)

Branson Parler serves as an elder and Director of Faith Formation at Fourth Reformed Church in North Grand Rapids Classis, where he and his family have attended since 2009. He is completing his eighth 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 13 years, and they have four children: Eliana (7), Ruby (5), Christian (3), and Ephraim (1 year). 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, hanging out with his family, and reading.

2015 Vice-Presidential Candidates

Paul Burmeister is currently a Specialized Transition Minister serving as a member of the Regional Synod Transition Ministry Team, and in his first interim assignment at Bentheim Reformed Church in Zeeland Classis. Paul is a 1984 Reformed Bible College graduate and received his M.Div. from Western Theological Seminary in 1987. After seminary he spent 3 years on active duty as a Chaplain with the U.S. Navy, then left active duty but continued serving as a Reserve Chaplain in the Navy until his retirement as a CAPTAIN in 2013. His journey in parish ministry started in 1990, as a pastor in Castlewood, SD, then Yakima, WA, and then as the Executive Pastor of Christ Memorial Church in Holland, MI. From there Paul took a call to Allendale, MI, and most recently served Fifth Reformed Church in Muskegon, MI. In every charge he has been very active in Classis leadership, serving on and chairing numerous committees and boards. He has been married to Nancy Langland from Mt. Greenwood/Chicago for 33 years, just newly settled in a condo in Hudsonville, MI, and they have two adult daughters who live out of state. Paul is deeply committed to seeing people come into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, to the absolute authority of the Scriptures, and to helping bring about the next great awakening of the Church through the power of prayer and the Holy Spirit. He is an active worship leader and a "longing to be more active" golfer!

Amy deGroot Bowling. Since graduating from Western Theological Seminary, Amy deGroot Bowling has ministered the last 12 years as an associate pastor of youth and family at Ferry Memorial Reformed Church in Montague, MI. She shares this position with her husband, Nick. Amy has become increasingly passionate about intergenerational ministry, helping people of different generations learn with each other and grow in

faith together. She fell in love with Reformed theology (and her husband, too!) at Trinity Christian College. Amy is serving on the Commission for Congregational Care and Pastoral Oversight of Muskegon Classis. She is also President of Consistory at Ferry Memorial during their senior pastor vacancy. Amy makes a mean homemade pizza, loves fresh tomatoes out of the garden and watching MASH reruns with her husband. They have 3 kids who love bike rides and summer days at the beach.

Judy Nelson is an ordained minister serving as a Corporate Chaplain at Tyson Foods in Zeeland MI. She feels extremely grateful to have been able to answer the call into ministry later in life after a successful career as a Speech Pathologist and Teacher Leader in the public schools. Judy has been serving on the GLR Executive Committee for the past year as the Holland Classis Member at Large. She is active in Holland Classis leadership and attends Fourth Community Reformed Church. Judy is passionate about global missions and serves as a mission mobilizer. She takes the privilege of prayer and service seriously, but loves to laugh and play along the way.

Dan Sewell grew up at the Parkview Reformed Church in Fairview Park, Ohio and went to Cran-Hill ranch in 1969 where he met both Christ and his future spouse, Karen (Toppen). They were married in 1975 and went to work with Young Life in several Northeastern cities before their growing family caused them to return to Fairview in 1984 to pursue a career in insurance, maintaining a volunteer ministry with YL and the Parkview Church. When Parkview became vacant in 1989, Dan and the church entered into a one year contract as pastor there, which soon grew in scope. In 1992, the Parkview and Riverside Reformed Churches "married" to form the New Hope Church, where Dan serves to this day. In 2011, New Hope purchased a large furniture store in Fairview Park that they have transformed into an expansive ministry headquarters. Beyond offering attractive and inviting worship, they are able to provide a variety of discipleship opportunities, host their Local Women's Community Bible Study, house the local food bank, and keep the focus of their Christ-centered ministry outwards into their local community and beyond. Dan has a MAT from Fuller Seminary, enjoys too-rare outings of fishing and golf, but gets to hang on to his musical roots as part of a high energy worship team at New Hope. He and Karen have four daughters, Katie (& Justin), Jessica (& Jim), Lauren, and Michelle, two granddaughters, Lorelei and Holly, with more on the way.

General Synod Delegates

The 2016 General Synod will be held June 9-14 on the campus of Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Illinois. It will begin on the afternoon of Thursday, June 9, and will adjourn on Tuesday, June 14. Each regional synod is entitled to one regular, voting delegate (BCO 1.IV.1), two women corresponding delegates (BCO 3.I.9.11a), and one young adult corresponding delegate (BCO 3.I.9.11b). We usually ask our president or vice-president to serve as our regular delegate. Dean is already scheduled to attend as a classis delegate. Branson agreed to serve as our regular delegate. We usually ask the women serving on the SGL Executive Committee if they are willing to serve as corresponding delegates. Judy Nelson and Laurel Kempfers agreed to serve as corresponding delegates. We ask for suggestions for the Youth Delegate from our Executive Committee members and staff. Eric Robert agreed to serve as our youth delegate, following the suggestion of Greg Stamm.

ELECTION OF THE PRESIDENT

The current vice-president, Branson Parler, 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. Branson Parler was elected as President on the first ballot.

REGIONAL EXECUTIVE REPORT

Rick Veenstra, reporting

Rick Veenstra presented an oral report on the work of the regional synod along with the written reports below. He commented on the work of the Core Leadership Team of the regional synod (Art Wiers, Doug McClintic, and Rick) to establish a multiplying culture and robust transition services for churches without installed ministers. Rick is working to establish a culture of collaboration and a cohesive leadership team to accomplish meaningful work within our region. Organizational health trumps everything else. The region is focusing on seven words: "Developing leaders to start and strengthen churches" as a way to provide clarity for the mission and vision of the church. Rick pointed out the increase in the number of adult baptisms (from 403 in 2014 to 512 in 2015). A video clip was shown of a baptismal service at CenterPoint in Kalamazoo. Rick shared several links to websites that provide more information about the work of the regional synod at luminexusa.org and greatlakesrca.org.

A Theological Vision for the Core Leadership Team

Under the umbrella of the Great Commission (to make disciples of Jesus Christ) and the Great Commandments (love God and other people), with a commitment to:

1. Cultivating transformation in Christ
2. Equipping leaders, and
3. Engaging in mission,

The GLR staff, in partnership with classis and RCA leaders, will “develop leaders to start and strengthen churches” (The Seven Words) through:

1. Ridder Church Renewal Modules I and II
2. Faith Walking Retreats – Scott Lokers, Jess Schults
3. 2025 Church Planting Vision
4. Church Planting Collaboratives
5. One Day Training Events
6. Transition Ministry Services
7. Succession Planning
8. Leadership Development Networks
9. A Culture of Innovation
10. Leadership Resources Network, such as
 - A. Faith-based Planning – Mike Gafa
 - B. Strategic Initiative Planning – Daryl Cripe
 - C. Conflict Management – Tim Meendering
 - D. Coaching and consulting

The beliefs that undergird this vision are:

1. Jesus Christ is building his church!
2. The church of Jesus Christ exists primarily to fulfill the Great Commission.
3. The church is called by God to place participation in God’s mission at the center of its life and ministry and to choose God’s mission before treasured traditions, personal preferences and rooted relationships.
4. Regarding faithful and fruitful ministry in the twenty-first century, our congregations have only two options: deep systemic change or slow death. Examples of deep change include moving from inward to outward focus, developing a culture of innovation, placing the lost before the members of the congregation in terms of priority in ministry focus or collaborating with others in planting a new church. As we lead change to establish a new level of equilibrium, there will be conflict. Therefore conflict-management and peace-making skills are essential to leading the deep change process, so that conflict can be life-enhancing, not life threatening.
5. People experience personal transformation in Christ by embracing the wonder of the GOSPEL of God’s grace in Jesus Christ. A sign of the transformation will be increased love for God and other people!
6. Personal transformation of congregational leaders through the GOSPEL of God’s grace in Jesus Christ precedes deep change at the congregational level. Therefore, as go the leaders, so goes the congregation.
7. Since the journey of personal transformation and deep congregational change is God’s work, all we are and do must be undergirded in prayer.
8. The best way to strengthen a relatively healthy (growing, on a plateau or in only modest decline for less than five years) church is to participate in starting a new congregation.
9. The most effective evangelistic tool on earth is planting a new church.

We value:

1. Gospel centered ministry in both word and deed.
2. A maturing and multiplying culture of personal transformation.
3. Encouraging, equipping and empowering leaders.
4. Accountable leadership.
5. Empowered teams.
6. The Church Life Cycle Assessment

7. The Medical Metaphor of Church Health, including Fitness Center, Annual Physical, Prime Care, Emergency Room and Hospice Churches.
8. Fresh Start/Legacy Churches.
9. Life-long learning.
10. Leadership Collaboration
11. A Culture of Innovation
12. A trusted outside voice
13. Coaching
14. Communities of grace and truth

We measure:

1. New Christians, including adult baptisms
2. Infant baptisms
3. New leaders
4. New worship venues
5. New ministry sites
6. New congregations
7. Newly organized congregations
8. Worship attendance

To God Be The Glory!

Great Lakes Region Goals: The Results in 2015

1. Facilitate with classis leaders 2-3 church plant organizations in 2015.
Result: Holland Eagle's Wings Church, South Harbor Church and the Nepali Speaking Community Church.
2. Maintain 4-6 LumineX Collaboratives in 2015.
Result: Cleveland, Kalamazoo #1, Downtown GR,
3. Multiply LumineX leadership with at least three additional persons in 2015.
Result, Amy Shenkel, Randy Weener,
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.
Result: Art is that person and is working at Forest Grove Church, Paul Burmeister was added as the first at the Partner level and is working at Bentheim Church.
5. Launch Ridder Church Renewal Modules I and II in 2015 with at least fifteen congregations.
Result: Modules I and II have been launched with a total of fourteen congregations.
6. Offer at least one Leadership Development Journey opportunity in 2015 with at least six pastors.
Result: Meredith Nieuwsma led and LDJ on-line with six pastors.
7. Develop a new Great Lakes International Classis, as God leads us.
Result: This was rescinded by the Assembly in 2015.
8. Develop a Learning Community for regional staff in the synods of the Heartland, Mid-America and the Great Lakes.
Result: This has been accomplished and six GLR staff/leaders attended the first session in September in IL. The synods of the Far West and Canada are also part of this Leadership Community.

Core Leadership Team (CLT) Goals for 2016

- I. Outcome Goals
 - A. 2-3 church plant organizations in 2016
 - B. 2-3 church plants launched, including fresh starts, in 2016
 - C. Deploy at least 2-3 Missionary Church Planting Teams in 2016
 - D. 5 new "leaders of leaders" functioning effectively on a regional empowered team in 2016.
- II. Process Goals
 - A. Maintain 4-6 Church Planting Collaboratives in 2016 (2-3 Church Multiplication Collaboratives and 2-3 Missionary Planting Collaboratives)
 - B. Add at least 2 Collaborative leaders in 2016
 - C. Add at least 4 partners to the Transition Ministry Team in 2016

- D. Facilitate at least 2 healthy congregational transitions in 2016.
- E. Facilitate at least 2 succession plans in 2016
- F. Engage at least one church in each classis, not previously served (within the last five years) by the GLR in 2016, always in partnership with classis leaders
- G. Meet twice as a Team of SIX with the RCA Regional Staff Leadership Community in Illinois in 2016
- H. Develop the Team of SIX (Art, Doug, Rick, Randy Weener, Dan Ackerman and Mike Gafa) into a high-performance team in 2016.
- I. Form at least 2 Leadership Development Districts in 2016, always in partnership with classis leaders.
- J. Complete an innovation process with the Lanio Consultation in 2016.
- K. Increase evangelistic activity in the region by engaging at least two congregations in each classis to utilize: Block Parties, Kingdom Focused Prayer Movement, or “Organic Outreach” (Kevin Harney) who have yet to do so.
- L. The Executive Committee will work with the regional staff to recruit / organize / equip and deploy “harvest researchers” to discern “unreached people” in our region.

Great Lakes Region Statistics

	2003 - 2012	2013	2014	2015
Adult Baptisms	3,228	452	403	512
Confessions of Faith	16,712	1,870	1,322	1,154
Infant Baptisms	9,187	857	767	765
Newly Organized Churches	17	1	3	1

*2015 is 100% of organized churches and plants responding.

ELECTION OF THE VICE-PRESIDENT

Paul Burmeister, Amy deGroot-Bowling, Judy Nelson, and Dan Sewell 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 of Paul Burmeister, Judy Nelson, and Dan Sewell appeared on the second ballot. The names of Paul Burmeister and Judy Nelson appeared on the third ballot. Judy Nelson was elected to the office of Vice-President.

BREAK

STARTING AND STRENGTHENING CHURCHES BY DEVELOPING LEADERS

Art Wiers, Doug McClintic, Mike Gafa, reporting

The report began with a short video testimony. Art Wiers introduced himself and talked about his work in providing resources for equipping and encouraging leaders in our region. Art is serving on the transition ministry team. He referred to the report in the workbook below. Art introduced Carol Roelofs from New Life Community in Norton Shores who shared her story of a pastoral transition and the work of Rev. Scott Lokers.

See the report on Transition Ministry in the Appendix.

Mike Gafa reported on his work with the region in developing leaders for strengthening churches. He referred to page 29 in the workbook, title, “New Staff.” He offered a free copy of this book to all the delegates, titled, *Faith Based – A Biblical, Practical Guide to Strategic Planning in the Church*. He is developing a video-based training resource that will accompany the book.

See the report on New Staff in the Appendix

Doug McClintic reported on church multiplication within our region, referring to his report on page 28. Doug distributed a flyer promoting a conference on Missions, Muslims, and the Heart of God, that will be held on June 23-24 in Grand Rapids. More info can be found at legacyconference.org.

See the report on New Churches in the Appendix.

TABLE DISCUSSION: LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN OUR CHURCHES

We reserved 15 minutes on our agenda for a discussion of Leadership Development in our Churches. Doug McClintic introduced this discussion with two documents: Lead Strong and The Multiplication of Leaders. He talked about six core practices that are the center of the leadership development process. See *the Appendix*.

OVERTURES AND JUDICIAL BUSINESS COMMITTEE

Russell Camp, reporting

The Overtures and Judicial Business Committee (OJBC) is one of the Administrative Committees of the Synod of the Great Lakes (SGL) whose members are directly appointed by the classes within the region. This committee has seven members, one from each classis. The OJBC reviews all matters of a judicial nature and reports to the SGL Assembly with recommendations, forwards all overtures to the SGL Assembly with recommendations, and prepares amendments to the SGL *Rules of Order* and recommends them to the SGL Assembly for adoption. Members may serve a maximum of two consecutive four-year terms. The stated clerk serves ex-officio, without vote. Currently Russell Camp serves as chair and Irv Boersen serves as vice-chair.

The OJBC met on August 25, 2015 to consider the referral from the 2015 SGL Assembly: "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." The committee voted to approve the amendments below for recommendation to the 2016 SGL Assembly. (*Additions are underlined; deletions are stricken.*) Note: Sections 1-3 under Article V describe the process of electing a president and vice-president. Those sections remain unchanged. Section 4 (below) describes what happens when an officer vacates office. Section 5 (below) describes the election of the regular members of the committee.

ARTICLE V. ELECTIONS

Sec. 4. Should the president vacate the office, the vice-president shall be named president, and a new vice-president shall be appointed. ~~following the rule in the next sentence. Should the vice-president vacate the office,~~ When needed, the Executive Committee shall appoint a vice-president from the current delegates to the assembly, giving full consideration to those who had the highest number of nominating votes at the prior session. Should ~~the a~~ a past president ~~or any of the at-large members~~ resign or otherwise vacate ~~their~~ his/her position, ~~the position shall remain vacant. Executive Committee shall appoint a new person to fill the office from the confessing members of the churches in the Regional Synod. All appointments of at-large members shall be subject to approval of the Regional Synod at its next regular session.~~ the position shall remain vacant.

Sec. 5. ~~Six~~ Nine ~~at-large regular~~ members of the Executive Committee will be elected in staggered three-year terms as needed at the regular session of the Assembly, ~~for three-year terms~~ and will be eligible for nomination and re-election one time. A balance shall be maintained between ministers of Word and sacrament and non-ministers on the committee. Terms for ~~the at-large~~ all members begin on June 1 and end on May 31. ~~At-large Regular~~ 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. One at-large member will be nominated by each classis for approval at the assembly meeting. The classis shall certify that they have considered a wide range of candidates, in response to the request of the regional synod for diversity. In addition, the SGL Executive Committee will nominate two at-large members for approval by the Assembly to ensure a balance of leadership gifts, ethnic/gender/age perspectives, and such other skills as may be needed on the Executive Committee. ~~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. Should any of the members resign or otherwise vacate their position, the classis (or the SGL Executive Committee in the case of an at-large member) shall nominate a new person to serve the remainder of the unexpired term for election at the next Assembly meeting. Members who have served a partial term of one year shall be eligible for an additional full three-year term.~~

ARTICLE VI. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Sec. 1. The Executive Committee shall consist of the president, the vice-president, the Regional Executive, the two most recent past presidents, the chairperson of the Finance Committee, and six nine members. A majority of the members of the Executive Committee shall constitute a quorum at any meeting.

In recommending the proposed amendments above, the OJBC considered a number of factors:

- Size. The Executive Committee currently consists of 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, for a total of 12 members if no additional members are appointed to ensure that each classis has a member included on the Executive Committee. With direct nomination of one person by each of the seven classes and two additional members nominated by the Executive Committee, the minimum size would increase to 15 members. We currently have 14 members on the committee because of overlapping terms, so that the increase to 15 members does not seem to be excessive.
- Diversity. We recognize the value of diversity in the leadership of the regional synod: ministers/elders, men/women, racial/ethnic, and age participation. We decided that it was important to maintain the balance between ministers and elders by making that a requirement. We struggled with the question of whether or not to include a standard for men/women, racial/ethnic, and age participation. We recognize the downside of setting quotas for the participation of members. Quotas may feel degrading to women, ethnic minorities, and youth who would rather be chosen for their skills and ability to contribute as a member. We agreed that there should be an education component in implementing the new rules on nomination, describing the value of diversity (gender, ethnic, age, skills) and modeling a process for seeking Spirit-led nominations that are more inclusive than what we are currently experiencing. Rather than trying to guarantee a certain level of gender or ethnic diversity, we plan to ask the nominating body to certify that they have considered an appropriate mix of candidates before making their nomination. Utilizing a form provides a better chance for diversity, because the classis will be asked to certify that they did consider a wide range of candidates in considering the request for diversity. In an effort to ensure more diversity, we are recommending that the Executive Committee nominate two at-large members (from any classis in the region). The suggested amendment does not single out "racial/ethnic" participation, but opens that opportunity now and provides some flexibility for the future when the Executive Committee may discover that another group is underrepresented.
- Terms of Office. Currently the terms of office are not evenly staggered. We are proposing nine members – that means three terms should be ending each year. Our rules of order do not currently require staggered terms. We decided to include a requirement by adding the words "in *staggered* three-year terms as needed."

The OJBC decided to submit these proposed amendments to the SGL *Rules of Order* to the SGL Executive Committee for review at their November meeting, and to the stated clerks of the classes within our region for review at their October meeting last fall. Both groups were given the chance to comment on the amendments.

R - 3

To approve the amendments to the SGL *Rules of Order* above in principle. (ADOPTED)

Following the SGL Bylaws, the proposed amendments must be submitted to the 2016 Assembly and approved by a majority vote, reviewed again by this committee, and then approved by the 2017 Assembly by two-thirds vote. If we wait until final approval before implementation, these amendments would not affect the nomination process until 2018. In order for these amendments to take effect a year earlier, the OJBC voted to recommend to the 2016 Assembly:

R - 4

That the *Rules of Order* regarding nomination be suspended in part to allow for these rules to be used for nominations coming to the 2017 Assembly. (ADOPTED by two-thirds of the delegates present) [These amendments need be adopted by two-thirds of the delegates present in 2017 in order to be in effect in the following years.]

JUDICIAL BUSINESS

The regional synod did not receive any complaints or appeals since the 2015 Assembly of the Synod of the Great Lakes. The OJBC report to the May 4, 2015 Assembly of the Synod of the Great Lakes included the following item:

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, 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.

In response to the appeal by the Zeeland Classis and Spring Valley Church regarding the membership of the Forners, the 2015 General Synod voted: "To remand the case to the Zeeland Classis for hearing on the merits of the Complaint of Phillip and Diane Forner regarding their membership in Spring Valley Reformed Church." As part of their report to the General Synod, the CJB wrote:

Decisions regarding membership in the local church are made by the local church, and more specifically, the board of elders (BCO Chapter 1, Part I, Article 5, Sections 2a and b). It appears from the record in this case that the decision of the board of elders of Spring Valley may not have been made consistent with the provisions of BCO Chapter 1, Part I, Article 5, Section 2b, but unlike the Regional Synod, we are unwilling to substitute our judgment for the judgment of the board of elders. Here, we believe that the complaint properly lies before the Zeeland Classis, where it was originally made, and that it is incumbent on the Zeeland Classis to deal with that complaint on the merits.

The OJBC discussed what to do in response to the pending appeal by the Forners filed on September 2, 2014 and the decision of the General Synod to remand the decision regarding the membership of the Forners to the Zeeland Classis. The OJBC decided to take no action at this time, since this committee previously voted to postpone consideration of the September 2, 2014 appeal until all appeals related to the membership of the Forners in the Reformed Church in America and Spring Valley Reformed Church have been exhausted.

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

We scheduled a 30 minute break for lunch at this time. Tom Dekker offered a prayer before our meal. Dean Van Farowe called the meeting to order after lunch.

CLASSIS SUPERVISOR TRAINING

Andy Bossardet, reporting

Andy Bossardet, RCA Coordinator for Equipping Thriving Congregations, talked about ways to help churches going through pastoral transitions. He shared a roadmap developed at the 2015 Congregations in Transition Summit as a training resource for classis supervisors to help the transition process to go well. He discussed five stages for the transition process: 1) Closure of a Pastoral Relationship, 2) Reflection on the Congregation, 3) Discernment, 4) Call Process, and 5) Help the New Pastor Get Started. The classis supervisor can help churches by coaching the search team and consistory toward good process. Andy offered his help to any classis that is working on improving this transition process. Additional resources will be available soon in written and video format.

TABLE DISCUSSION: LEARNING DURING PASTORAL TRANSITIONS

The delegates were asked to discuss how pastoral transitions can be a time of learning for the church, using the following questions for each table:

- 1) How could transitions be an opportunity for churches to grow in maturity and Christlikeness?
- 2) How could training for supervisors help our classis empower our congregations? How can the Classis Help?

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 dealt with the following issues:

- Reviewed the report of the Financial Review Committee
- Reviewed and approved some changes in the 2015/16 budget.
- Reviewed the investment manager's report on earnings for 2015, and the current portfolio with the Synod's investment manager.
- Reviewed the financial statements for the year ended September 30, 2015.
- Updated the Minimum Salary Guidelines and Schedule for Ministers of Word and sacrament for 2017.
- Updated voluntary compensation guidelines for church staff of SGL churches for 2017.
- Reviewed and recommended approval of the 2016/2017 Ministry Fund Budget and the assessment for 2017, to the Executive Committee.

SALARY GUIDELINES

The 2017 Compensation Guidelines were changed to removed items B and C under the vacation section. The committee recommended a 2.0% change from the 2016 guidelines. (See *Appendix*.) The committee recommended:

R - 5

To approve the proposed 2017 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 2.0% change from the 2016 guidelines. (See *Appendix*.) The committee recommended:

R - 6

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.

2016/17 BUDGET

Our committee reviewed the needs and requests for the Ministry Fund budget for 2016/17. 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 2016/17 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 2016/17 budget assuming a loss of 421 confessing members, or 0.99%, from 42,521 in 2015, to 42,100 in 2016. The committee believes that this would be a realistic and conservative approach for estimating the 2017 assessment.

The proposed 2016/17 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 2017 proposed assessment of \$18.50 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. (*Where Do My Assessments God?* in the Appendix.) The committee recommended:

R - 7

To approve the 2016-17 Ministry Fund Budget and the \$18.50 per confessing member assessment for 2017. (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

Linda Jacobs (HOL)
Darwin Evers (SWM)

Mike Gafa (NGR)
Vacant (NMI)

APPROVING CALLS AND CONTRACTS

Howard Moths presented a document that is designed to help churches implement the 2017 Compensation Guidelines for Ministers of Word and sacrament that we have approved.

OVERTURE TO GENERAL SYNOD

At the November 9, 2015 meeting of the GLR Executive Committee, the motion was made, seconded, and carried to recommend the overture printed below for adoption by the 2016 SGL Assembly with the understanding that the reasons may be amended at our March Executive Committee meeting. At the March meeting the committee voted recommend this overture to the 2016 SGL Assembly with a change in order to the reasons (5-6 moved to 1-2).

R - 8

To approve the following overture to the 2016 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

The Regional Synod of the Great Lakes overtures the General Synod to amend the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 9, Section 11, to include the Regional Synod Executives as corresponding delegates, or another person appointed to fill their role by each regional synod.

Reasons:

1. The regional synod executives play a key role in providing alignment of purpose throughout the denomination, and are often at the General Synod meetings.
2. Appointing the regional synod executives as corresponding delegates would provide greater ability for collaboration between the General Synod and the regional synods by providing a voice for their particular concerns.
3. Corresponding delegates fully participate in General Synod but cannot vote, make motions, or be elected to office. (BCO, 3.1.9.1)
4. Currently corresponding delegates include a General Synod professor, the presidents of the RCA colleges, two students from each of the colleges, two students for each RCA seminary, two students from the MFCA, the RCA General Secretary, the members of the General Synod Council, one representative from each of the General Synod commissions, the presidents of the RCA seminaries, a member from the board of trustees of the seminaries and the MFCA, eleven ecumenical delegates appointed by the Commission, the president of the Board of Benefits Services, the president of the RCA Church Growth Fund, one woman appointed by the Commission for Women, a racial/ethnic minority member appointed by the Commission on Race and Ethnicity, and a young adult appointed by the Commission on Christian Discipleship and Education.
5. Each regional synod is given the responsibility of appointing two women as corresponding delegates, and one young adult may be appointed as a corresponding delegate by each regional synod.
6. Although one elder or minister is appointed from each of the regional synods as a regular delegate, this person is not usually a regional executive.

REGIONAL EXECUTIVE SEARCH TEAM

Irv Boersen presented a report on behalf of the Regional Executive Search Team. He introduced the members of the team. The team is planning to present a recommendation to hire a new Regional Executive to the 2017 SGL Assembly. He requested that the delegates join the team in prayer for the search process, and to suggest names of individuals who may be qualified for this position.

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS

Classical Minutes Committee

Leigh Van Kempen, 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

Marc deWaard, reporting

The committee recommended approval of the following resolutions:

R - 9

To thank Eric Cook for his three years of service on the Synod of the Great Lakes Executive Committee as an at-large member. (Adopted)

R - 10

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

R - 11

To thank Kevin Kleinheksel 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 - 12

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

Unexcused Absences

The following delegates were absent without excuse from the 2016 Assembly meeting:

Great Lakes City Classis – Peter TeWinkle

North Grand Rapids Classis – Kristi Kiel

Southwest Michigan Classis – Dan Bussema

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 61st Annual Session of the Synod of the Great Lakes Minutes, Convened at Remembrance Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan, May 2, 2016*. The Executive Committee will review and approve the minutes before publication.

SEATING OF THE NEW OFFICERS

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

CLOSING PRAYER

Gordon Christian closed the Assembly meeting with prayer.

ADJOURNMENT

Branson Parler 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 1:45 p.m.

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

Documents that appear in the Appendix:

Balance Sheet and Income Statements
Transition Ministry – Report by Art Wiers
New Staff – Report by Mike Gafa
New Churches – Report by Doug McClintic
Luminex – Lead Strong
The Multiplication of Leaders
2017 Compensation Guidelines for Ministers of Word and Sacrament
2017 Church Staff Salary and Benefit Guidelines
Synod of the Great Lakes Ministry Fund – 2016/2017 Budget
Where Do Your Assessments Go? – Based on the Proposed 2016/2017 Budget