

**Synod of the Great Lakes
Meeting and Minutes
Convened at Second Reformed Church
Kalamazoo, Michigan
Sixty-Fourth Annual Session
May 6, 2019**

FORMATION OF THE SYNOD

Roll Call/Seating of Delegates

This Assembly of the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes (RSGL) was convened in the sanctuary of Second Reformed Church, 2323 Stadium Drive, Kalamazoo, Michigan on Monday, May 6, 2019. Delegates were asked to be seated and to introduce themselves to others seated around their table. President Bob VanderZwaag 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

Rev. Greg Brower, 36th Avenue, Grandville, MI, 49418*
Rev. Rich Heusinkveld, 3200 Delta River Drive, Lansing, MI, 48906*
Rev. Mark Kleinheksel, 2635 Bauer Rd, Jenison, MI 49428
Mr. Larry Kleymeer, 3456 Minnie Avenue, Wyoming, MI, 49519*
Mr. Jim Peterson, 5964 8th Avenue, Grandville, MI, 49418
Mr. Josh Sanders, 3552 Earle, Grandville, MI, 49418
Ms. Sherry Seamon 2069 West 100th Street, Cleveland, OH, 44102
Rev. JB Wernlund, 7734 Eastern Avenue, Grand Rapids, MI, 49408

HOLLAND CLASSIS

Rev. Dan Gillett, 630 State Street, Holland, MI, 49423
Rev. Dan Griswold, 513 E 8th Street, Holland, MI, 49423
Mr. Don Lam, 882 West 26th Street, Holland, MI, 49424
Rev. David Lantz, 895 Ottawa Beach Road, Holland, MI, 49424*
Ms. Mari Martin, 1205 Waterwalk Drive, Holland, MI, 49423
Ms. Marilyn Norman, 795 South Shore Drive, Holland, MI, 49423

MUSKEGON CLASSIS

Rev. Ray Dekker, 330 E Oak Street, Fremont, MI, 49412
Mr. Tony Dunn, 170 S Brooks Road, Muskegon, MI, 49415*
Mr. Ron Matthews, 2062 E River Road, Muskegon, MI, 49415*
Mr. Jim Smith, 6691 Minard, Muskegon, MI, 49442*
Rev. Scott VanArendonk, 2495 Hathaway Court, Muskegon, MI, 49441*
Rev. Dick Van Dop, 12010 Canterbury Court, Marne, MI, 49435
Rev. Randy Vander Weit, 1132 Peck Street, Muskegon, MI, 49441
Mr. Jack Zandstra, 6051 Hubbard Road, Muskegon, MI, 49442

NORTH GRAND RAPIDS CLASSIS

Rev. Nancy Claus, 1553 Woodlawn, Grand Rapids, MI, 49506
Mr. Bob Engelsman, 3506 Westcott Drive, Ada, MI, 49301
Mr. Bill Hahn, 2419 Glen Valley Drive, Grand Rapids, MI, 49544
Ms. Marla Lunderberg, 3697 Iris Drive, Grandville, MI, 49418*
Rev. Dr. Mara Joy Norden, 1047 Paradise Lake Drive, Grand Rapids, MI, 49546*
Mr. Roger Scheele, 3118 Rickman NE, Grand Rapids, MI, 49505*
Rev. Christopher Westerbeek, 295 Greentree Lane, Ada, MI, 49301
Rev. Les Wiseman, 4025 Knapp Street, Grand Rapids, MI, 49525*

NORTHERN MICHIGAN CLASSIS

Rev. Todd Bush, 45 S Amber Road, Scottville, MI, 49454
Ms. Alissa Davis, 1208 S Poseyville Road, Midland, MI, 48640
Mr. Tom DeKorte, 09052 Mercer Blvd, Charlevoix, MI 48640
Rev. Rick Eschenburg, PO Box 5, New Era, MI, 49446*
Mr. Roger Ouwinga, 9150 W Watergate, McBain, MI, 49657
Rev. Kevin Schutt, 8372 S Lucas Road, McBain, MI, 49657
Ms. Di Swan, 213 Buys Road, Muskegon, MI, 49445
Mr. Brad Vander Waal, 1100 N Saginaw Road, Midland, MI, 48640

SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN CLASSIS

Mr. Joe Brown, 5219 Deerland, Kalamazoo, MI, 49009
Mr. Tim Buis, 2512 Kalamarama, Portage, MI, 49024
Rev. Jonathan Lam, 8161 South 24th Street, Kalamazoo, MI, 49408*
Rev. Calandra Nevenzel, 7031 South 6th Street, Kalamazoo, MI, 49009*
Rev. Laura Osborne, 322 South 1st Street, Kalamazoo, MI, 49009
Ms. Pat Roush, 12145 Doster Road, Plainwell, MI, 49080
Mr. Michael Stewart, 1122 Lay Blvd, Kalamazoo, MI, 49001*
Rev. Clayton Smith, 227 Brown Avenue, Kalamazoo, MI, 49002

ZEELAND CLASSIS

Mr. Terry Ebels, 6854 144th Avenue, Holland, MI, 49424*
Ms. Mary Beth Gernaat, 4855 Hide Away, Hudsonville, MI, 49426*
Rev. Dustyn Keepers, 3712 N. Broadway, #127, Chicago, IL, 60613
Mr. Glenn Kleinheksel, 4269 47th Street, Holland, MI, 49423
Mr. Cal Klokkert, 4352 134th Avenue, Hamilton, MI, 49419
Rev. John Nyitray, 6854 144th Avenue, Holland, MI, 49424
Rev. Brian VanderWege, 3995 N Lakeshore Drive, Holland, MI, 49424*
Rev. Rob Wondergem, 5947 Lake Michigan Drive, Allendale, MI, 49401

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

President:	Mr. Bob VanderZwaag
Vice-President:	Rev. Greg Brower
Past-President:	Rev. Judy Nelson
Past Past-President:	Dr. Branson Parler
At-Large Members:	Mrs. Jami Alferink
	Rev. Suzanne Hart
	Rev. Jen Holmes Curran
	Mrs. Laurel Kempkers
	Rev. Billy Norden
	Rev. Dan Sewell
	Rev. Greg Stamm
	Mr. Mik Sutton
	Rev. Deb Yurk
Regional Executive:	Rev. John Messer
Stated Clerk/Parliamentarian (non-voting):	Rev. Howard Moths

Absent with excuse: Branson Parler and Mik Sutton.

Absent without excuse: Joe Brown, Pat Roush, Roger Scheele, and Michael Stewart.

Privilege of the Floor

The president made a number of introductions. 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 RSGL task forces, committees, and ministry teams who have been asked to present reports to the Synod.

(ADOPTED)

Limits to Debate

Following the practice of previous synod meetings to limit the length of time allowed by debate, the following motion was made and seconded:

R-2

To limit debate to two minutes for each delegate on any motion that comes before the Assembly. Following Robert's Rules, delegates may not speak more than twice to a single motion. If a delegate chooses to speak a second time, the time available will be limited to one minute." (ADOPTED)

Approval of the 2018 Assembly Minutes

The Minutes of the Assembly of the Synod of the Great Lakes that was held on May 7, 2018 are posted on the Great Lakes Region website (<https://greatlakesrca.org>) on the Assembly Resources page and were mailed to anyone who requested a copy. The minutes were reviewed and approved for publication by the RSGL Executive Committee. One copy was made available on each delegate table at this meeting. The president asked for any additions or corrections to the minutes. Since none were offered, he declared that the minutes of the 2018 RSGL 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

Dick Van Dop, chair
Glenn Kleinheksel
Ron Matthews
Mara Joy Norden
Howard Moths (staff)

Resolution/Leave of Absence Committee

Scott Van Arendonk, chair
Jane Dalman
Terry Ebels
Alison DeBoer (staff)

Study Committee

Not appointed

Tellers

Brian VanderWege, chair
Larry Kleymeer
Marla Lunderberg
DJ Swan
Jeff Wenke
Howard Moths (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. The motion was made and seconded from the floor:

R-3

To approve the agenda as printed. (ADOPTED)

OPENING WORSHIP

Suzanne Hart (Pastor for Transformational Ministries of Second Reformed Church, Kalamazoo) welcomed the delegates and made a few announcements regarding the facility. Suzanne opened the meeting in prayer and led the delegates worship including the singing of the hymn, *Holy, Holy, Holy*. Suzanne read from Ephesians 4:1-15 and shared a few reflections on the passage. Jim Harrison led the assembly in prayer including the Lord's Prayer. The delegates concluded worship by singing, *In Christ Alone*.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Bob VanderZwaag, reporting

As Bob presented his report, our vice-president, Greg Brower, took the chair.

Executive Director, Regional Staff, Assembly Delegates, Invited Guests, first let me thank you for your attendance today at this assembly gathering for the purpose of dutifully and in an orderly manner conducting the business of the Regional Synod of Great Lakes as well as engaging in an educational experience to enhance our communication skills.

Just over two years ago someone thought I might be a viable candidate for the office of vice president and subsequently president and nominated me for that office. As procedures have it, our stated clerk contacted me to ask whether I would be willing to accept the nomination and have my name as one of three candidates. I asked for some time to pray, ponder and speak with my wife. In my career I've chaired hundreds of meetings so that was no big deal as far as handling the meeting part. The big issue for me was that after attending two previous regional Synod assemblies, I had heard two very eloquent Presidential reports and knew that if elected, that was in my future. The report, as most of you well know is presented to a collection of church leaders – pastors, elders, deacons and others who have demonstrated theological leadership in some ways – that, by the way is how I describe you folks. I was and am no theological genius and yet would be expected to share a somewhat theologically-based address to the assembly.

Well, my wife was pretty non-committal, even to some degree suggesting I shouldn't fear the requirements, In my consultations with her, she provided no reasons or support of me backing out. Furthermore, my mind rationalized I really had but a one in three - 33 1/3 % chance of winning the election! But it happened and immediately, I was congratulated and encouraged by several people sitting around me. Three of them joined hands around me and began to pray for me!! – I didn't even know who they were!! Randomly throughout the remainder of the meeting at least 5 more people prayed with and for me. I really can't adequately explain to you what that meant to me and quite frankly, as the first point of at least this 3 point presentation, we need to be people of more prayer as individuals, as groups called churches, as classis, as a denomination and as a world wide body of believers.

I must admit I grew up in an environment of what I'll call obligatory prayer. The routine prayer before meals, bedtime prayer recitals, prayer before and after a meeting, and of course the often-dreaded pastoral prayer during the service – and let's not forget the prayer of thanksgiving after the offering was taken. Sadly, I do not recall too many spontaneous prayers in my youth. The most intimate relationship we can and should develop is one with our heavenly father and that will be accomplished through prayer – personal conversation with God – and of course through study of the Word.

While I hesitate to share a name because it always leaves out others who perhaps are forgotten or unknown and doing the same thing we may be referencing, I have to on this occasion to solidify a point. The day after election day as president one year ago, delegate Mik Sutton from Mason County sent me an email indicating he would be praying for me every day over the next year. Ya, sure- I've said a similar thing before to many people and by the end of the week it all seemed to end. Not Mik – for at least a couple months an email came nearly every day, often as simple as the word "Praying". Beyond that month I never doubted a prayer was offered every day. Thank you Mik – I am more keenly aware than ever that there is power in prayer from being a personal recipient of your prayers every day this past year! Assembly attendants, I challenge you to pick at least one person and let them know in some way you are praying for them every day – we truly would be doing a work that Christ has called us to!!

During the course of the last two years I have been in more churches beyond what I would normally attend. Through those experiences, from discussions with pastors and other lay people, and from reading the presidential reports turned in to the Regional Synod as part of the reporting requirements, I can report to you that we as a group of churches under the label of a regional synod are experiencing the same kinds of challenges and celebrations that churches across the country are experiencing. Let me, first of all, deal with the challenges, so that we might leave this address with celebrations on our minds. One of the challenges is related to church membership – nationwide church membership is in decline. According to the most recent data released in April by the Gallup organization, church membership is now at an approximate 50% of the adult population of the United States, despite the fact the polls reveal that 77% still claim to be "religious". The most rapid pace of decline has been in the last 20 years. It appears that people, in general, are no longer seeing membership in an organization, such as a church, as important as they once did. I article I read recently pointed out that churches are no different than other organizations in our society who serve similar purposes, like service organizations for example. The once vibrant Lions, Rotarians, AMBUCS, and others are grasping on to threads to keep their organizations going.

The corollary to declining membership is, of course, declining attendance. With less members, we might logically expect lower attendance. While some churches in reports indicate their attendance has increased, most are reporting declines in attendance. Nationally there appears to be a trend that even with declines in official membership, there are growing numbers of people attending a given church over a long period of time without choosing to take the next step of membership. I noted in a couple of the classis reports some statement of growing frustration amongst active members who seem to be responsible for carrying the extra load resulting from members and attendees not participating in responsibilities and opportunities of service within the church.

One might then expect that a next step logically is a result of declining membership and declining attendance – and that is declining financial resources. In my 40 some years of being a member of a church, I rarely recall bountiful excess financial resources flowing from any church I ever joined, so we certainly can say this is not a new trend. However, we are now living in a period of time in which overall declining membership is a fact which is different from what we saw 20 plus years ago. This is cause for concern for all of us in the long run and certainly is one justification for researching new methods of supporting the work of affiliate divisions within the Reformed Church of America.

One other common trend I saw in reading our own internal reports and which is likewise confirmed in the national statistics is concern about the younger generation, the Millennials, those born between 1980 and 2000. The Gallup survey indicates of Millennials claiming to have a religious affiliation, which is 68 % overall, just 57% actually belong to a church. The alarming trend in this area is that with each generation there is a decline in participation in a religious organization from our oldest population groups to the younger population groups polled.

Let's look at some celebrations. At our regional synod executive committee meetings, we have found it a special time to share positive events going on in our personal lives and our professional lives. We find we have great cause for celebrating because of many great things happening in our churches. The classis reports in several cases shared the celebration of very successful outreach programs in their communities, traditional programs like vacation bible school and Sunday School and youth groups. I hear multiple comments from youth workers that as much as 50% of a given youth group is not affiliated with one's own church. Many churches, often based upon their locations, are committed to multicultural experiences within the community and energized efforts to incorporate all cultures represented in a community. While not brand new, but I would suggest somewhat recent developments due to events in today's society, many churches are finding cause for celebration because of food banks and pantries providing basic supplies for the home, just as Christ has called us to care for the poor and the hungry. Multicultural experiences in the form of out-of-state and out-of-country mission trips provide great rallying points for multiple congregations. The reports from the classis also reveal a rather strong manner of success in new church plants, a goal of classis, regional synods and the denomination. We can celebrate the fact that there is success in this area despite the fact there is an overall decline in membership. Perhaps the success of church plants or new church starts suggests new models of ministry that we have not considered in the past are working. We need to uncover new ways to connect with those not connected to churches who claim to be Christians as well as those who have not yet claimed the promises of the Bible.

Looming before us is still a major issue to be dealt with within the next couple of years. The Vision 2020 group has diligently been meeting to explore ways to deal with the issues before us which many fear will bring us to a point of fracture. I, as all of you do, love the Reformed Church in America and grieve the stress and tension before us while likely operating with some fear of what the future holds for the denomination. We believe in the same God and have so many commonalities amongst us that it is hard to imagine anything different from what we are and have right now. I look forward to positive outcomes for the educational portion of our day today to help us deal with these stresses and pray that as we move forward through a process that those watching from outside of us might note that we have dealt with critical issues with dignity and grace and in a manner that might be modeled by others.

I'd like to close this presentation with the recital of perhaps the most common Christian-based words spoken in unity throughout the generations, The Lord's Prayer, but in a little different way. Between each phrase of the words of the Lord's Prayer, I would ask that we pause about 10 secs to think on the words we just spoke. To that end, please follow my lead.

Our Father.....who art in heaven.....hallowed be Thy name.....Thy Kingdom come.....Thy will be done.....on earth as it is in heaven.....Give us this day our daily bread.....And forgive us our

debts.....as we forgive our debtors.....And lead us not into temptation.....But deliver us from evil.....For Thine is the Kingdom.....and the power.....And the glory..... Forever.....Amen

ELECTION OF THE PRESIDENT

The current vice-president, Greg Brower, was presented as the sole candidate for the office of president. Delegates used the provided ballots to vote as required by the RSGL Rules of Order. Greg Brower was elected as President of the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes on the first ballot.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE REPORT

Bob VanderZwaag, reporting

Summary of Actions Taken in the Past Year

The *Rules of Order* of the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes (RSGL) state that among other duties, the Executive Committee shall “administer the affairs of the Regional Synod between sessions of the assembly.” Since the 2018 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 25, 2018 meeting, the committee:

- welcomed members elected by the 2018 RSGL Assembly.
- approved the RSGL Assembly Minutes of May 7, 2018 for publication.
- evaluated the 2018 Assembly of the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes that was convened at Second Reformed Church in Kalamazoo on Monday, May 7.
- set the date for the 2019 Assembly for Monday, May 6, 2019.
- reviewed the Regional Executive Strategic Goals for 2018-2019 presented by John Messer.
- granted authority to the Regional Executive or the RSGL President to sign legal documents on behalf of the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes for any legal and/or property actions approved by the RSGL Executive Committee or the RSGL Assembly.
- adopted proposed changes to the RSGL Rules of Order in principle and referred them to the RSGL Overtures and Judicial Business Committee for consideration.
- reviewed a report on the actions of the 2018 General Synod that was held from June 7-12 on the campus of Calvin College including the appointment of the Vision 2020 Team.
- engaged in Bible Study following the Accountability Principal AP1.a.1. on the topic of the Great Commission in Biblical Context and our Current Context led by Branson Parler and John Messer.
- decided on a search process to replace the current RSGL representative on the General Synod Council who will complete his 4-year term on June 30, 2019.
- engaged in prayer for wisdom and discernment for the future of the Reformed Church in America.

At the November 5, 2018 meeting, the committee:

- welcomed a new member of this committee, Rev. Deb Yurk, who was appointed by the Holland Classis to serve the unexpired term of Glenda McKinley.
- approved the use of covenant shares in the place of the per-confessing-member assessment currently in use for funding the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes if the General Synod votes in favor of this plan. If approved by the General Synod, this funding plan would be implemented by the regional synod in the same year as the General Synod.
- reduced the mandatory finance reserve percentage from 35% to 30% for each budget year in the future.
- received staff reports from Doug McClintic, Scott Lokers, and Mike Gafa. Doug has accepted a new position with the RCA to coordinate global church planting efforts in partnership with churches in Europe.
- designated a housing allowance for the members of the staff of the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes for 2019.
- reviewed a Revised Budget for the current fiscal year in the amount of \$754,200.
- approved a resolution in honor of Bill VerHulst, who has served faithfully for 17 years as the Treasurer of the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes.
- received word that Mike Gafa has been hired as the new treasurer for the regional synod.

- reviewed the Guiding Principles of the Synod of the Great Lakes and considered incorporating the RSGL Staff Mission Principles and Vision Frame (Mission, Motives, Map, Measures), but decided that they did not conflict with the existing principles and did not need to be included in the document.
- decided to forgive the assessments for the year 2019 from the Twin Lakes Reformed Church in response to a request from Southwest Michigan Classis.
- nominated elder delegates to the 2018 General Synod to serve a four-year term on the General Synod Council to begin on July 1, 2019. Bruce Deckinga accepted the nomination.
- nominated a number of ministers to serve a three-year term on the Commission on Judicial Business to begin on July 1, 2019. John (Chip) Sauer accepted the nomination.
- nominated Judy Nelson to serve a three-year term on the Commission on Nominations to begin on July 1, 2019. Judy accepted the nomination.
- appointed Bob VanderZwaag as the regular delegate from the RSGL to the 2019 General Synod.
- reviewed the location for annual RSGL Assembly meeting on May 6, 2019. The Assembly will meet at the 2nd Reformed Church of Kalamazoo, following the pattern of meeting at the same location for two years in a row.

At the March 4, 2019 meeting, the committee:

- monitored the performance of the Regional Synod Executive by reviewing the Regional Executive Strategic Goals for 2018 and the work that John Messer has been doing on the Vision 2020 Task Force.
- monitored the work of the GLR Executive Committee by completing a self-evaluation form which was distributed in advance of the meeting along with the Guiding Principles (the source of the items listed in the self-evaluation form), focusing on Devotion to Prayer and the Word of God, Community Research and Missional Engagement, Church Feedback, Mission Assessment, and Governing Style.
- reviewed the reports from the RSGL Finance Committee including the 2019/2020 proposed budget and 2020 Assessment.
- decided to place a discussion on forming a new classis on the agenda for our June 24 RSGL Executive Committee meeting with the understanding that a decision will be made at the November Executive Committee meeting to allow for adequate consultation as described in the *Book of Church Order*.
- voted to communicate the support of the RSGL Executive Committee for the request of the Zeeland Classis to transfer Jusrang Church in Atlanta from Zeeland Classis to Greater Palisades Classis along with the transfer of Disciple Church (non-organized) to Greater Palisades Classis.
- nominated Laurel Kempkers to serve a second term on the RSGL Executive Committee as an at-large member beginning on June 1, 2019.
- nominated candidates for the office of vice-president of the regional synod, considering the suggestions for vice-president from the classis clerks from the list of classis delegates to the 2019 RSGL Assembly. Mary Beth Gernaat, Mari D. Martin, and Michael (Mik) Sutton accepted their nomination.
- reviewed the report of the OJBC to the May 6 Assembly including the Proposed Changes to the RSGL Rules of Order.
- reviewed the 2019 RSGL Assembly agenda including a presentation on the Vision 2020 process during three hours of the meeting (one and a half hours before and after lunch).
- engaged in at time of prayer for a personal need of a committee member.

NOMINATIONS AND ELECTION

Nomination of RSGL Executive Committee Members

The 2017 Assembly of the Synod of the Great Lakes voted to approve amendments in the RSGL Rules of Order (approved in a first reading by the 2016 Assembly) so that each of its classes nominates one representative to the RSGL Executive Committee to be approved by the Assembly. The changes to the nomination of members to serve on the RSGL Executive Committee include the following main points:

- Nine members of the Executive Committee (not counting officers) will be elected in staggered three-year terms. A balance shall be maintained between ministers of Word and Sacrament and non-ministers on the committee.
- One member will be nominated by each of the seven classes in our region for approval at the Assembly meeting as needed. Each 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 RSGL Executive Committee will nominate two at-large members for approval by the Assembly, as needed, to ensure a balance of leadership gifts, ethnic/gender/age perspectives, and other skills as may be helpful on the Executive Committee.
- Terms begin on June 1 and end on May 31. Should any of the members resign or otherwise vacate their position, the classis (or the RSGL Executive Committee in the case of an at-large member) nominates a new person to serve the remainder of the unexpired term for election at the next Assembly meeting.

Not counting our Regional Executive (Synod Minister), the chairperson of the Finance Committee, and the four elected officers of the regional synod, the classes are currently represented by the following people on the RSGL Executive Committee, listed with the year that their term on office expires. Also listed are the two at-large members of the Executive Committee, bringing the total number to nine.

Classis	Committee Members (class) M=Minister
Great Lakes City	Dan Sewell (2020, 2 nd term) M
Holland	Deb Yurk (2019, 1 st term) M
Muskegon	Greg Stamm (2020, 2 nd term) M
Northern Michigan	Mik Sutton (2021, 1 st term)
North Grand Rapids	Billy Norden (2019, 1 st term) M
Southwest Michigan	Suzanne Hart (2021, 1 st term) M
Zeeland	Jami Alferink (2021, 1 st term)
At-Large	Laurel Kempkers (2019, 1 st term)
At-Large	Jen Holmes Curran (2020, 1 st term) M

At the 2017 RSGL Assembly, Holland Classis nominated Glenda McKinley to serve a two-year term on the RSGL Executive Committee, beginning on June 1, 2017. This past year Glenda resigned, and Deb Yurk was appointed to serve the remainder of Glenda's term, ending on May 31 this year. North Grand Rapids Classis nominated Rev. Billy Norden to serve a two-year term on the RSGL Executive Committee, beginning on June 1, 2017. The RSGL Executive Committee nominated Laurel Kempkers to serve a two-year term as an at-large member of the Executive Committee, beginning on June 1, 2017. Those terms are concluding on June 1, 2019.

Holland Classis nominates **Deb Yurk** for a three-year term, beginning on June 1, 2019. Rev. Deb Yurk is Co-Pastor of Trinity Reformed Church in Holland, where she has served since October 2014. Prior to moving to Holland, Deb lived in southern California and planted Church of Grace in Garden Grove, through Emmanuel Reformed Church, Paramount, CA. Prior to her ordination, Deb served on staff at the Crystal Cathedral, at CenterPoint in Kalamazoo, MI and at Trinity Reformed, Kalamazoo in various Christian Ed roles. Prior to her ministerial roles, Deb worked as an Occupational Therapist in home health. Deb graduated from WMU with her BS in OT (1979); from WTS with an MRE (1996) and with an MDiv (2008). She has been married to her husband, Pat for 40 years and has 4 grown children. Dr. Brian (& Michelle), Rev. Kevin (& Rachel), Stephen (& Ashley) and Meghan (& Matt Johnson). Deb and Pat have 8 grandchildren with #9 due in July. Her back porch is her favorite place to read and the Pacific Ocean and Lake Michigan are her favorite places to visit.

R-4

To elect Deb Yurk for a three-year term on the RSGL Executive Committee, beginning on June 1, 2019, as the representative from Holland Classis. (APPROVED)

Billy Norden that he has taken on some additional work with the RCA and does not think he can commit to another term in good conscience. The North Grand Rapids Classis nominates **Nancy Boote** for a three-year term, beginning on June 1, 2019. Rev. Nancy Boote was born and raised in Western Pennsylvania. She made profession of faith in the United Presbyterian Church and was active in youth ministry leadership. Her pastor planted the seed of seminary in Nancy when she was 15. When she was 16, Nancy moved to Okemos, Michigan. She received her bachelor's degree in religion (music minor) from Hope College. While at Hope, Nancy continued to be involved in campus ministry. But she told the chaplain that she would never go to seminary. He, of course, told her, "Never say never!" After graduation, Nancy participated in the RCA's Adventure in Ministry program where she served at Bethany Memorial Reformed Church in New York City and continued to explore her gifts in ministry. After marrying her husband Evan, Nancy served in a ministry role at Geneva Campus Ministry in Madison, WI. In 1988, Nancy and Evan moved to Columbia, Missouri, where they

raised their sons, Cameron and Ethan. While in Columbia, Nancy was the Associate Teaching Director for Community Bible Study. It was during this time, that her call of ministry grew. Her love for prayer, evangelism and people fueled this call. In 2006, Nancy enrolled as a Distance Learning Student at Western Theological Seminary and graduated in 2011. In 2012, Nancy and her husband moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan. She was ordained in 2013. From 2012-2018, Nancy served as the Pastor of Congregational Care at Ridgewood CRC in Jenison, MI. Besides attending to those in need at Ridgewood, Nancy was actively involved in prayer ministries in the West Michigan area and has trained people to share their faith with others. Nancy and Evan reside in Ada, MI. She enjoys walking, writing music, singing and being a grandma.

R-5

To elect Nancy Boote for a three-year term on the RSGL Executive Committee, beginning on June 1, 2019 as the representative from the North Grand Rapids Classis. (APPROVED)

The RSGL Executive Committee nominates **Laurel Kempkers** to serve a three-year term beginning on June 1, 2019. Laurel (Van Haitsma) Kempkers is a member of Overisel Reformed Church in Holland, where she is a member of the Celebration Choir of the church. Laurel married Gordon Kempkers 3-1/2 years ago and moved to Hamilton, MI from Ludington. She had been a member of Mason County Reformed Church (MCRC) of Scottville, MI for 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 10 Van Haitsma grandchildren, and 1 step daughter and 1 step son plus 5 Kempkers grandchildren through marriage to Gord. She retired from teaching in 2009 from Covenant Christian School, Ludington, MI. Laurel's favorite pastimes are reading and walking, and going "on safari" with Gord as they two-track through the woods looking for deer, turkeys, and other wild life.

R-6

To elect Laurel Kempkers for a three-year term on the RSGL Executive Committee, beginning on June 1, 2019 as an at-large member. (APPROVED)

2019 Presidential Candidate (our current vice-president)

The RSGL Rules of Order specify that the president is elected by ballot and the current vice-president is the sole nominee on the first ballot. If the candidate receives a majority vote of the delegates present at the meeting, the current vice-president shall be declared elected. Rev. Greg Brower is our current vice-president.

Greg Brower grew up in Third Christian Reformed Church in Zeeland, MI. Attending Christian schools from kindergarten through college, he came to faith his Sophomore year at Calvin College. After graduation, he worked at Herman Miller, earned an MBA from Indiana University, and worked for a while as a consultant in Chicago. While living in Chicago, he felt a call to ministry after an encounter with a homeless person. He met his wife, Rachel, while attending Western Theological Seminary in Holland and they were married in 2001. His first call was to New Hope Community Church in Aurora, CO where their first child, Ethan, was born. After 2 years, they returned to Michigan to serve Zion Reformed Church in Grandville, where over the past 14 years they have seen the church develop an outward focus, join in supporting and helping launch three new churches, begin multiple neighborhood ministries, and grow younger. Greg enjoys hiking in the mountains, kayaking on Lake Michigan, camping with his family, and watching a good basketball game. He and Rachel have four children: Ethan (9th grade), Noah (7th grade), Caleb (4th grade), and Eliana (1st grade).

2019 Vice-Presidential Candidates (nominated by the RSGL Executive Committee)

Under ARTICLE V. ELECTIONS, our Rules of Order contain the following rules for the nomination and election of the Vice-President of the Synod of the Great Lakes:

Sec. 2. The vice-president shall be elected by ballot from among the list of the delegates enrolled at the regular session. The office of vice-president shall be filled by a minister of Word and sacrament only on alternate years. The Executive Committee shall recommend a minimum of three (3) eligible candidates for the office of vice-president. Other nominations of delegates may be offered from the floor of the assembly on the nominating ballot (first ballot).

Sec. 3. The election for vice-president shall not begin until the president has been elected. The nominees recommended by the Executive Committee and others nominated from the floor shall appear on the nominating ballot. If any of the nominees receives two-thirds of the total number of ballots cast on the nominating ballot, the nominee shall be declared elected. If this is not the case and

more than three nominees were on the ballot, the three nominees receiving the highest number of votes will be placed on the electing ballot. If only three nominees were on the nominating ballot, the names of the two nominees receiving the highest number of votes will be placed on the electing ballot. A simple majority of ballots cast on the electing ballots will constitute an election to the office. If the second ballot (the first electing ballot) does not result in an election, the names of the two nominees receiving the highest number of votes will be placed on the next electing ballot.

2019 Candidates for Vice-President

This year we must nominate a person who is not a minister of Word and Sacrament for the office of vice-president of the regional synod. All those who are serving on the RSGL Executive Committee who are not ministers and all those who are serving as elder delegates from the classes are eligible for nomination. The RSGL Executive Committee nominates the following candidates for vice-president.

Mary Beth Gernaat is a member and ordained elder at Covenant Community Church in Hudsonville and currently serves on the Pastoral Relations Committee for Zeeland Classis. Having grown up in rural West Michigan, the daughter of a United Brethren pastor, she graduated from Northview High School and attended Grand Rapids School of the Bible and Music. Mary Beth earned her B.S. in Ministry Leadership at Cornerstone University. She has a passion for middle-school youth and has served as a youth leader for over 25 years. She and her husband, Kurt, the Fire Chief in Blendon Township, live in Hudsonville and like to travel, read, and spend time in the woods near Falmouth, MI. They will soon be empty-nesters as they are busy helping plan the wedding of their daughter, Lexi, who will be married in June. Austin, their son, was recently married this past August. Mary Beth is employed at the Edgar & Elsa Prince Foundation as the foundation assistant and personal assistant to Elsa Prince Broekhuizen.

Mari D. Martin lives and works in Holland, MI. She moved from Wisconsin to Michigan in 1983. She is the founding partner of Performance Strategies Group, Inc. (PSG). It is a consulting company that identifies individual strengths and talents; and accelerates the communication, collaboration and teambuilding process within companies, non-profit organizations and ministry teams. Mari has worked with several RCA church leaders, staff and teams. A few specific examples would include the full staff of the Reformed Church in America; leaders within the Synod of the Great Lakes; Vision 2020 Team; Christ Memorial Church, Faith Church, Dyer, IN; Emmanuel Reformed, Parmount, CA; Fairhaven Ministries, Hudsonville; Gun Lake Community Church; and Remembrance Church, Grand Rapids. She is a member of Christ Memorial Church where she has served as a Pastoral Care Elder, Lead Elder, and Care and Connections Elder. Mari and her husband Chris have three adult sons and one granddaughter. Mari has a passion for long distance running and has run eight marathons.

Mik Sutton grew up near Ludington, Michigan, attended Mason County Central Schools, West Shore Community College, Western Michigan University (BS, MA in special education), and Grand Valley State University (MA educational leadership). He worked in the field of special education for 32 years, and retired to enter the RCA Commissioned Pastor program. He has served as Pastor of Intercession and Care at Mason County Reformed, Senior Pastor at Grant Reformed, and Senior Pastor at Sugar Ridge Church of the Brethren. Mik has served on the Northern Michigan Classis Board, the Regional Synod Executive Committee, the Words of Hope Board of Direction, and has been a delegate to two General Synods. Mik currently serves as the Pastoral Relations coordinator for the Northern Michigan Classis Board, is a member of the Regional Synod Executive Committee and the Regional Synod Strategic Prayer Team, and runs a home-based prayer outreach ministry. Mik is married to Polly, they have five children, seven grandchildren, three great grandchildren, and are members of Mason County Reformed Church where Mik serves as an elder.

General Synod Delegates

The 2019 General Synod will be held on the campus of Hope College in Holland, Michigan. It will begin on the afternoon of Thursday, June 6 at 3:00 p.m. and will adjourn by noon on Tuesday, June 11. Each regional synod is entitled to appoint one regular voting delegate, two women corresponding delegates, one young adult corresponding delegate, and its regional synod executive, or their appointee, as a corresponding delegate. At our November meeting Bob VanderZwaag was approved as our regular delegate. John Messer will be serving as our regional synod executive corresponding delegate. The women serving on the Executive Committee were asked if they are willing to serve as corresponding delegates. Laurel Kempkers and Jen Holmes Curran volunteered to serve as corresponding delegates. Suzanne Hart and Jami Alferink will serve

as alternates, if Laurel and Jen cannot attend. The Executive Committee members were asked to recommend candidates to serve as the youth corresponding delegate. Ruth Langkamp agreed to serve in this role for 2019.

ELECTION OF THE VICE-PRESIDENT

Mary Beth Gernaat, Mari D. Martin, 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. Following the first ballot vote, the names of Mari Martin and Mik Sutton were presented for the second ballot. Mik Sutton was elected to the office of Vice-President on the second ballot.

REGIONAL EXECUTIVE REPORT

John Messer, reporting

John Messer presented an oral report on the work of the regional synod along with the written report below.

The past year brought new challenges and continuing changes to Great Lakes Region. Our great staff continued to excel at developing leaders, starting churches and strengthening churches. Doug McClintic worked hard at identifying and equipping church planters and preparing them to begin healthy new churches. Scott Lokers identified new transitional pastors and has been working with churches to coordinate transitional ministry coverage for all those who desire it. As a result, the value of transitional ministry is becoming apparent to more church leaders, which will ultimately increase the health and effectiveness of churches in our region. Mike Gafa continued to improve our ministry offerings through Luminex and has partnered with Scott to offer Church Optimization services within the region.

We have expanded our Luminex ministry services to include Will Mancini's Auxano processes: Church Unique (church mission, values, strategy vision frame), God Dreams (vision proper), Younique (Gospel-centered life calling), as well as Leadership Pipeline development. The Auxano processes provide outstanding help for churches and leaders who want to be missionally effective. We are offering the range of integrated services to leaders and churches in our region (see Luminexusa.org for more information).

The focus in 2018 was making strategic decisions about the future organization and direction of RSGL. Our conviction is that we must continue to accomplish our mission of "developing leaders to start and strengthen churches" even as the external and internal denominational environment, including the future direction and organizational structure, are uncertain. Our conviction is this: We will continue to be "on mission," regardless of what happens around us. Jesus told us to "go and make disciples..." and we will continue to grow our capacity and effectiveness to accomplish that mission.

In my last report I affirmed that the Regional Staff had committed to taking 10,000 Kingdom leadership risks by 2025. I would like to report that Doug, Scott, Mike and I have each taken hundreds of risks to further the strategic mission of RSGL. The risks are not always predictable or foreseen, but almost always are apparent when we are confronted with them. For example, it is a strategic risk to challenge a stalled congregation to consider taking 12-18 months to work with a transition pastor, or challenging a dying RCA congregation to consider a "resurrection" scenario (close and restart), or challenge the Vision 2020 Team to consider that it is the RCA's structure that has created the outcomes we are experiencing, and if we want to change the outcome we are experiencing (conflict), we have to change the structure (organization). The staff have taken many more risks that they would be willing to talk with you about.

As a denomination, the RCA has taken a great risk: At the last General Synod we chose to embark on a process of considering alternative approaches to our corporate future: changing nothing, radically restructuring, or "graciously" separating. As a member of the Vision 2020 team, the past year has been consumed with talking, thinking, and praying about potential ways to overcome our dysfunctional place in which we find ourselves. At General Synod 2019 delegates will engage in a process to learn about and discuss the possible future scenarios adopted at GS 2018 (do nothing, radical restructuring, gracious separation).

Our next year will be focused on processing the potential future scenarios as a region. Each Classis and congregation will be invited to participate in forums to learn about and discuss these scenarios in preparation for the decision-making time at General Synod 2020. I strongly encourage congregation and Classis leaders to engage in this process. The greatest gift we can give one another is to remain connected through the difficult process of talking about hard topics, hard choices and the probability of painful change. Our painful history of arguing and conflict over human sexuality will not be resolved by cutting off relationships with those who are different. It doesn't work in politics; it doesn't work in the church. If I have learned anything this past year or so,

it is that the only way we have any opportunity to find a God-honoring outcome to our current dysfunction, it will be through a recommitment to loving relationships with our Christian brothers and sisters. Consequently, the best strategy to come to a God-honoring outcome in 2020 is to stay engaged (or re-engage) with the process and the people until we have reached an outcome. We will stay engaged and stay committed to our calling.

Ministry emphases in 2019

We will develop leaders who start and strengthen churches:

- Apprenticing, mentoring, coaching
- Developing leadership pathways
- Church planting, ministry planting, outreach, and evangelism

More than ever, we must be willing to take risks to advance the Kingdom of God.

- Risking popular approval to stand for grace and truth. Risking reputation to reach out to the least and the lost, no matter who they are, no matter where they are.
- Risking reputation and status to be counter-cultural, standing for Christ and the message that true transformation happens only through relationship with him, when that message is increasingly culturally unpopular.
- Risking the familiar to pursue the unknown, to the place God is calling us, with no guarantee of success, in simple obedience, for the sake of others.

As regional staff, we will continue to lead forward into the unknown future, trusting that God will work all things together for good. We are committed to helping others flourish. We are committed to extending our relationships to work with new people in new ways for the sake of the Kingdom. We are committed to letting go of some forms of ministry that are no longer effective so that we can take hold of newer, more effective approaches.

We remain committed to encouraging and equipping leaders and churches to follow hard after Jesus for the sake of others.

Grace and Peace.

OVERTURES AND JUDICIAL BUSINESS COMMITTEE

Case Van Kempen, reporting

Our committee met on November 15, 2018 and on February 21, 2019. Case VanKempen was elected as the chair and Susan Vogel-Vanderson was elected as vice-chair.

AMENDMENTS TO THE RSGL RULES OF ORDER

The Executive Committee of the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes (RSGL) asked this committee to review several proposed amendments to the RSGL Rules of Order and consider whether or not to submit them to the May 6, 2019 RSGL Assembly for consideration.

One or Two-Year Term for Assembly Delegates

The current rule in the RSGL Rules of Order of the regional synod that states: “The delegates serve two-year terms, according to their classis’ regular rotation or selection process...” The rule was designed to provide more continuity in the decision-making of the regional synod, but it has the downside of limiting the numbers of minister and elder delegates who can attend over the years. After considering this recommendation, the motion was made, seconded, and carried to recommend the following amendment (*additions underlined, deletions stricken*):

ARTICLE I. MEMBERSHIP OF THE ASSEMBLY

Sec. 1. The membership of the assembly of the Regional Synod is the Regional Synod Executive Committee, and four ministers of the Word and Sacrament delegates and four elder delegates from each of the classes within the bounds of the Synod. The delegates are selected ~~serve two-year terms,~~ according to their classis’ regular rotation or selection process. Synod staff are *ipso facto* members without vote. The seated delegates and the Executive Committee members are permitted to vote.

Reason: This amendment allows each classis to determine the number of terms that any one delegate may serve, similar to the process for General Synod delegates. The classes will be informally encouraged to appoint delegates for more than one term to encourage continuity.

R-7

That ARTICLE I. MEMBERSHIP OF THE ASSEMBLY, Section 1 be amended by inserting the words “are selected” and deleting the words “serve two-year terms” in the second sentence. (APPROVED IN PRINCIPLE)

Nomination of Vice-Presidential Candidates

The classis clerks pointed out a problem that we face when trying to find elder delegates who are willing and able to consider serving as one of the three required candidates for office of vice-president, since not many elders have had the experience of leading meetings. This is usually not a problem in the years when the candidates for vice-president are drawn from the minister delegates. The clerks suggested changing the way that candidates are nominated for the office of vice-president so that elders who are not delegates to the regional synod may be nominated for that office if the classis determines that none of their elder delegates are willing and able to serve in that role. This committee considered whether or not to recommend an amendment allowing a classis to suggest a candidate for vice-president from elders of the churches within the classis if the regional synod Executive Committee determines that none of the elder delegates from a classis are willing and able to serve in that role. The committee decided not to recommend an amendment following the practice of General Synod that requires the vice-president to be elected from among the current delegates to the assembly.

RSGL Finance Committee Membership

In their meeting on March 12, the RSGL Executive Committee suggested that the RSGL Rules of Order be amended to allow the formation of a committee of 5-7 members, with as wide a representation as possible, but allowing for more than one member from a classis. This committee considered whether or not to recommend an amendment that would allow a classis to request another classis to appoint a Finance Committee member for the next term. The committee decided not to recommend this amendment with the belief that each classis should be able to find someone with financial skills to serve as their representative. Additional volunteers may be recruited to work with the committee if the members lack specific skills.

Method of Guaranteeing Balance on the Executive Committee

Now that we have started our regular rotation of members appointed by the classes, we need to find a way to carry out the requirements for balance between ministers of Word and sacrament and non-ministers on the committee. The motion was made, seconded, and carried to propose the following amendment (underlined below):

ARTICLE V. ELECTIONS

Sec. 5. Nine regular members of the Executive Committee will be elected in staggered three-year terms as needed at the regular session of the Assembly 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 all members begin on June 1 and end on May 31. Regular members will be chosen for their gifts, from the confessing members of the churches in the Regional Synod and need not come from the body of delegates at the assembly. One 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. 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. In order to maintain a balance between ministers of Word and sacrament and non-ministers on the committee, positions held for two terms shall be rotated to the opposite category (minister or non-minister).

R-8

That ARTICLE V. ELECTIONS, Section 5 be amended by the addition of the sentence: “In order to maintain a balance between ministers of Word and sacrament and non-ministers on the committee, positions held for two terms shall be rotated to the opposite category (minister or non-minister).” (APPROVED IN PRINCIPLE)

Corresponding Delegates for the RSGL Assembly

For the past few years the delegates have adopted the following motion at the beginning of the RSGL Assembly meeting:

The privilege of the floor is limited to the official delegates of the Assembly. Since non-delegates do not have access to the floor, the following motion is in order: "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 RSGL task forces, committees, and ministry teams who have been asked to present reports to the Synod."

Currently the regional synod Rules of Order do not provide for corresponding members. This committee decided to recommend a new section in the rules that would eliminate the need for this motion each year.

R-9

That ARTICLE I. MEMBERSHIP OF THE ASSEMBLY be amended adding a new Section 4 that would read: "Classis leaders, stated clerks, or RCA staff that are present at an Assembly meeting, and those non-delegates and members of the RSGL task forces, committees, and ministry teams who have been asked to present reports to the Synod will be considered corresponding delegates. Corresponding delegates may fully participate in the Assembly but cannot vote, make motions, or be elected to office." (APPROVED IN PRINCIPLE)

Editorial Changes

The motion was made, seconded, and carried to recommend the following editorial changes that reflect the current practice of the regional synod:

Since two classes combined to form the Great Lakes City Classis, we have seven rather than eight classes in our region. The following amendment bring the Rules of Order up-to-date.

ARTICLE VII. ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEES

Sec. 2. Overtures and Judicial Business Committee.

B. Membership. This committee shall consist of ~~eight members~~ one member from each classis within the Regional Synod, at least three members must be ministers and at least two members must be elders.

A number of years ago the Executive Committee changed the name of our Synod Minister to "Regional Executive". This committee recommends a global amendment to replace "Synod Minister" with "Regional Executive" wherever that title is found in the Rules of Order.

For a number of years, the Executive Committee has delegated the responsibility of appointing the Standing Committees (Classical Minutes Committee, Study Committee, and Leave of Absence and Resolutions Committee) to the president, working with Alison DeBoer (Operations Manager of the regional synod), rather than requiring the approval of the Executive Committee. This committee recommends the following amendments:

ARTICLE II. MEETINGS OF THE ASSEMBLY

Sec. 5. Standing Committees. The following committees shall be ~~appointed~~ nominated by the president ~~and appointed by the Executive Committee~~. Each committee shall consist of two ministers and two elders. They shall serve from the time of their appointment to the end of the annual session of assembly. ~~Time shall be scheduled during the regular session of the assembly meeting for these committees to meet and report to the assembly.~~

ARTICLE IV. DUTIES OF THE OFFICERS

Sec. 1. The president shall preside over all meetings of the Regional Synod assembly and the Executive Committee. It shall be the president's duty to state and explain the business which is to be transacted, to enforce the Rules of Order, and in general to maintain the decorum and dignity becoming a judicatory of the church. The president shall ~~appoint~~ recommend to the Executive Committee ~~appointees to~~ all standing committees and a sufficient number of persons to serve as tellers for each session, whose task it will be to distribute materials, to count written ballots, and to perform such other activities as the president may direct. It shall also be the president's duty at each regular session to present to the assembly a report on the state of religion in the Synod, based upon personal observations and reports submitted by the classes. ~~When this report has been adopted, it shall be published in the Minutes of the Regional Synod.~~

Explanation: The report of the president is always published in the Minutes of the Regional Synod, and the Assembly never votes to adopt the report in its entirety. If the report contains recommendations for the Assembly to consider, it is referred to the Study Committee. In recent years, the reports of the president have not included specific recommendations and the Study Committee has not been appointed.

R-10

That the editorial changes listed on pages 25-26 (above) be approved in principle. (APPROVED IN PRINCIPLE)

Review of the Last Appeal from the Region

This committee reviewed the report of the General Synod Commission on Judicial Business (CJB) in the 2018 Minutes of General Synod on pages 291-293. It was noted that the CJB voted to find the appeal of the Forners from the action of this committee to be frivolous and clearly without merit, and the CJB then dismissed the appeal without a hearing.

2018 Forner Complaint

The Overtures and Judicial Business Committee (OJBC) of the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes (RSGL) met on February 21, 2019 to consider the appeal/complaint filed by Phil and Diane Forner against the October 29, 2018 decision of Zeeland Classis “to not undertake an intentional process of reconciliation between Phil and Diane Forner (Forners), Spring Valley Church (SVC) and Zeeland Classis.”

This committee reviewed the process for considering complaints and appeals in the RCA *Book of Church Order (BCO)*, Chapter 2, Part III and determined that the email communication from the Forners appears to fit with the definition of a complaint. It does not fit the definition of an appeal, since an appeal is “the transfer to a higher judicatory of a complaint, a charge, or an appeal on which judgment has been rendered in a lower judicatory,” (*BCO*, 2.III.1.1) and Zeeland Classis took no such action in this case.

The committee considered if the case and its papers are in order. The OJBC decided that Forners have standing to file a complaint (since this case represents an ongoing issue in which they originally had standing), the complaint was filed in a timely way by the Forners, and the record of the case appears to be complete.

After the OJBC decided that the case is in proper order, this committee moved on to consider the merits of the complaint. The committee found no evidence that any action or a decision of the Zeeland Classis or its any of its officers violated or failed to comply with the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America or other laws and regulations of the church and found no grounds for a complaint as listed in the *BCO*.

The motion was made, seconded, and carried to find this complaint filed by the Forners against the Zeeland Classis to be frivolous, dilatory, and clearly without merit and to dismiss the complaint without a hearing. This action will be reported to the Assembly of the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes on May 6, 2019, but this decision is considered the final action of the regional synod in response to this complaint following Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 5 of the RCA *Book of Church Order*. [Note: This decision was appealed by the Forners and is under consideration by the General Synod Commission on Judicial Business.]

OJBC MEMBERS: John Grant, Diane Maodush-Pitzer, Dave Mejeur, Leighton Seys, Susan Vogel-Vanderson; Case VanKempen, Dirk Weeldreyer

BREAK

VISION 2020 PROCESS

The 2018 General Synod voted to appoint a 2020 Vision Group to discern RCA's future. The group is exploring three possible scenarios for the RCA's future—staying together, radical reconstituting and reorganization, and grace-filled separation. Interim general secretary Don Poest proposed the 2020 Vision Group in his report to synod, following a year of observations from across the denomination. The vision group will present its recommendations to General Synod 2020. The group has been working in consultation with Jim Herrington and Trisha Taylor and their colleague, Ryan Donovan, consultants who have a long relationship with the RCA and help congregations and denominations with strategy planning, conflict resolution, and leadership development. Tricia Taylor was invited to lead a training event at this Assembly.

Tricia Taylor is a counselor, author, consultant and speaker based in Houston, Texas. Trisha is a co-author of *The Leader's Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation*, which challenges leaders to see their congregations as living systems and to respond to leadership challenges with emotional maturity, leading as Jesus did, from the inside out. As both a minister and a counselor, Trisha holds a Texas

state license as a professional counselor and is a fellow in the American Association of Pastoral Counselors. She graduated from Baylor University (Psychology, 1985) and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (Counseling, 1988).

Tricia introduced herself and commented that she has been working with the RCA since the publication of *The Leaders Journey*, including the launching of Ridder Church Renewal in the RCA. She distributed a handout titled, "Being an Emotional Grown-up: Defined and Connected in an Emotionally Charged System." Tricia talked about how to live together in unity. The church is a system that is connected, complex, and changing. Everyone contributes to the results that we are getting, by what we do and what we don't do. You are not stuck in traffic; you are part of the traffic. Systems are always changing, but systems resist change. The highest leverage point of change is to change the way we show up in the system. Emotional maturity: The ability to act out of our deeply held values despite the pressure to do otherwise; the ability to stay connected with others without having our feelings and behaviors determined by them; and the ability to define ourselves and allow others to do the same. Jesus was the most emotionally mature leader that the world has even seen. The delegates discussed around their tables how Jesus demonstrated his emotional maturity and shared some examples with the whole group. Anxiety is our reaction to threat that pushes us toward fight or flight or freeze. Anxiety makes us focus "out there" instead of "in here." Anxiety is contagious. Predictable reactions to anxiety include conflict, distance, over/under functioning, and projection (triangles and blame). Anxious people blame others, look for a quick fix, join "herd" mentality, have heightened reactivity, accept poor leadership. The delegates discussed examples of anxious reactivity in the system of our denomination.

LUNCH AND FELLOWSHIP TIME

A prayer of blessing was offered by John Nyitray before lunch was served to all the delegates and guests.

VISION 2020 PROCESS

Tricia Taylor continued her presentation on the 2020 Vision Process. She read from Ephesians 4 and talked about the process of leading through change and how to face intractable problems. I define myself when I say clearly and courageously what I think, feel, and what I am going to do. I must also allow others to define themselves. Then, what does it mean to be connected? Fusion is when we get stuck to each other and take on the emotions of other people. I am appropriately connected when I can stay in relationship even in the face of disagreement and emotional intensity. The delegates discussed the question: "When something has to give, are you more likely to double down on defining yourself or are you more likely to focus on staying connected? What is the impact of that? Delegates were asked to try to hold on to something with their left hand while extending their right hand to another person. Tricia talked about ways to hold on to what we believe while connecting with other people. One way: To exchange anxiety for curiosity. The challenge is to stay connected to each person in the system. Tricia ended her presentation with a unison reading of the Prayer of St. Francis.

BREAK

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

John Messer, reporting

Our Finance Committee is the other one of two permanent administrative committees whose members are appointed directly by the classes within our region. John Messer presented the written report below on behalf of the committee.

During the past year, the Finance Committee:

- Reviewed and approved some changes to the 2018-19 budget.
- Reviewed the investment manager's report on earnings for 2018, and the current portfolio with the Synod's investment manager.
- Reviewed the financial statements for the year ended September 30, 2018.
- Updated the Minimum Salary Guidelines and Schedule for Ministers of Word and sacrament for 2020.
- Updated voluntary compensation guidelines for church staff of SGL churches for 2020.
- Reviewed and recommended approval of the Ministry Fund Budget and assessment for 2019-20, to the Executive Committee.
- Reviewed the financial statements for the quarter ended December 31, 2018.
- Gave thanks for the legacy left by Bill Verhulst, our former Treasurer, who served Christ and our Synod faithfully and joyfully for many years.

- Welcomed Mike Gafa into the role of Treasurer of the regional synod.

COMPENSATION GUIDELINES

The Executive Committee requested that we annually review and update the voluntary guidelines published to assist churches in setting reasonable compensation guidelines for Ministers of Word and Sacrament, as well as certain other church staff members. The Finance Committee has completed its review, and based on a combination of Consumer Price Index, rate of inflation, and annual Social Security increase, is recommending a 2.0% increase over the 2019 guidelines. The Finance Committee voted to recommend the following motions to this Assembly:

R-11

To approve the proposed 2020 Compensation Guidelines for Ministers of Word and Sacrament and recommend them to the classes within our region. (APPROVED)

R-12

To approve the proposed 2020 Church Staff Salary and Benefits Guidelines and recommend them to the churches to be implemented on a voluntary basis. (APPROVED)

2019-2020 BUDGET

The Finance Committee has reviewed the needs and requests for the Ministry Fund budget for 2019-20. The committee looked at each budgeted line item with the purpose of determining if there are ways to lower expenses without sacrificing mission and vision. In light of the reality that many of our congregations and classes face significant financial challenges, the 2019-20 Ministry Fund Budget reflects the fiscal responsibility to control operational and programmatic costs yet keep us “on mission” and stepping toward our vision.

Because we have experienced a steady decline in confessing membership in recent years, the committee has elected to propose the 2019-20 budget assuming a loss of 844 confessing members. The committee believes that this will be a realistic and conservative approach for estimating the 2020 assessment.

The proposed 2019-20 budget reflects this estimate and proposes no increase over 2019. This budget reflects minimal salary increases, encapsulates ongoing and anticipated staff transitions, and reflects an increasing bent toward supplemental (non-assessment) revenue from consulting services.

MINISTRY FUND

The 2020 proposed assessment of \$20.00 in our regional synod represents no increase over 2019 and remains one of the lowest of the RCA’s regional synods. The Finance Committee voted to recommend the following motion to this Assembly:

R-13

To approve the 2019-2020 Ministry Fund Budget and the \$20.00 per confessing member assessment. (APPROVED)

FINANCE COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Chuck Brower, chair (ZEE), Linda Jacobs (HOL), Tim Elzinga (NGR), Bob Zielinski (GLCC), Cindy Lowman (SWM), Irv Boersen (MUSK), Gord VanderSlice (NMI), Alison DeBoer (staff), Mike Gafa, (Treasurer, Ex-Officio).

Staff Reports

John Messer highlighted the written staff reports in the Assembly Workbook from Scott Lokers (Transition Ministry/Church Optimization Catalyst) and Doug McClintic (Church Multiplication Catalyst). Doug has left the regional synod staff and accepted a new position in Europe to coordinate global church planting efforts in partnership with churches and denominations around the world.

Classical Minutes Committee

Dick Van Dop, reporting

Minutes of the seven classes within our region were submitted by the classis clerks and examined by this committee before the meeting. Dick reported that the minutes from the regular and special sessions of the classes were found to be complete and in good order. The committee members completed feedback forms that will be sent to each classis clerk.

Resolutions/Leave of Absence Committee

Scott Van Arendonk, reporting

The committee recommended approval of the following resolutions:

R-14

To thank Branson Parler 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. (APPROVED)

R-15

To thank Susan Vogel-Vanderson for her eight years of services on the Overtures and Judicial Business Committee. (APPROVED)

R-16

**Whereas, William Arthur VerHulst (better known as Bill) served faithfully for 17 years as the Treasurer of the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes;
Whereas, Bill continued to serve the region as his job changed in scope and nature exhibiting his desire to do whatever work would help propel the mission and ministry of the synod;
Whereas, Bill worked cooperatively with the staff and the members of the Finance Committee and Executive Committee of the region;
Whereas, Bill retired from this work this past year only because his health did not let him continue; and
Whereas Bill entered the nearer presence of God on Friday, February 22, 2019, at the age of 78; now, therefore, be it
Resolved, That the 64th Annual Assembly of Regional Synod of the Great Lakes meeting on May 6, 2019 expresses its deepest appreciation for the faithful service of Bill VerHulst as Treasurer of this region of the Reformed Church in America and gives thanks to God for his life of service. (APPROVED)**

R-17

Thank Second Reformed Church for making its facility available for this year's assembly. (APPROVED)

Excused and Unexcused Absences

The following delegates were absent without excuse from the 2019 Assembly meeting: Roger Scheele from North Grand Rapids Classis, and Joe Brown, Pat Roush, and Michael Stewart from Southwest Michigan Classis.

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

In his role as stated clerk, Howard Moths read the minutes of this session by title: *The 64th Annual Session of the Synod of the Great Lakes Minutes, Convened at Second Reformed Church of Kalamazoo, Michigan, May 6, 2019*. The Executive Committee will review and approve the minutes before publication and after that they will be available of the regional synod website.

SEATING OF THE NEW OFFICERS

Bob VanderZwaag invited the past-president, Judy Nelson, to come forward to seat the newly elected officers. Judy invited Greg Brower, the newly elected president to come forward. Mik Sutton, the newly elected vice-president, was unable to attend this meeting. Judy congratulated them on their election and prayed for the new officers.

CLOSING PRAYER

Greg took over as the presiding officer and closed the Assembly meeting with prayer.

ADJOURNMENT

The motion was made, seconded, and carried to adjourn this Assembly of the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes. The meeting was adjourned at 2:45 p.m.

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

Documents that appear in the Appendix:

Financial Reports

2020 Compensation Guidelines for Ministers of Word and Sacrament

2020 Church Staff Salary and Benefits Guidelines

Staff Report: Scott Lokers (Transition Ministry/Church Optimization Catalyst)

Staff Report: Doug McClintic (Church Multiplication Catalyst).

The Leader's Journey (Handout from Tricia Taylor)