

**REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE GREAT LAKES
REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA
MEETING AND MINUTES
Convened at DeWitt Ministry Center, RCA Michigan Regional Center
Grand Rapids, Michigan
Sixty-eighth Annual Session
May 1, 2023**

FORMATION OF THE SYNOD

Roll Call/Seating of Delegates

This Assembly of the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes (RSGL) was convened at the DeWitt Ministry Center in the RCA Michigan Regional Center, Grand Rapids, Michigan, on Monday, May 1, 2023. President Michelle Chahine called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. Delegates were asked to be seated and to introduce themselves to others seated around their table. 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. The asterisk (*) designates a second-year delegate.

GREAT LAKES CITY CLASSIS

Rev. Jon Alexanian
Rev. Tim Dieffenbach*
Rev. Rob Housman
Rev. Brent Kladder
Ms. Joann Koning
Ms. Betty Shuster
Mr. Ken Williams*
Mr. Mike Zomermaand

HOLLAND CLASSIS

Mr. Max Blumer
Rev. Ryan Boes
Rev. Jon Brown
Rev. Denise Kingdom-Grier
Rev. Kevin Kleinheksel
Ms. Lois Maassen
Mr. Mike Rannow
Mr. Bill Van Auken

MUSKEGON CLASSIS

Rev. Jim Beezley*
Rev. Sherwin Brantsen*
Rev. David Celeskey*
Rev. John Koedyker
Mr. Wayne Duiser
Mr. Ron Morse
Mr. Steve Mussman
Mr. Hank Waldo

NORTH GRAND RAPIDS CLASSIS

Mr. Brian Andrew
Ms. Linda Cline*
Mr. John Dykema
Rev. Jen Holmes Curran
Rev. Kristen Meyer*

Mr. Kurt Reppart
Rev. Rebecca Stegeman Riekse*
Rev. Dave Vander Woude

NORTHERN MICHIGAN CLASSIS

Rev. Todd Bush*
Mr. Brock Johnsen
Rev. Cobus Manders
Rev. Drew Peterson*
Rev. Chip Sauer
Mr. Tom Van Dusen,
Mr. Jim Van Sickle*

SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN CLASSIS

Mr. Phil DeYoung
Rev. Paul Fazio*
Rev. Laura Osborne
Mr. Mark Shadley
Mr. Phil Stohrer
Mr. Don Visker*
Rev. Dave Zomer*

ZEELAND CLASSIS

Ms. Sara Donkersloot
Rev. Jonathan Elgersma
Ms. Linda Kolk
Mr. Don Komejan
Rev. Todd Krygsheld
Rev. Jon Opgennorth
Rev. Marcia Pratt
Mr. Lloyd Redder

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

President:	Mrs. Michelle Chahine
Vice-President:	Rev. Tim Dieffenbach
Past-President:	Rev. Dan Gillett
Past Past-President:	Vacant
At-Large Member:	Rev. Jen Holmes Curran
At-Large Member:	Mr. Mike Johnson
Great Lakes City Classis Rep:	Rev. Don Poest
Holland Classis Rep:	Mr. Steve Orlow
Muskegon Classis Rep:	Mr. Irv Boersen
Northern Michigan Classis Rep:	Mr. James Van Sickle
North Grand Rapids Classis Rep:	Rev. Nancy Boote
Southwest Michigan Classis Rep	Rev. Suzanne Hart
Zeeland Classis Rep	Mrs. Linda Kolk
Regional Executive:	Rev. John Messer
Stated Clerk/Parliamentarian (non-voting):	Rev. Howard Moths

Absent with excuse from this meeting: Don Poest, Max Blumer, Todd Krygsheld, and Ken Williams.
Absent without excuse from this meeting: Brent Kladder.

Guests included Judy Nelson, the current vice president of the General Synod, and Wayne Otten, a member of the RSGL Transition Team. All seven of the classis clerks/leaders were present at this meeting.

Privilege of the Floor

The presiding officer made a number of introductions. Following the provision in the RSGL *Rules of Order*, the privilege of the floor was granted to those employed as classis leaders, stated clerks, or RCA staff that were present, and those non-delegates and members of the RSGL task forces, committees, and ministry teams who were asked to present reports to the Synod.

Limits to Debate

The president requested that all the delegates observe a two-minute time limit for speaking on any motion that comes before the Assembly.

Approval of the 2022 Assembly Minutes

The Minutes of the last Assembly of the Synod of the Great Lakes that was held on May 2, 2022, are posted on the Great Lakes Region website 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. The President asked for any additions or corrections to the minutes. Since none were offered, she declared that the minutes of May 2, 2022, will stand approved as printed.

Appointment of Standing Committees

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

Classical Minutes Committee

Kevin Kleinheksel, chair
Lois Maassen
Betty Shuster
Dave VanderWoude
Howard Moths (staff)

Tellers

Joann Koning, chair
Sherwin Brantsen
Laura Osborne
Drew Peterson

Resolution/Leave of Absence Committee

Jim Beezley, chair
Linda Cline
Don Komejan
Alison DeBoer (staff)

Study Committee

NA

Presentation of New Business

The *Rules of Order* of the Synod of the Great Lakes allow for the 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:

R-1

To approve the agenda as printed in the Assembly Workbook. (ADOPTED)

OPENING DEVOTIONS AND PRAYER

Devotions were led by Lindsey Burkey, who serves as the Director of Worship at Rosewood Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan. Lindsey led the assembly in singing a medley of spiritual songs and hymns and opened the meeting with prayer. Greg Brower, who serves as the Classis Leader of the Great Lakes City Classis, presented a message from Matthew 28:16-20. Greg talked about how we develop leaders to start and strengthen churches, and the greater goal of the Great Commission at the end of Matthew's Gospel. We should not let distractions keep us from the mission of the church – to make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to obey. Greg led the assembly in prayer.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Michelle Chahine, reporting

As Michelle presented her report, our vice president, Tim Dieffenbach, took the chair. Michelle presented the following report.

“As I was driving to a meeting recently, I was listening to *The Message*, a Christian music station on Sirius XM Radio. The radio host, with his soothing voice, shared an honest insight about what anxiety really means. My ears perked up and I tuned out my inner monologue and the road noise, to listen closely. He said simply, ‘Anxiety means you feel something is *lacking*.’ This made me pause and my inner-monologue was jump-started again. What? How profound! I continued to ponder and asked myself if this was true for me. ‘How do I handle the concept of lacking?’ Do I remain mired in my self-sufficiency and pride or do I refocus on God and trust Him to supply all my needs according to His riches and glory?’ My answers to these questions were yes, and yes. In fact, I do absolutely both, based on my level of humility in a given circumstance.

“In my preparation to write this report, I reviewed previous RSGL president’s reports, classis president’s reports and reflected upon my service on the RSGL Executive Committee for the last three years. In this process, I recognized several themes that you will recognize- uncertainty, anxiety, lament, and concerns about the future of the RCA. The impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic, Vision 2020 Report and the anticipation of the Restructuring Process for the region and denomination- to name just a few, has changed our lives and ministry landscape. We have encountered some unpredictable and unusual situations over these past few years, which have challenged our norms, culture, leadership, depleted our energy, impacted our ability to adjust to change and reduced our desire to seek revitalization and new ministry. The current region statistics state that 46 of our 184 churches have submitted petitions to leave the denomination. This is a loss of 24.7% of our churches and 47% of our confessing members. It would be fair to say, we are experiencing a sense of ‘*lacking*’.

“In Deuteronomy 31:8, we are reassured that: *‘The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.’*

“The RSGL Executive Committee continues to evaluate and refine our Transition Guiding Principles, under the Accountable Leadership model for board governance, which frame and direct our regional executive, John Messer, to cast a vision for a preferred future to support and encourage fruitful and thriving ministry among our churches, classes and regional synod. At our March RSGL Executive Committee meeting, we refined our Mission Principles to focus on the priorities of Spiritual Formation and Outreach/Mission/Church Planting for the remainder of this season of transition for the region. Under John’s regional executive leadership, he has consistently introduced concepts that have framed issues of concern and developed resources to improve our organization and spiritual health as individuals, leaders, churches/ministries, region and denomination. Many of these concepts have gained traction within denomination-wide conversations regarding restructuring; in churches, ministries, classes, regions and the denomination. Familiar concepts include- changing mental models, dialogue versus debate, shifting paradigms, re-centering on spiritual formation and discipleship and the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

“It is through the Luminex Group that our RSGL staff provide services to empower churches, leaders to learn, thrive and flourish. The Luminex Group was founded by our regional synod several years ago and recently became a non-profit organization to sustain and expand its mission. It serves to equip churches and leaders to realize transformational growth in the volatile, uncertain, and complex times we live in. Custom services to help churches flourish include: Whiteboard Monthly, Xpedition, Church Unique, God Dreams, Systems Thinking, Transition Ministry, Succession Planning and the Upper Room. To learn more please visit at www.luminexgroup.org

“Last year at the 2022 Annual Assembly, the RSGL Executive Committee reported the decision for regional leadership to ‘PIVOT’ from helping churches in the process of transferring to a different denomination, classis or region (following the BCO process and regulations of the church adopted by General Synod 2021) to think ahead to ways to help churches to rethink and refocus their

priorities, in anticipation of future restructuring plans for the region and denomination. We sensed a healthy shift in leadership energy was needed to provide guidance and support to our leaders, churches and classes to focus on our future as a region. We continue to provide resources for churches who seek to transfer out of the RCA, but changed our main focus to helping churches who are remaining in the RCA. This year, you will notice a “PIVOT EXPANSION”, to move us from the season of restructuring preparation (rethink and refocus) to the season of considering restructuring options for the region. Later today we will learn more about the proposed restructuring plan options for our region in a presentation from John.

“This unusual season of *“lacking”* has definitely bred anxiety. Despite it all, God continues to move us forward. We can either respond with full-faith in His goodness and plan, or respond with resistance. I sense, we are transitioning from a season of anxiety to a season of great hope! We have been provided a wake-up call to humbly admit our needs, seek help, re-invigorate our ministry yearnings and become the people God has called us to be to impact the world.

“Following are some exciting responses to God at work, despite this unusual season within the region and denomination:

RCA Anti-Racism Policy

“At General Synod 2022, the RCA unanimously adopted an Anti-Racism Policy. This policy is an important step in helping the RCA live into the Revelation 7:9 vision of being a multi-racial, multi-cultural denomination freed from racism. We are blessed to have Nancy Boote serving on the RSGL Executive Committee who also serves on the denomination’s Dismantling Racism Task Force. For more information visit the RCA website at <https://www.rca.org/about/dismantling-racism/>.

- Hope Church in Holland adopted this policy and has created their own policy that is particular to their own context.
- The North Grand Rapids Classis unanimously adopted the policy and is providing funding this year for churches to take anti-racism initiatives.
- The RSGL Executive Committee will address the adoption of the policy at a future meeting.

Classis Collaboration

“As the result of drastic reduction in the size of some of our seven region classes, due to loss of churches, classes are becoming collaborative to share resources both within and between classes. New and supportive relationships are being created to help maintain mission and ministry.

Church Transfer to Alternate Classis Conversations

“Some churches have expressed the interest in transferring to other classes in our region. Churches are evaluating their identity, mission and ministry needs and initiating conversations with potential classes. The transfer processes have been handled effectively, within the established guidelines by the churches, classes and region. Later today, the Assembly will be asked to approve the request by New Hope Community Church of Shelby, MI to transfer from the Northern Michigan Classis to the Holland Classis, effective on July 1, 2023.

Transition Ministry & Succession Planning

“We anticipate there will be a need for more Transition & Interim Ministers in our region, as pastors depart and more churches become interested in the God Dreams and Church Unique ministry services provided through the Luminex Group. Churches are also anticipating their future needs due to upcoming pastor retirement. A report from Tom Grabill, Transition Ministry/Church Vitality Catalyst is provided on page 37 of your workbook for more details.

Church Multiplication Initiatives

“Classes, churches and leaders are remaining focused on bringing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to reach the lost in their communities and context. Four of our seven classes are meeting together monthly to collaborate for more intentional church multiplication efforts. A report from the Great Lakes City Classis and Muskegon Classis is provided on page 38 & 39 of your workbook for more details.

“In closing, I would like to read one of my favorite scriptures, Isaiah 41:10:

'So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.'

"The imagery of this scripture brings me comfort and a bit of humor. I am a curious soul and am intrigued by the emphasis on God's 'righteous right hand.' In my humanity, I picture myself holding God's right hand, with my left hand, and we are walking side by side. If I hold His right hand with my right hand, then I am face to face with him. As I see it, the points of view are very significant. We can join God without fear by accompanying Him on the journey and look into His face and receive instruction and encouragement.

"The mysteries of God fascinate me, and I am comfortable with not always knowing His plan or design. I rest knowing someday it will all be revealed, and I will be in awe, and will share a special moment with God and delight in His sense of humor, and recognize my limited human perception of it.

"I humbly thank you for this opportunity to share my reflections and president's report with you today."

Serving Jesus Christ Together,
Michelle Chahine, RSGL president

The President's Report was referred to the RSGL Executive Committee for consideration.

ELECTION OF THE PRESIDENT

The current vice president, Tim Dieffenbach, 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*. Tim Dieffenbach was elected as President of the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes on the first ballot.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE REPORT

Michelle Chahine, 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 May 2, 2022 Assembly meeting, the Executive Committee has met three times. A summary of each meeting is printed below. The meetings were held at the Michigan Regional Center in Grand Rapids.

At the June 27, 2022 meeting, the committee:

- welcomed new members Tim Dieffenbach (vice-president) and Gary Morris (Holland Classis representative).
- approved the Assembly Minutes of May 2, 2022 for distribution.
- participated in a Bible Study led by Nancy Boote on the topic of Becoming a Spiritual Leadership Community.
- evaluated the 2022 Assembly of the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes.
- approved the date of Monday, May 1, 2023 for the next RSGL Assembly.
- received a report from John Messer on his work as our Regional Executive.
- shared observations from the General Synod held on June 9-13, 2022, at Central College in Pella, Iowa.
- reviewed two papers: 1) Ministerial Status When Church Withdraws from the RCA and 2) Church Members Who Desire to Stay in RCA.
- voted to instruct the RSGL Staff and our Finance Committee to move ahead with the adoption of Covenant Shares for the regional synod in 2024.
- voted to grant two years of assessment relief from our regional synod to the First Reformed Church of Ravenna and approved two cash gifts to the church following the tragic loss of their buildings by fire on April 2.
- decided to meet for prayer once a month on the third Thursday using Zoom.

At the November 7, 2022 meeting, the committee:

- welcomed Irv Boersen, the newly appointed representative from the Muskegon Classis, and Don Poest representing the Great Lakes City Classis on a temporary basis while Lee DeYoung is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- reviewed reports from the RCA Restructure Team and discussed the implications for our regional synod.
- received a formal petition from New Hope Community Church of Shelby, Michigan to transfer from Classis Northern Michigan to Classis Holland.
- received reports from John Messer on his conversation with Dale Assink, Leader of Central Plains Classis, to capture some transferrable principles of their multiplication success among Hispanic/Latin people groups.
- reviewed plans to create dialogue with the classes to rethink, refocus, and restructure with the goal of flourishing not just surviving.
- reviewed the Finance Committee report that showed we ended the fiscal year (as of 9/30/2022) with a surplus of \$63,000 and a fund balance of \$1,216,478.
- approved amounts for the 2023 housing allowance for staff members: Mike Gafa, John Messer, Tom Grabill, and Howard Moths.
- reviewed the Guiding Principles of the Synod of the Great Lakes and the Addendum that was adopted by this committee in January of 2021.
- nominated Jonathan Ogenorth to serve on the GSC to replace our current representative Dr. Bruce Deckinga, whose final term concludes June 30, 2023.
- nominated Suzanne Hart to serve on the General Synod Commission on Nominations (CoN) for a vacancy beginning July 1, 2023.
- appointed Michelle Chahine to serve as the regular delegate from the RSGL to the 2023 General Synod.
- appointed Nancy Boote and Tierra Marshall to serve as corresponding delegates to the 2023 General Synod.

At the March 20, 2023 meeting, the committee:

- welcomed Linda Kolk, the newly appointed representative from the Zeeland Classis, and Jim Van Sickle, the newly appointed representative from the Northern Michigan Classis.
- reviewed the Restructuring Options for the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes as presented by John Messer and the RSGL Transition Team that will be presented to the 2023 Assembly.
- appointed a working group to respond to a letter from the Tri-Synod Gathering (Albany, New York, and Mid-Atlantics) held on February 10-11, 2023.
- decided to create overtures to the General Synod in response to John Messer's report and to present them for consideration by the 2023 RSGL Assembly.
- voted to ask the Finance Committee to recommend a 2024 budget based on a Covenant Shares multiplier of 0.70 for consideration by the 2023 Assembly.
- voted to affirm the recommendation of the Finance Committee for a 4.0 percent increase in the 2024 Ministerial Compensation Guidelines and the 2024 Church Staff Salary and Benefit Guidelines.
- voted to provide up to \$30,000 as a grant to SWM Classis to assist in the legal matter it currently faces.
- expressed its appreciation to Mike Gafa for seven years of work in the regional synod. Mike will continue to work as treasurer part-time through April.
- voted to maintain a full-time Regional Executive, absorbing the \$40-45,000 difference for two years out of reserves.
- conducted a review following the Guiding Principle AP1.b.2 requirement for "monitoring of the performance of the Regional Executive and its own work as a board."
- evaluated the Transition Period Guiding Principles and voted to substitute the outcomes listed in John's report in the place of the Mission Principles T-MP1-7 and to remove T-AP1 from the Accountability Principles.
- reviewed a rough draft of the Nominations Report that will be presented to the 2023 RSGL Assembly.
- voted to nominate Bob Carlson to replace Jen Holmes Curran who is completing her second term as an at-large member of the RSGL Executive Committee.

- nominated five eligible candidates for the office of vice-president with the goal of presenting three names to the annual Assembly.
- decided to continue the search for a young adult who might be interested in attending the 2023 General Synod as a corresponding delegate.
- voted to recommend to the 2023 RSGL Assembly the approval of the request by the New Hope Community Church of Shelby, Michigan to transfer from the Northern Michigan Classis to the Holland Classis, effective on July 1, 2023.
- discussed the agenda for the 2023 RSGL Assembly and decided to designate significant time for considering the Restructuring Options for our region.
- authorized the officers to approve the final draft of the 2023 Assembly agenda.
- set the dates for the next two meetings of this committee: Monday, June 26, 2023, and Monday, November 6, 2023.

This report was submitted in writing for the information of the delegates. The president encouraged the delegates to ask questions or share comments on the committee's work.

NOMINATIONS AND ELECTIONS

Michelle Chahine, reporting

RSGL Executive Committee Members

The Rules of Order for the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes (RSGL) state that each of its classes nominates one representative to the RSGL Executive Committee to be approved by the Assembly. 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 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 and the 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 of 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	Lee DeYoung (2023, 1 st term)
Holland	Steve Orlow (2025, 1 st term)
Muskegon	Irv Boersen (2023, 1 st term)
Northern Michigan	Jim Van Sickle (2024, 1 st term)
North Grand Rapids	Nancy Boote (2025, 2 nd term) M
Southwest Michigan	Suzanne Hart (2024, 2 nd term) M
Zeeland	Linda Kolk (2024, 1 st term)
At-Large	Mike Johnson (2025, 2 nd term)
At-Large	Jen Holmes Curran (2023, 2 nd term) M

- Lee DeYoung, the representative from the Great Lakes City Classis, will be completing his first term on May 31, 2023, and is eligible to serve another term. The Great Lakes City Classis appointed Lee to

replace Michelle Chahine after she was elected vice president of the RSGL in 2021. The 2022 RSGL Assembly elected Lee to serve the remaining year of this term, which is expiring on May 31, 2023.

- The Holland Classis recently appointed Steve Orlow as a representative to the RSGL Executive Committee to replace Gary Morris, who resigned for health reasons. This appointment needs to be confirmed by a vote of the RSGL Assembly.
- The Muskegon Classis appointed Irv Boersen in September of 2022 as a representative to the RSGL Executive Committee to replace Wally De La Fuente, who is no longer actively serving within the classis. This term is expiring this year, and Irv will need to be nominated and elected to his first full term.
- The Northern Michigan Classis appointed Jim Van Sickle in December of 2022 to serve the unexpired term of Paul DeBoer, who resigned from the RSGL Exec Committee due to the withdrawal of First Reformed Church of Grant from the RCA. This appointment needs to be confirmed by a vote of the RSGL Assembly.
- The Zeeland Classis appointed Linda Kolk in January of 2023 to serve the unexpired term of Jami Alferink, who resigned from the RSGL Exec Committee due to a change in her employment. This appointment needs to be confirmed by a vote of the RSGL Assembly.
- Jen Holmes Curran is completing her second term in 2023. The RSGL Executive Committee nominated Bob Carlson to serve as an at-large member of the RSGL Executive Committee when it met on March 20.

The Great Lakes City Classis is nominating Lee DeYoung to be elected to his second term on the RSGL Executive Committee.

Lee DeYoung retired in 2019 from Words of Hope, an international media ministry based in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where he served 33 years as its Vice President for International Ministries. In that role, he visited 90 countries. Lee earned his B.A. from Hope College and his M.B.A. from the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business. He attended Western Theological Seminary in Holland, MI, from 1971 to 72. He has served as an Elder and Vice President of the Consistory at Hager Park Reformed Church in Jenison, MI, where he participates in worship, IT, and occasional preaching. Lee has served the RCA as President of the General Synod, General Synod Council moderator, Commission on Nominations moderator, and President of the South Grand Rapids Classis (now Great Lakes City Classis). He served on the RCA's General Secretary search team from 2017-2018. He currently chairs the Emerging Leaders Team of Great Lakes City Classis. Lee grew up in the south suburbs of Chicago. He and his wife Sheri live in Jenison, Michigan. They have four adult children and 30 grandchildren.

R-2

To elect Lee DeYoung for a second three-year term on the RSGL Executive Committee, beginning on June 1, 2023, as the representative from the Great Lakes City Classis. (ADOPTED)

The Muskegon Classis is nominating Irv Boersen to serve his first full term on the RSGL Executive Committee.

Irv Boersen grew up in Allegan County, Michigan. He has been a lifetime member of the Reformed Church in America. He married his wife Irene in 1969. She passed away in May of 2021. They have no children. He has served as deacon, elder, vice president, and search chairman three different times, and on the General Synod Council. Irv has attended seven separate General Synod meetings. He is a member of the RSGL Finance Committee and has also served on the RSGL Executive Committee previously. He is retired after being employed in the cemetery/parks department for the City of Zeeland.

R-3

To elect Irv Boersen for a first three-year term on the RSGL Executive Committee, beginning on June 1, 2023, as the representative from the Muskegon Classis. (ADOPTED)

The Northern Michigan Classis is nominating Jim Van Sickle to fill an unexpired term on the RSGL Executive Committee ending on May 31, 2024.

Jim Van Sickle grew up in Shelby, Michigan. After high school, he attended Michigan State University for one year before receiving an appointment to the United States Military Academy. After graduating from West Point in 1966 with a BS degree, he spent 26 years in the Army, serving several stateside assignments, and overseas in Korea, Vietnam, and Germany. While in the Army, he received an MS degree from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and taught English at West Point for four years. After retiring as a lieutenant colonel in 1992, Jim, his wife, Lynn, and their six children moved to New Era, Michigan. Jim began a new career, teaching English and writing at Muskegon Community College for five years and Grand Valley for 23 years, retiring a second time in 2020. He became a member of New Era Reformed Church in 1974. Since retiring from the Army, he has served New Era Reformed as a deacon, an elder, and a Sunday school teacher, as classis representative on the Words of Hope board, and an elder delegate at the classis, regional synod, and general synod levels. He currently serves as an elder and the clerk of the consistory at New Era Reformed Church. Jim and Lynn enjoy visiting with their children and 18 grandchildren.

R-4

To elect Jim Van Sickle for an unexpired term on the RSGL Executive Committee, ending on May 31, 2024, as the representative from the Northern Michigan Classis. (ADOPTED)

The Zeeland Classis is nominating Linda Kolk to fill an unexpired term on the RSGL Executive Committee ending on May 31, 2024.

Linda Kolk grew up in the Third Christian Reformed Church of Zeeland, Michigan. After getting her BA and MA degrees, she taught English at Calvin College while her husband attended Calvin Seminary. They moved to the mountains of Kentucky and became Presbyterian when her husband took a call to three small Presbyterian mission churches there. She raised three children in Kentucky and taught at the local community college. In 1997 she accepted a teaching position at Grand Rapids Community College and returned to Zeeland. She rejoined Third CRC, where she served as a deacon. She also served for six years on the executive team of the Classis Zeeland (CRC) Diaconal Committee. Meanwhile, she earned an Ed.S. degree and became the director for academic programs serving at-risk students at GRCC. In 2013 Linda married a member of the RCA and transferred her church membership to Second Reformed Church in Zeeland, where she serves as an elder and clerk of consistory. The RCA, she says, feels like home. Now retired, Linda enjoys volunteering with the Zeeland Historical Society, riding her bike, reading for pleasure, and studying Dutch.

R-5

To elect Linda Kolk to fill an unexpired term on the RSGL Executive Committee, ending on May 31, 2024, as the representative from the Zeeland Classis. (ADOPTED)

The RSGL Executive Committee is nominating Bob Carlson to serve his first three-year term as an at-large member on the RSGL Executive Committee.

Bob Carlson grew up in Muskegon, Michigan and his family attended a Congregational church. He graduated from Hope College in 1975 and received an MBA from Northwestern University in 1977. Bob's work experience included thirty-four years in commercial banking in West Michigan and nine years as the executive director of the RCA Church Growth Fund (CGF) from which he retired in May 2020.

In addition to his career in business, Bob has been involved in several non-profit organizations serving on the boards of Holland Public Schools, Hospice of Holland, Camp Geneva, Community Action House, Mission Partners India, and Resthaven Patrons. Before becoming executive director of the CGF, Bob served on its board of directors and was a member of the finance committee of the Synod of the Great Lakes.

Bob and his wife of forty-five years have three children and five grandchildren. They have been active in RCA churches since 1977 and are members of First Reformed Church in Holland, where Bob has served two terms as an elder on its consistory.

R-6

To elect Bob Carlson for his first three-year term on the RSGL Executive Committee, beginning on June 1, 2023, as an at-large member. (ADOPTED)

The Holland Classis is nominating Steve Orlow to fill an unexpired term on the RSGL Executive Committee ending on May 31, 2025.

Steve Orlow grew up in Wisconsin as a child, lived in Illinois through high school, and attended DePauw University in Indiana. Steve married his high school sweetheart during college after impressing her father by attending both her Lutheran church and Steve's Presbyterian church every Sunday they could. Laurie and Steve have three grown children and three grandchildren spread across the globe in London, England; Richmond, Virginia; and Iowa City, Iowa. Steve and Laurie have attended Lutheran, Presbyterian and Reformed churches, depending on where they have lived. They have participated in church choirs, audited church financials, served on sessions, and are currently members of Third Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan. Steve is an ordained Elder, has been the VP of the Consistory at Third, is assistant to the assistant treasurer (really), and is part of the Tech Team at Third. Outside of Third, Steve is also the Chairperson of the Church Supervision and Support Committee of Holland Classis and has taught many classes in Non-violent Communication at Ionia Correctional Facility in Ionia, Michigan.

Steve attended Loyola University Medical School, had a residency, and fellowship in Chicago and practiced Interventional Cardiology in Fort Wayne, Indiana for 22 years. He transitioned to Medical Informatics by getting a master's degree at Northwestern University in 2012, worked as the Chief Medical Information Officer of a 7-hospital network in Fort Wayne (while living in Holland!), and retired in 2017.

Steve is particularly interested in exploring how disunity in the local church is caused by fear and is the major source of pain in God's community. Steve wonders if, by focusing on discipleship to Jesus, we might find ways to stay more connected to our brothers and sisters in the Church.

R-7

To elect Steve Orlow to fill an unexpired term on the RSGL Executive Committee, ending on May 31, 2025, as the representative from the Holland Classis. (ADOPTED)

2023 Presidential Candidate

Tim Dieffenbach is serving as our vice president and is willing to be elected as our president. His name is listed as the sole nominee for the office of President on the first ballot of this Assembly meeting.

Tim Dieffenbach was raised in the Reformed Church. He is a son of Ross Reformed Church (Illiana Classis). Tim attended Central College in Pella, Iowa, before transferring to Hope College in Holland, Michigan, in his sophomore year. During his college years, he served three years at Camp Manitoqua in Frankfort, Illinois. Upon graduation from Hope, he entered Western Theological Seminary and graduated with his M.Div. in 1988. He was already working on the staff at Central Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, in youth ministry. Tim served on various committees in North Grand Rapids Classis and the Regional Synod Youth Team. He was a regional trainer for the National Institute of Youth Ministry and Youth Unlimited, as well as leading student colloquy groups at Western Seminary. Tim believes serving the larger church to be an important part of his calling. After 18 1/2 years at Central, he started serving Thornapple Community Church in 2005. He and his co-pastors, Paul Wesselink (former) and Kent Frens (present), have embraced the learning and rhythm of Ridder Church renewal to help shape the life and ministry of the church. In Great Lakes City Classis, he has also served on various committees, including a recent term on the executive team that included his leadership as Classis president. Tim also serves as the Chaplain to the Cascade Fire Department.

Tim is married to Brenda Hoffman Dieffenbach. They are parents of two sons, Zachary, married to Breanna, and Trevor, married to Sabrina. They also have two daughters, Abby and Emily, who are students at Hope. They enjoy hiking, fishing, and traveling and look forward to a day when they might be blessed to spoil grandchildren.

2022 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 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 at least 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 are on the ballot, the three nominees receiving the most 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 most votes will be placed on the next electing ballot.

2023 Candidates for Vice-President

This year we must nominate a person who is not a minister for the office of vice-president of the regional synod. All the non-ministers who are serving on the RSGL Executive Committee and all those who are serving as elder delegates from the classes to the 2023 RSGL Assembly are eligible for nomination. The RSGL Executive Committee voted to nominate the following people as candidates for the office of vice president: Linda Kolk, Linda Cline, and Brian Andrew.

Linda Kolk grew up in the Third Christian Reformed Church of Zeeland, Michigan. After getting her BA and MA degrees, she taught English at Calvin College while her husband attended Calvin Seminary. They moved to the mountains of Kentucky and became Presbyterian when her husband took a call to three small Presbyterian mission churches there. She raised three children in Kentucky and taught at the local community college. In 1997 she accepted a teaching position at Grand Rapids Community College and returned to Zeeland. She rejoined Third CRC, where she served as a deacon. She also served for six years on the executive team of the Classis Zeeland (CRC) Diaconal Committee. Meanwhile, she earned an Ed.S. degree and became the director of academic programs serving at-risk students at GRCC. In 2013 Linda married a member of the RCA and transferred her church membership to the Second Reformed Church in Zeeland, where she serves as an elder and clerk of the consistory. The RCA, she says, feels like home. Now retired, Linda enjoys volunteering with the Zeeland Historical Society, riding her bike, reading for pleasure, and studying Dutch.

Linda Cline began work in the business world in the areas of data entry, main-frame computer operations, bookkeeping, and accounts payable/receivable upon graduation from high school. She married her high school sweetheart five years after graduation, moved from Grandville to Standale, and left the business world after 12 years to raise two children. When their children reached school-age Linda began volunteering in the school, which led to being hired as a paraprofessional, teaching reading and math to small groups of at-risk children. During her 21 years with the same school district, she earned a highly qualified educational paraprofessional certification from the State of Michigan. At her retirement from the school district in 2014, she began caring for her four granddaughters, which recently ended when the youngest began attending school full-time this school year. Linda has a life-long relationship with the RCA as she was baptized at Richmond Reformed, grew up at Zion Reformed, and made her profession of faith at Grandville First Reformed. She and her husband bought a house in Standale and transferred to Standale Reformed, where she has been a member for 41 years. She has been very active at Standale RC, wearing many hats. She has been led by the Lord to fulfill her spiritual gifts. She serves on the personnel committee at SRC, as an elder delegate to the Classis of North Grand Rapids, and as a member of the General Synod Council in a term that expires in 2025.

Brian Andrew has called West Michigan home for the past 25 years after being raised in the Chicago suburbs. He received his bachelor's degree from Hope College and his law degree from Northwestern University. He has been a practicing attorney in Grand Rapids, Michigan, since 1998. Brian and his wife, Jennifer, joined Central Reformed Church in 1999, raised both of their children there, and enjoy serving as

active members. Over the years, Brian has served as the lay leader of Central's children's program, youth program, and adult education program. He has been a regular teacher in those programs since 2008. He has been called upon to lead several staff and pastoral search committees. Brian has had the privilege of serving on consistory twice, first as a deacon, where he served as chair from 2012-14, and currently, as an elder, where he has served as vice-president of consistory since 2021. Brian is also finishing his second year as a member of the RCA's Commission on Church Order. Now that the kids are largely out of the house, Brian and Jennifer have enjoyed cooking, hiking, and traveling together. He hopes his golf game improves.

General Synod Delegates

The 2023 General Synod will be held on the campus of Central College in Pella, Iowa. It will begin on the afternoon of Thursday, June 8, at 3:00 p.m. and is planned to adjourn by noon on Tuesday, June 13. Each regional synod is entitled to appoint:

- one regular, voting delegate (*BCO 1.IV.1*)
- two women corresponding delegates (*BCO 3.I.9.11a*)
- one young adult corresponding delegate (*BCO 3.I.9.11b*)
- its regional synod executive as a corresponding delegate (*BCO 3.I.9.11c*)

Michelle Chahine will be serving as the regular delegate from the RSGL in her role as president of the regional synod. Nancy Boote and Tierra Marshall agreed to serve our women corresponding delegates to the 2023 General Synod. John Messer will be serving as our regional synod executive corresponding delegate. As of this writing, we are in the process of confirming the corresponding young adult delegate.

General Synod Commissions

The General Synod Commission on Nominations asked our regional synod to nominate two persons – one to serve as our region's representative on the General Synod Council (GSC) and one to serve on the Commission on Nominations (CoN).

Our regional synod's current representative to GSC is Dr. Bruce Deckinga, whose final term concludes on June 30, 2023. The BCO states that regional synod representatives to GSC must be from among its regular classical delegates to the immediately preceding General Synod, which for the current cycle is the June 2022 General Synod. After considering the list of ministers who attended the General Synod in 2022, the RSGL Executive Committee chose Jonathan Opgenorth, and he accepted the nomination.

We were asked to nominate a person to serve on the General Synod Commission on Nominations (CoN) for a vacancy beginning July 1, 2023. Our regional synod's current representative to the CoN is Rev. Judy Nelson, who has decided to step away from her term early on June 30, 2023, so that she can focus on her responsibilities as General Synod president in 2023-2024. We were asked to identify a replacement for the vacancy in the class ending in 2025. Since our regional synod's nominee will begin to serve on July 1, 2023, they would be eligible to serve one additional 3-year term. Suzanne Hart was chosen as our representative to serve on the Commission on Nominations by the RSGL Executive Committee, and she accepted the nomination.

BREAK

FUTURE VISION FOR THE REGIONAL SYNOD

John Messer presented a PowerPoint that included the responsibilities of the regional synod, the transition guidelines adopted by the RSGL Executive Committee, and the questions that are in use for the re-evaluation of the classes. John listed the assumptions that are part of the restructuring process dialogue and important considerations that are under review. Wayne Otten, the pastor of Unity Reformed Church in Kentwood and a member of the Think Tank and the RSGL Transition Team, presented the desired outcomes that have surfaced in these discussions: 1) healthy leaders in collaborative relationships with leaders in communities or networks, 2) Personal and communal, relationship-focused discipleship processes producing deeper, well-rounded, reproducing Christ-followers, and 3) Maturing leaders and churches with willingness, capacity, knowledge and skills to be God's faithful presence in secular culture. John talked about the need for paradigm shifts to get past the obstacles to find the opportunities that God provided for us. He presented a couple of options for restructuring the regional synod: 1) Merging the

smaller classes within our region, and 2) collaborative classes combining two or three smaller classes to share resources. The RSGLE Executive Committee is recommending that we move in the direction of Option 2: Collaborative Classes. We invite the classis leadership to engage in dialogue sessions on three Thursdays from 10 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. on July 17, October 26, and January 15, 2024. After the presentation, the delegates were given the opportunity to ask questions and share comments. The delegates talked with each other around their tables in response to what they had heard. John encouraged the delegates to take this conversation back to their classis. A copy of this report and a video will be sent to all the classes in our region.

ELECTION OF THE VICE-PRESIDENT

The Executive Committee nominated Linda Kolk, Linda Cline, and Brian Andrew as candidates for the office of vice president. Nominations for the regional synod vice-president were opened from the floor. The delegates made no additional nominations. Following the first ballot vote, the names of Linda Kolk and Brian Andrew were presented for the second ballot. Linda Kolk was elected to the office of Vice-President on the second ballot.

LUNCH

Irv Boersen offered prayer before lunch. After lunch, the President called the afternoon session to order. Jen Holmes Curran offered prayer to open the afternoon session. Special prayers for healing were offered for Gary Morris and Lee DeYoung, who have been serving on the RSGLE Executive Committee.

OVERTURE TO THE GENERAL SYNOD

Dan Gillett, reporting

The RSGLE Executive Committee presented an overture to the General Synod for consideration by the Assembly. When the RSGLE Executive Committee met on March 20, the committee approved the writing overtures in response to my Regional Executive Report and the Restructuring Options for the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes. Several overtures were considered, but only one was recommended since this one is time sensitive due to the work of the RCA Restructuring Team. In a special meeting on April 20, the RSGLE Executive Committee voted to recommend the following overture to the RSGLE Assembly. The overture seeks to Clarify the Role of the Regional Synods.

R-8

The Regional Synod of the Great Lakes overtures the General Synod to instruct the Commission on Church Order in dialogue with the RCA Restructure Team to recommend amendments to the RCA Book of Church Order that will clarify the responsibilities of the regional synods within the Reformed Church in America.

Reasons:

- 1. As the RCA considers restructuring, this is the right time to clarify the role and purpose of the regional synods.**
- 2. The current responsibilities of the regional synod in the *Book of Church Order* lack clarity: “The regional synod shall exercise a general superintendence over the interests and concerns of the classes within its bounds.” And “The regional synod shall create whatever organization it desires for the furtherance of the work of the gospel within its bounds...” *RCA Book of Church Order* (BCO), Chapter 1, Part III, Article 2, Sections 1 and 5 (2022 edition, pp. 65-66)**
- 3. The current system creates “structural traps” which undermine our ability to produce constructive change. Structural traps occur as leaders of each governmental unit (classis, regional synod, and the General Synod) take overlapping responsibility and make uncoordinated efforts to effect change. As organizational leadership shifts from a more hierarchical, top-down style to a more flattened, collaborative style this issue will intensify unless we clarify the responsibilities of each assembly.**
- 4. “General superintendence” is ambiguous. The only clear superintendence of the regional synod is judicial. (ADOPTED)**

TRANSFER PETITION FROM NEW HOPE, SHELBY

Michelle Chahine, reporting

The Regional Synod of the Great Lakes received a formal petition from New Hope Community Church of Shelby, Michigan to transfer from Classis Northern Michigan to Classis Holland. The regional synod has copies of the minutes of the consistory and congregation meeting in which a unanimous vote was received to approve the transfer. Members of the regional synod staff consulted with the consistory of New Hope Community Church on September 19, 2022, and the Holland Classis on September 27, 2022, and January 24, 2023. At the meeting of the Holland Classis on January 24, 2023, the classis voted “to support the request by the New Hope Community Church of Shelby, Michigan, that the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes transfer that church to Holland Classis.” This vote meets the criteria in the regulations adopted by the 2021 General Synod that the church provides “written evidence that the church would be received without reservation by another classis.” Members of the regional synod staff consulted with both classes as required by the RCA *Book of Church Order*.

Two documents were attached to the petition report: 1) The Steps for Transferring to Another RCA Classis adopted by the 2021 General Synod as part of the Vision 2020 Report, and 2) The Petition from New Hope Community Church of Shelby, Michigan, to transfer from Classis Northern Michigan to Classis Holland.

R-9

To approve the request by the New Hope Community Church of Shelby, Michigan to transfer from the Northern Michigan Classis to the Holland Classis, effective on July 1, 2023. The church will begin paying assessments to the Holland Classis on January 1, 2024. The General Synod and regional synod will continue to assess the classis from which the church is transferring for the remainder of the calendar year in which the church is officially transferred (2023) and the subsequent calendar year (2024), based on the consistorial report form (“CRF”) data and assessment rates in effect for each year. New Hope Church Community Church will continue to pay the Northern Michigan Classis all assessments or Covenant Shares from the General Synod and regional synod as along as the Northern Michigan Classis is required to pay assessments/Covenant Shares for the New Hope Community Church. (ADOPTED)

The president acknowledged the presence of all the stated clerks from the classes within our region and thanked them for their service.

REGIONAL EXECUTIVE REPORT

John Messer, reporting

John Messer presented a report on the work of the regional synod in the written report below.

“We have experienced another challenging year in the regional synod. It seems challenging years are becoming the norm. In the past twelve months we have begun to experience the consequences of mindsets, assumptions, expectations and behaviors which were expressed over prior years. Pastors, churches, confessing members, and adherents are leaving for other denominations and congregations.

“In the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes, 46 churches (approximately 25 percent), and approximately 47 percent of confessing members have left or are leaving. Large-scale losses are not the only issue impacting our churches. COVID impacted us in ways we did not anticipate. In most churches, COVID produced a drop in attendance. Unfortunately, some of those who departed have not returned. So, in addition to the stresses and challenges of our denominational antagonism and arguments, leaders have been dealing with significantly reduced budgets and higher expectations of congregations who expect them to “solve” the problems. Shrinking congregations and shrinking budgets seem to be another pattern in our currently reality.

“For many of our members, they wonder how we came to the place that debate, division, strife, blaming and shaming became so prominent in our denomination. There is a sense of failure and guilt and shame that we were not better able to handle our differences. Those are not exactly the things that build Christ-centered community. While we must acknowledge that we did not handle our differences over sexuality as well as we could—we were not as Christ-like as we said we wanted to be through those times—we now have the opportunity to acknowledge it, confess it, and repent, because our gracious God promises that he will not hold our sins against us (Jeremiah 31:34; 2 Corinthians 5:19). Praise God for this marvelous promise!

“In a sense we could say that we are in the midst of the “worst of times.” But simultaneously, we must recognize that we are on the verge of the “best of times.” Through our magnificent Savior, God has a way of redeeming our most challenging times—even our failures and sins—so that they are overflowing with opportunities.

The Old Thing

“Our challenge now is one of allowing God, partnering with him, to redeem the “years the locusts have eaten” (Joel 2:25). The enemy of the Church would love to keep us in such a sense of guilt and shame that we are unable to heal, grow, and move forward. He would prefer that we convince ourselves that we do not deserve a better future. But that is definitely not God’s way nor his plan. An essential step in moving forward will require some decisions from us:

- Will we learn the lessons from our past failures and sins?
- Will we focus on being prepared and equipped for the future?
- Are we thoroughly convinced that we must let go of the old to take hold of the new?

The New Thing

“Perhaps we have heard this so often that we miss the power and magnificence of God’s promise:

‘Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up, do you not perceive it?’

‘I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.’

‘The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland to give drink to my people, people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.’ Isaiah 43:18-19

‘Contrary to the enemies and skeptics, God does not want his people dwelling on their sins and failures. Having confessed and repented of them, they are past. And God says let the past be in the past. Learn from them but do not dwell on them. Instead, God reminds us that he provides for us, and accomplishes new things. All so that we can point to him as the Magnificent Creator God that he is, worthy of all praise.

‘So, with consciences washed clean by the blood of Christ, we can actively pursue God’s new thing! Yearn for it. Search for it. Pour all that we are into it. Constantly praising God for his provision and living with gratitude for his mercy and grace in Christ Jesus.

‘Partnering in God’s new thing will require that we adopt new ways over old ways—new ways of thinking, new mindsets, new paradigms and mental models. Our expectations and mental models shape what we are able to see. If our mental model, our paradigm, discounts the possibility of finding opportunities in hard times and pain, then we won’t look for them; we’ll miss the opportunities God is providing. Instead, we can trust that opportunities abound in pain and hardships.

‘Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers’ (Galatians 6:10).

‘[Make] the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil’ (Ephesians 5:16).

‘Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity’ (Colossians 4:5).

“Opportunities abound because God provides them. But we have to have the ‘eyes to see’ and the “ears to hear” them. Rethinking and refocusing our expectations, assumptions, and mental models prepares us to not only see God-given opportunities, but enables us to respond to them. In practical terms, that means we must change our paradigms (mental models).

“Changing our mindsets, our expectations and assumptions is called “renewing our minds” in Romans.

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.’

“The promise is that as our minds are renewed, we will be able to “test” and “approve” God’s will. Paul refers to it as being ‘renewed in the spirit of your mind’ (Ephesians 4:23). Then we can see God’s purposes and the opportunities he provides us.

“And again, ‘*Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator*’ (Colossians 3:9-10).

A Call to Renew our Minds and Change our Paradigms

“The coming years will continue to challenge us. But God promises they will be full of opportunities. So, let’s commit ourselves to seeing and responding to his plan and purposes through those opportunities. As we consider gaining transformed minds, let’s think about what we must leave behind and what we must take up in the transformative process:

Learning over knowing: “The Church is the ultimate teaching-learning organization. Sometimes, however, we are so focused on what we already know that we forget transformed minds are constantly learning. So, for effective future ministry, we must elevate learning over what we already know. Future challenges, adapting to the massive changes occurring everywhere, are best approached with open, learning hearts and minds.

Opportunity focus over problem focus: “When we see everything as a problem to be fixed, we tend to want to solve it quickly and move on. But that leads to quick fixes which do not really solve anything. Seeing opportunities empowers innovation, creativity, and responsiveness that problem-solving does not, for all the reasons stated above. We’ve spent so many years focusing on and trying to solve problems that we have, perhaps, slipped into a mindset that elevates problem solving over opportunity taking.

Servant leadership over power (hierarchical) leadership: “When we look at our culture and the norms and practices outside the church, it is clear that power and control are often the way things “get done.” But Jesus made it very clear that power and control, position and status are not what make us effective in the Kingdom. Jesus came to serve. His disciples must be servants as well. Servant leadership is biblical leadership. Relying on power and control in an effort to accomplish Kingdom purposes is an oxymoron. Let’s recommit to Jesus’ way of leadership.

Dialogue over debate: “Debate has a its place in decision-making. Dialogue builds understanding and learning. A teaching-learning focus requires more dialogue than debate. For Jesus, dialogue characterized his relationship with his disciples. He asked many questions and invited them to consider situations from differing perspectives. Emphasizing dialogue over debate will help us engage new and challenging situations. See the attachment on dialogue—debate.

Outward focus over inward focus: “God’s redeeming work, reconciling all to himself is not just for us. We are intended to participate in that work. The call to make disciples is not a self-focused mandate. We emphasize discipleship for the sake of others, not just for ourselves. That means that our ministries must focus outward. We are sent to minister to others, our neighbors, our communities and our world. We cannot do that when we are focusing inward on ourselves.

Long-term solutions over quick fixes: “treating symptoms through quick fixes does not solve problems. It can temporarily relieve some pain, but the problem continues and the symptoms will return, usually bigger and badder than before.

Unity over uniformity: “diversity is a source of strength, innovation, and creative ministry, if we see it from God’s perspective. The body of Christ is diverse. Diversity is the strength of the body.

Conclusion: Committed to God’s New Thing

“Jesus gave us a clear missional mandate: ‘*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*’ (Matthew 28:19-20).

“We don’t need to guess what we are called and sent to do in our communities, our region, and our world. The questions we must answer are about how. How will we fulfill the disciple making mandate with the opportunities God is providing? How will we each contribute our unique gifts, talents, strengths and abilities to this Kingdom enterprise? How will we support and encourage one another along the way, when times are hard and discouragement starts to surface?

“We still face challenges. There will still be hardships and some pain. But when we commit ourselves to pursuing our mission, we will find that partnering with God in his purposes is greater

than accomplishing something on our own. We may even be surprised and excited about what God accomplished through us—and in us.

“Let’s not dwell on the past but focus on the new thing God is doing. Do you perceive it?”

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

Mike Gafa, reporting

Mike Gafa presented the report of the RSGL Finance Committee using a video recording. He highlighted the content of the committee report below and the 2023-2024 Ministry Fund Budget.

During the past year, the Finance Committee:

- Reviewed the investment manager’s report on earnings for 2022, and the current portfolio with the Synod’s investment manager.
- Reviewed financial statements for the year ended September 30, 2022, along with quarters ended on December 31, 2022, and March 31, 2023.
- Updated the Compensation Guidelines for Ministers of Word and Sacrament, and voluntary Church Staff Salary and Benefit Guidelines, for 2024.
- Due to many churches leaving the RCA, significantly reduced/aligned our operating budget with our current (and near-term future) reality.
- Commensurate with above, analyzed the impact of transitioning from a “per-member” assessment model to a “covenant shares” assessment model, in order to establish a covenant shares multiplier that, at an aggregate level, holds the line on assessment costs churches pay for GLR services.

COMPENSATION GUIDELINES

The Executive Committee requests that the Finance Committee review and update the Compensation Guidelines for Ministers of Word and Sacrament, and for other church staff members, on an annual basis. The Finance Committee has completed its review, and is recommending a 4.0% increase over the 2023 guidelines. Background information and rationale is summarized below, as well as on both of the compensation documents:

Historical Adjustments to Compensation Guidelines:

- CY’2023 (approved May 2022): 8.5% increase (Regional Synod delegates voted on this figure, rather than the 6.0% increase proposed by the GLR Finance Committee).
- CY’2022 (approved May 2021): 1.75% increase.
- CY’2021 (approved May 2020): 2.0% increase.
- CY’2020 (approved May 2019): 2.0% increase.
- CY’2019 (approved May 2018): 2.0% increase.

5-Year Average Increase: 3.25%

Supporting Information for 4.0% Increase to Compensation Guidelines:

- Social Security Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for 2023: 8.7%
- Consumer Price Index (CPI, 1/1/22 - 12/31/22): 6.5%
- Core Consumer Price Index (Core CPI, 1/31/22 - 1/31/23): 5.7%
- Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE, 12/31/21 - 12/31/22): 5.0%
- Core Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE, 12/31/21 - 12/31/22): 4.4%
- Gross Domestic Product (GDP) Price Deflator, Q4 2022: 3.5% Annual rate
- Producer Price Index (PPI, 12/31/21 - 12/31/22): 6.2%
- Wage Inflation (from 2/3/23 jobs report): 4.4%

The Finance Committee recommended the following motions:

R-10

That the proposed 2024 Compensation Guidelines for Ministers of Word and Sacrament be approved and recommended to the classes. (ADOPTED)

R-11

That the proposed 2024 Church Staff Salary and Benefits Guidelines be approved and recommended to the churches to be implemented on a voluntary basis. (ADOPTED)

2023-24 BUDGET

The Finance Committee has spent ample time considering – and in light of ongoing church petitions, actively reconsidering – a viable Ministry Fund budget for 2023-24.

The proposed 2023-24 Ministry Fund budget represents a 27.2% decrease in total revenue, accompanied by a 21.9% decrease in total expenses, vs. the final 2022-23 Ministry Fund budget. 2023-24 will be the second consecutive fiscal year that the GLR faces a sizable deficit. This comes in the face of critical restructuring work, an increased need to assist churches in transition, and the ongoing need to positively impact churches, pastors and leaders through our Luminex ministry.

We are thankful that the Lord has provided the GLR with sufficient funds on-hand to weather the storm in 2023-24 and beyond. In fact, while our Bylaws require that unrestricted reserve funds be at least 30% of the annual budget, we project that *after* 2023-24 is completed our unrestricted reserve funds would still be around 95% of the budget. Further, if we incur similar additional deficits of around \$75,000 in 2024-25 and 2025-26, unrestricted reserve funds would still be well in excess of 50% of the budget – well above the 30% threshold.

Regarding assessment income, in 2023-24 the RCA will be transitioning from the long-standing “per-member” model to a “covenant shares” model. For consistency the GLR is following suit. Hence, for the first quarter of the fiscal year (Oct’23 – Dec’23), the current per-member model will be used. Starting in the second quarter of the fiscal year (Jan’24) the covenant shares model will be introduced.

For the first quarter, the GLR is carrying over the current assessment rate of \$18.50 per member. Starting in the second quarter, the GLR Finance Committee is proposing a covenant share multiplier of 0.75%. For clarity, this multiplier is applied against each church’s total giving, as entered on line 21 of its most recent CRF. Further, to mitigate against excessive increases or decreases, an annual cap of 10% is applied, such that churches pay no more than 10% over, or 10% under, what they paid the prior year.

By adopting a 0.75% multiplier, the GLR is effectively holding its assessment costs to remaining GLR churches steady for FY’24. Understanding that some churches in the GLR will pay slightly more while others will pay slightly less, at an *aggregate* level, assessment revenue in 2023-24 from carryover churches will decrease by ~ 0.4% in the GLR. This comes on the heels of the GLR *holding* its per-member assessment rate at \$18.50 for the past three years, following *reducing* the rate by 7.5% four years ago.

MINISTRY FUND

The Finance Committee recommended the following motion:

R-12

That the 2023-24 Ministry Fund Budget, including an \$18.50 per confessing member assessment for 1Q FY’24 (Oct.’ 2023 – Dec.’ 2023), and a 0.75% covenant share multiplier (vs. CRF line 21) for 2Q FY’24 – 4Q FY’24 (Jan.’ 2024 – Sept.’ 2024) be approved. (ADOPTED)

FINANCE COMMITTEE

Chuck Brower, chair (ZEE)
Tim Elzinga (NGR)
Vacant (SWM)
Vacant (Holland)
Mike Gafa, Treasurer (Ex-Officio)

Gordon Vander Slice (NMI)
Bob Zielinski (GLCC)
Irv Boersen (MUSK)
Alison DeBoer, staff
John Messer, Regional Executive (Ex-Officio)

STAFF REPORTS

A Staff Report from Tom Grabill found was included on page 37 in the Assembly Workbook along with a Church Multiplication Report that begins on page 38.

CLASSICAL MINUTES COMMITTEE

Kevin Kleinheksel, reporting

Minutes of the seven classes within our region were submitted by the classis clerks and examined by this committee before the meeting. Kevin reported that the committee members examined the minutes from all seven classes and found them to be in good order, with a few exceptions that will be sent to each classis clerk on feedback forms.

RESOLUTIONS/LEAVE OF ABSENCE COMMITTEE

Jim Beezley, reporting

The following Resolutions were recommended by this committee:

R-13

To thank Rev. Jen Holmes Curran for her six years of service on the RSGL Executive Committee. (ADOPTED)

The committee reported that Brent Kladder was absent without excuse.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Delegates were asked to complete an evaluation form for the Assembly meeting and to submit their request for mileage reimbursement. An opportunity was provided for the delegates to recycle their workbooks and name tags.

READING OF THE JOURNAL

In his role as stated clerk, Howard Moths read the minutes of this session by title: "The 68th Annual Session of the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes Minutes, convened at the DeWitt Ministry Center, RCA Michigan Regional Center in Grand Rapids, Michigan on May 1, 2023."

The Executive Committee will review and approve the minutes before publication, and after that, they will be available on the RSGL website.

SEATING OF THE NEW OFFICERS

The past president of the regional synod, Dan Gillett, congratulated Tim Dieffenbach, the newly elected president, and Linda Kolk, the newly elected vice president. The new officers pledged to faithfully perform the work of the regional synod. Dan Gillett prayed for the newly elected officers, and they were installed in the offices with the affirmation of the delegates.

CLOSING PRAYER and ADJOURNMENT

Tim Diefenbach, the newly elected president, closed the Assembly meeting with prayer. The motion was made, seconded, and carried to adjourn this Assembly at 2:09 p.m.

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

Documents that appear in the Appendix:

Future Vision for the Regional Synod

Financial Reports

2024 Compensation Guidelines for Ministers of Word and Sacrament

2024 Church Staff Salary and Benefits Guidelines

Staff Report by Tom Grabill

Church Multiplication Report