

**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-ninth Annual Session
May 6, 2024**

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 6, 2024. President Tim Dieffenbach 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. Jon Cooper
Ms. Carol DeBoer
Ms. Joann Koning*
Rev. Wayne Otten
Rev. Dan Swell
Ms. Betty Shuster*
Mr. David Steffen

HOLLAND CLASSIS

Mr. Andy Boss
Rev. Lindsay Bona
Rev. Sandra Cammenga
Ms. Pat Leppink
Mr. Steve Orlow
Rev. Felix Theonugraha
Ms. Gail Vande Vusse
Rev. Gordon Wiersma

MUSKEGON CLASSIS

Mr. Wayne Duiser*
Mr. Jim Heckathorn
Rev. Steve Hyma
Rev. Dave Kingma
Rev. John Koedyker*
Mr. Steve Mussman*
Rev. Steve Vanderwoude

NORTH GRAND RAPIDS CLASSIS

Mr. Brian Andrew*
Rev. John Delger
Rev. Jen Holmes Curran*
Ms. Katie Musick-Reynhout
Rev. Jeffrey Petersen
Mr. Kurt Reppart*
Mr. Ron Schollaart
Rev. Matt Shults

NORTHERN MICHIGAN CLASSIS

Rev. Todd Bush
Mr. Brian Buter
Ms. Ann Byl
Mr. Mark Campbell
Rev. Cobus Manders*
Rev. Andrea Poppleton
Mr. Lee Pranger
Rev. Chip Sauer*

SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN CLASSIS

Rev. Dave Armstrong
Mr. Phil DeYoung*
Rev. Suzanne Hart
Rev. Mark Kaari
Mr. Mark Shadley
Mr. Rodger Storteboom
Rev. Dave Zomer*

ZEELAND CLASSIS

Rev. Eric Barnes
Rev. Miriam Barnes
Rev. Steven DeVries
Ms. Mary Beth Geernaat
Mr. Bob King
Mr. John Query
Mr. Lloyd Redder*
Rev. Brian VanderWege

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

President:	Rev. Tim Dieffenbach
Vice-President:	Mrs. Linda Kolk
Past-President:	Mrs. Michelle Chahine
Past Past-President:	Rev. Dan Gillett
At-Large Member:	Bob Carlson
At-Large Member:	Mr. Mike Johnson
Great Lakes City Classis Rep:	Mr. Lee DeYoung
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	Rev. Jamie DeVries
Regional Executive:	Rev. John Messer
Stated Clerk/Parliamentarian (non-voting):	Rev. Howard Moths

Absent with excuse from this meeting: Cobus Manders (Northern Michigan Classis) and Gordon Wiersma (Holland Classis).

Absent without excuse from this meeting: none.

A number of classis clerks/leaders were present as guests 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 2023 Assembly Minutes

The Minutes of the last Assembly of the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes that was held on May 1, 2023, 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, he declared that the minutes of May 1, 2023, 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

John Koedyker, chair
Mary Beth Geernaat
Jeffrey Petersen
Betty Shuster
Howard Moths (staff)

Tellers

Joann Koning, chair
Steve DeVries
Brian Andrew
Andrea Poppleton

Resolution/Leave of Absence Committee

Dave Kingma, chair
Sandra Cammanga
Phil DeYoung
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 on 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 and carried to approve the agenda as printed in the Assembly Workbook.

OPENING DEVOTIONS AND PRAYER

Tim Dieffenbach opened the meeting with prayer. Worship was led by Jamie DeVries, who serves as the Lead Pastor of Covenant Community Church Hudsonville, Michigan. The worship band included Lee Veldhoff (Bass), Dave Saylor (Cajon), and Shaundra Fairfield (Keyboard/Vocals).

Matt Shults, who serves as the Pastor of Congregation Care at Central Reformed Church in Grand Rapids spoke about Ephesians 4:32 – *Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.* Matt concluded his message with prayer. The group sang one more worship song: *We are One in the Spirit.*

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Tim Dieffenbach, reporting

As Tim presented his report, our vice president, Linda Kolk, took the chair. Tim presented the following report along with additional comments:

"... and they all lived happily ever after." We all want a 'happily ever after' to visit us and our churches after the impact of the pandemic, the losses experienced throughout the denomination and the trickle effect still in process of the churches and members leaving our denomination. You may agree or disagree with some of the outcomes, but we are all aware of the intentional effort to put into place a peaceful exit strategy. The Vision 2020 Team used the language of *mutually generous separation*. It was more than wishful thinking on their part to do this well and right, decently and in good order. They hoped to set an example of how a Christian people fraught with differences could separate in ways that allowed for the ongoing mission of

Christ to be accomplished in our future. Our General Secretary named this season as a time for lament within the body, but also provided counsel to keep looking toward a hopeful future.

As I read through the 2024 State of Religion reports of our member Classis in the Synod of the Great Lakes for this past year phrases like: ‘ a year marked by traumatization, stabilization and anticipation...’, ‘our classis has been in the midst of change, or chaos, or turmoil, or a slow burn, depending on your perspective.’; ‘There are challenges in the body, such as aging congregations, building maintenance and meeting budgets” all reminding me of the challenges so many have faced throughout these last several years. These statements were coupled with evidence of positive momentum in specific areas of ministry in all classes. But more importantly, there was the underlying sentiment that fully embraces what we believe to be true: Jesus is Lord and the majority of members are hopeful that something new will emerge from the challenges of our current reality.

In light of organizational change, John Messer, our RSGL staff, and the executive team have been focusing on how to keep moving forward toward a more sustainable future. To that end I will highlight some of the work of the RSGL over the past year.

- We’ve hosted three different sessions (July, October, and January) with Classis leaders and members to discuss anticipated changes. It was through John’s leadership and the shared consensus with executive team members that we continue preparing to significantly reduce the footprint of the RSGL in the coming year(s). We discerned that with the recommendations from the Restructuring Team that will be voted on at General Synod 2024, specifically Recommendation 1: Create one level of governance in between the consistory and the General Synod; we would maintain the RSGL to provide only the services required by the B.C.O. The focus going forward will be on governance verses ministry program. This will mean that classes will need to relate differently and begin to consider where are the places and who are the people with whom we can work collaboratively going forward. Already we have seen collaborative exploration between Northern Michigan and GLCC. We encourage all classes to embrace these conversations. You’ll hear more about Adaptive Change coaching during this assembly that we plan to provide in the coming year as well as vote on the recommendation to adopt the Adaptive Change process.
- Ministry programs will continue to be available through Luminex. *Church Unique, God Dreams, Succession Planning, The Upper Room and Transitional Ministry* will continue but a new funding plan will need to be created by the Luminex board and in cooperation with classes moving forward.
- In the effort to reduce our footprint and responding to the feedback from many on our deficit budget, a task force of the RSGL Executive Team went through a process of evaluating our staffing. We had discussions with all staff members. At the March 18, 2024 meeting the Executive Team voted to eliminate the RSGL Executive position beginning July 1, 2024. We are grateful for John’s posture of acceptance and support. John will receive a six month severance package and our sincere thanks for his work. It was a difficult decision. We felt this move was necessary to reduce our spending and continue to work toward reducing the footprint of the RSGL. Howard Moths will continue to coach Alison DeBoer through the remainder of the year before retiring. Tom Grabill will be taking over day to day leadership responsibilities of RSGL. We still need to work through details of new job descriptions and responsibilities.

As we continue to work through transitions in our denomination and the impact this is having with our congregations and Classes, let me assure you we are listening and striving to be responsive. There is much we do not know, but we don’t believe a “let’s do nothing” posture is our best way forward. We don’t know what will or will not be approved at General Synod from the Restructuring Team report and we are well aware of the fatigue many feel from the ongoing discussions about our path forward. We also know there is a strong pull to resist change and that most of us would just like to do what we’ve always done. Unfortunately, the significant losses we’ve experienced demand a new response.

Let me encourage you to be among those who believe there is something new that will emerge from all we’ve experienced. Let me challenge you to pray often for one another, our denominational staff, Synod and Classis leaders and all the congregations in the Reformed Church in America. As Christians we are a people of hope and the Church has always been resilient in the face of adversity and challenge. We do believe Jesus is Lord and that He is the only one who can provide our ‘happily ever after.’

In the most challenging of times in my life and ministry the verses that I often need to remind myself and embrace are:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will direct your path. Proverbs 3:5-6

Blessings,
Tim Dieffenbach, RSGL President

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

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE REPORT

Tim Dieffenbach, 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 1, 2023 Assembly meeting, the Executive Committee has met four times. A summary of each meeting is printed below. The meetings were held at the Michigan Regional Center in Grand Rapids unless otherwise noted.

At the May 17, 2023, Zoom meeting the committee:

- Voted to remove the conditions on providing the grant of \$30,000 to the SW Michigan Classis and to give that amount to the classis on the basis of our covenantal relationship.

At the June 26, 2023 meeting, the committee:

- Welcomed Bob Carlson as the new at-large member of the RSGL Executive Committee.
- Approved the RSGL Assembly Minutes of May 1, 2023, for distribution.
- Participated in a Bible Study led by Tim Dieffenbach on Revelation 21:1-8 with the title: "What do you imagine will happen when God makes all things new?"
- Evaluated the 2023 Assembly of the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes.
- Voted to adopt the RCA Antiracism Policy as one of the Guiding Principles for this committee. [This committee implements the program of the Regional Synod by establishing and reviewing policies (Guiding Principles) for directing the work of its committees and the Regional Executive.]
- Voted to recommend the adoption of the RCA Antiracism Policy to the 2024 RSGL Assembly.
- Approved the date of Monday, May 6, 2024, for the annual RSGL Assembly to be held in the DeWitt Ministry Center in Grand Rapids, Michigan.
- Shared observations from the General Synod that was held on June 8-13, 2023, on the campus of Central College in Pella, Iowa.
- Received a report on the response of the RSGL overture to the 2023 General Synod. Delegates voted to deny the overture as premature.
- Received a report from John Messer on his Strategic Goals for 2023-2024 as our Regional Executive.
- Approved additions to the RSGL Guiding Principles and the 2021 Addendum as part of monitoring the performance of the Regional Executive and the RSGL Executive Committee.
- Planned three regional gatherings to be held on July 27, October 26, and January 25, 2024, to continue conversations for the purpose of developing a consensus regarding our future regional synod structure. Each classis was asked to send 5-10 delegates to these meetings.
- Delegated responsibility to respond to a letter from the delegates of the Tri-Synod Gathering (Albany, New York, and Mid-Atlantics) held on February 10-11, 2023, with the purpose of exploring possibilities for deepening co-operation among our regional synods.
- Considered a report from the RSGL Finance Committee regarding changes in the budget of FY 2026-2027.
- Decided to continue to meet for prayer on the second Thursday of each month at 10:00 a.m. and set the dates for our next two regular committee meetings.

At the November 6, 2023 meeting, the committee:

- Welcomed Jamie DeVries as the new representative from Zeeland Classis.
- Received a report from John Messer on the structure of the RSGL and our mental models that need to change. John summarized the dialogue that took place at the RSGL Restructuring Conversation on October 26.
- Voted to call a special session of the regional synod assembly by Zoom on Monday, January 22, 2024, at 7:00 p.m. to respond to requests for transfers of churches from one classis to another classis within our region. [This special session was cancelled after work on the requests was delayed.]

- Received a report on the work of the RCA Restructuring Team.
- Reviewed the RSGL Fiscal Year End Financial Reports ending 9/30/23.
- Encouraged the RSGL Finance Committee to begin a conversation regarding the sale of the ownership of our portion of the RCA Michigan Regional Center.
- Appointed a task force to consider questions regarding staffing and transition planning for our regional synod.
- Responded to a request from the NGR Classis for assessment relief for one of its churches. The regional synod follows the 1991 General Synod process for assessment relief. The classis must decide first whether the classis can structure its assessment of the churches to address special circumstances.
- Voted to approve a housing allowance for ordained ministers serving on staff following Section 107 of the Internal Revenue Code.
- Voted to extend the RSGL Executive Committee Transition Period Guiding Principles until January 1, 2025.
- Appointed delegates to the 2024 General Synod.
- Received a report that an appeal from the Consistory of the Southridge Church (Kalamazoo) against the action of the Southwest Michigan Classis was withdrawn.

At the March 18, 2024 meeting, the committee:

- Reviewed two reports from John Messer: the Regional Executive Report and the Recommendation of Restructure Process for Regional Synod including a description and rationale of the Adaptive Change Process.
- Voted to recommend to the 2024 RSGL Assembly the adoption of the Adaptive Change Process as presented by the Regional Executive.
- Reviewed the report of the Task Force Regarding Staffing and Transition Planning appointed on November 6. Recommendation 1 in the report was considered and adopted: "To eliminate the RSGL Executive position as of July 1, 2024, and approve a severance package equivalent to 6 months of benefits and salary for John Messer." John Messer agreed with this action and will cooperate with the transition. Under the provisions of the RSGL succession plan, Tom Grabill will be asked to take on the role of the Regional Executive. The RSGL Guiding Principles and Tom's job description will be reviewed and revised at the June meeting of the RSGL Executive Committee.
- Appointed Lee DeYoung and Howard Moths to review the *BCO* and the RSGL *Rules of Order* and report to the June meeting of this committee regarding the minimum responsibilities for a regional synod and what amendments to the RSGL *Rules of Order* that may be needed to accomplish the transitional goals. Later in the meeting this committee asked them to include the RSGL Guiding Principles (and the Addendum) as a part of their review.
- Decided not to act on the remainder of the recommendations of the Task Force Regarding Staffing and Transition, but rather to appoint a new task force to meet with Alison and Tom to work out a new set of recommendations for report at the June meeting of the RSGL Executive Committee.
- Voted to affirm the 2025 Ministerial Compensation Guidelines and the 2025 Church Staff Salary and Benefit Guidelines as recommended by the RSGL Finance Committee. [The Finance Committee had not completed work on the 2024/2025 proposed budget and 2025 Covenant Shares because of the decisions pending before this committee.]
- Received a report on the work of the RCA Restructuring Team.
- Reviewed three petitions from consistories for the transfer of their church to another classis within the RSGL, and voted to recommend that the 2024 RSGL Assembly vote in favor of the petitions.
- Reviewed the Nominations Report from Howard Moths and voted to nominate Linda Kolk for the office of president, and to nominate three people to the office of vice-president following the RSGL *Rules of Order*. [See the Nominations Report in the RSGL Assembly Workbook.]
- Voted to appoint Marcia Pratt and Jan Luchies as the women corresponding delegates to the 2024 General Synod.
- Voted to recommend to the 2024 RSGL Assembly that the classes adopt the RCA Antiracism Policy. [This action was first taken on June 26.]
- Decided to ask John to provide a training session on Adaptive Change at the May 2024 Assembly meeting.

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

Tim Dieffenbach, 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 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 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 (2026, 2 nd term)
Holland	Steve Orlow (2025, 1 st term)
Muskegon	Irv Boersen (2026, 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	Jamie DeVries (2024, 1 st term) M
At-Large	Mike Johnson (2025, 2 nd term)
At-Large	Bob Carlson (2026, 1 st term)

- Jim Van Sickle is eligible to be nominated by the Northern Michigan Classis to serve his first full term on this committee. Jim decided to decline. The classis is nominating Lou Okma in his place.
- Suzanne Hart will be completing her second term on this committee at the end of May. The SW Michigan Classis is nominating Rev. Ed Schmidt to take her place.
- Jamie DeVries is eligible to be nominated by the Zeeland Classis to serve his first full term on this committee.

The Northern Michigan Classis nominated Lou Okma to serve his first full term on the RSGL Executive Committee.

Lou Okma was born and raised in the Christian Reformed Church in Prospect Park, New Jersey. He attended Christian schools from K-12 and graduated from Calvin College in Grand Rapids. Lou has an MSW from the University of Michigan. He was an administrator and therapist in Children’s Group Treatment programs for 30 years. He retired 25 years ago from social work and has been a Real Estate Associate Broker for the past 26 years. Lou joined Faith Reformed Church in Traverse City over 40 years ago. He has been a Sunday School teacher for both adults and youth, along with serving as a deacon and elder multiple times. Lou has been married for 57 years and has three married sons and ten grandchildren.

To elect Lou Okma for his first three-year term on the RSGL Executive Committee, beginning on June 1, 2024, as the representative from the Northern Michigan Classis. (ADOPTED)

The Southwest Michigan Classis nominated Rev. Ed Schmidt to serve for his first full term on the RSGL Executive Committee.

Ed Schmidt was raised in a Reformed Church parsonage. His elementary years were spent in a small Wisconsin community and then middle and high school years in northwestern Indiana just outside of Chicago. He graduated from Hope College majoring in Political Science, and then went right across the street to attend Western Theological Seminary for his Master of Divinity degree. In over 40 years while employed by Christ's church, he served congregations in Lansing, Grand Rapids, and Vicksburg, Michigan. He also served in the denomination's church plant efforts in Crown Point, Indiana, for 8 years. Previously Ed served on the Regional Synod's Executive Committee for Christian Discipleship. Presently he serves on the Southwest Michigan Classis Leadership team and is the Transitional Task Force Team leader. He recently accepted a part-time position as one of the RCA Chaplains for our denominational retirees living in Michigan. Since he has retired, he continues to dream of a better and more consistent golf game. He enjoys retirement with his wife, Jennie, renewing and building relationships in Holland, Michigan. They have two children and three granddaughters.

R-2

To elect Ed Schmidt for his first three-year term on the RSGL Executive Committee, beginning on June 1, 2024, as the representative from the Southwest Michigan Classis. (ADOPTED)

The Zeeland Classis is nominating Rev. Jamie DeVries to serve for his first full term on the RSGL Executive Committee.

James (Jamie) DeVries is a second career pastor serving the Covenant Community Church in Hudsonville, Michigan. After almost 20 years in sales and several part-time worship and youth ministry positions, he graduated from Western Theological Seminary in 2018. Jamie has been married to his wife Becky for 27 years and they have two sons and one grandson, Miles. He is currently in the final stages of earning his Doctor of Ministry degree at New Brunswick Theological Seminary with a focus on Transformational Preaching. God has richly blessed Jamie and his family with many opportunities over the years to learn and grow in life and ministry. While he enjoys preaching and teaching, music will always be his passion and the vehicle God used to bring him along on this journey. Currently he is honored to serve as Zeeland Classis Vice-President and as a member of the Regional Synod Executive Committee.

R-3

To elect Jamie DeVries for his first full three-year term on the RSGL Executive Committee, beginning on June 1, 2024, as the representative from the Zeeland Classis. (ADOPTED)

2024 Presidential Candidate (our current vice-president)

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 her 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 transferred her church membership to the Second Reformed Church in Zeeland, where she is serving her second term as elder and clerk of the consistory. The RCA, she says, feels like home. Now retired, Linda enjoys volunteering with the Zeeland Historical Society, bike riding, reading, and studying Dutch. About her service to the RSGL, Linda says, "Serving the RSGL during this time of transition is both an honor and a

big responsibility. I am grateful for all the support and wise counsel I have experienced in my year as VP, and I look forward with hope to the path ahead."

ELECTION OF THE 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. Linda Kolk was listed as the sole nominee for the office of President on the first ballot of this Assembly meeting. Linda Kolk was elected as the President of the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes by a unanimous vote.

2024 Candidates for Vice-President

The Rules of Order of the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes specify that we must nominate and elect a person who is a minister of Word and Sacrament for the office of vice-president of the regional synod this year. All those who are ministers and are serving on the RSGL Executive Committee and all those who are serving as minister delegates from the classes to this Assembly are eligible for nomination. The RSGL Executive Committee voted to nominate the following people as candidates for the office of vice president, and they accepted the nomination: Miriam Barnes, Jamie DeVries, and Wayne Otten.

Rev. Dr. Miriam Barnes is Co-Pastor at Second Reformed Church in Zeeland. She and her husband, Eric, have served at Second in a couple different roles for a decade. Miriam's first call was to a small RCA congregation in upstate New York where she served as solo pastor for five years. Prior to getting her M.Div. degree at Western Theological Seminary (WTS), she worked in campus ministry for 5 years. She completed a D.Min. at WTS in 2022 with a thesis that explored how the liturgy of Second Church forms the congregation for mission. Miriam has served the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA) of the RCA for more than a decade (six years on the board, and many more on the Certification Committee). Miriam and Eric have two daughters who don't seem to mind being double PKs or living in a parsonage (evidence of the grace of God and a warmly welcoming congregation!). Their family enjoys reading, listening to and making music, camping, hiking, and sharing meals with friends. Currently, Miriam serves as the representative from the Zeeland Classis on the RSGL Overtures and Judicial Business Committee.

Rev. James (Jamie) DeVries is a second career pastor serving the Covenant Community Church in Hudsonville, Michigan. After almost 20 years in sales and several part-time worship and youth ministry positions, he graduated from Western Theological Seminary in 2018. Jamie has been married to his wife Becky for 27 years and they have two sons and one grandson, Miles. He is currently in the final stages of earning his Doctor of Ministry degree at New Brunswick Theological Seminary with a focus on Transformational Preaching. God has richly blessed Jamie and his family with many opportunities over the years to learn and grow in life and ministry. While he enjoys preaching and teaching, music will always be his passion and the vehicle God used to bring him along on this journey. Currently he is honored to serve as Zeeland Classis Vice-President and as a member of the Regional Synod Executive Committee.

Rev. Wayne Otten was born and raised in Stratford, Ontario, Canada, and grew up attending Bethel Free Reformed Church in Mitchell, Ontario. He attended Redeemer University, where he completed a double-major in Business and Theology. After his undergraduate work, he moved to Michigan in 2017 to attend Western Theological Seminary. Wayne graduated with a M.Div. degree in 2020. Following seminary, he accepted a call to Unity Reformed Church in Kentwood, Michigan, where he continues to serve as their Senior Pastor. Wayne has loved serving in the RCA through church ministry as well as various denomination teams, and he continues to enjoy learning about the RCA's rich history and ministry. Outside of church leadership, he has stayed connected to the community through things like coaching hockey at West Ottawa High School and serving as a Chaplain for Holland Township Fire Department. When he gets some free time, Wayne enjoys running, watching the Toronto Maple Leafs hockey team and heading out to the closest body of water that he can find.

ELECTION OF THE VICE-PRESIDENT

The Executive Committee nominated Miriam Barnes, Jamie DeVries, and Wayne Otten 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 Miriam Barnes

and Jamie DeVries were presented for the second ballot. Jamie DeVries was elected to the office of Vice-President on the second ballot.

General Synod Positions

- Our current representative to the General Synod Council (GSC) is Rev. Jonathan Opgenorth, whose final term concludes June 30, 2027.
- Our current representative to the Commission on Judicial Business (CJB) is Ms. Susan Vogel-Vanderson, a lay lawyer whose current term concludes June 30, 2025.
- Our current representative to the Commission on Nominations (CoN) is Rev. Suzanne Hart, whose current term concludes June 30, 2025.

Therefore, no action is needed at this time.

General Synod Delegates

The 2024 General Synod will be held at The Westin La Paloma in Tucson, Arizona. It will begin on the afternoon of Thursday, June 13, at 3:00 p.m. and is planned to adjourn by noon on Tuesday, June 18.

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)

John Messer is planning to attend as our Regional Executive. Tim Dieffenbach is planning to serve as our regular delegate. The following women were appointed to serve as corresponding delegates: Rev. Marcia Pratt who serves as the pastor of the Zion Reformed Church in Grandville (GLCC) and Jan Luchies who is an elder at Second Reformed Church in Kalamazoo (SWM Classis). We did not appoint a person to serve as our young adult delegate this year.

BREAK

ADAPTIVE CHANGE PROCESS

On March 18, 2024, the RSGL Executive Committee voted to recommend to the 2024 RSGL Assembly the Adaptive Change Process as presented by John Messer, the RSGL Regional Executive. Three documents were sent to the delegates in advance of the Assembly that included the recommendation from the Executive Committee, a longer explanation of the Adaptive Change Process, and a set of Frequently Asked Questions. John Messer presented an oral explanation of the Adaptive Change Process including a printed copy of one of the slides that spelled out the three steps of the process:

1) Observe like a game, 2) Make multiple interpretations, and 3) Playful interventions (experiment). Several questions were asked and answered by John Messer and Howard Moths. The delegates spent some time discussing this process at their tables and concluded this discussion with a time of prayer.

LUNCH

Kurt Rapport offered prayer before lunch. After lunch, the President called the afternoon session to order. Jen Holmes Curran offered prayer to open the afternoon session.

REGIONAL EXECUTIVE REPORT

John Messer, reporting

John Messer presented a report on the work of the regional synod in the written report below with additional oral comments.

This past year has been a lesson in living in the tension between the “worst of times” and the “best of times.” We are facing the consequences hardships of division and separation, and we are simultaneously presented with abounding God-given opportunities.

A brief overview:

In March 2018 the regional executives presented the General Synod Council with the high probability of significant church and membership losses in the next three to five years. Since that time the regional synod has been working from worst case/best case scenarios. At worst, the synod would lose 50% of its churches; at best it would lose 25%. Membership losses would depend on which churches decided to leave the RCA.

Budgets reflected the worst-case scenario, and beginning in 2019 we began reducing the synod budget by 5%, and reduced assessments from \$20 per member to \$18.50 per member.

The operating assumption was that the regional synod would be necessarily reduced and, as a result, classes would need to take on more functions or ministries that had previously been accomplished by the regional synod. The implication was that classes would need to become more self-sufficient for meeting their needs, and the regional synod would need to push as many resources as possible to classes and churches. One example is the creation of multiplication catalysts, funded at 50% by the regional synod for three years—as synod budgets continued to shrink.

In addition to budget reductions, we began a process to identify the opportunities and options present in this tumultuous period of change.

Anticipating the need for organizational restructure to attain or maintain healthy and effective leaders and churches, in 2021 we adopted a leadership process to examine and plan for the changes we would encounter in the coming years. We called it a reevaluate-refocus-restructure process.

REEVALUATE, REFOCUS, RESTRUCTURE PROCESS:

STAGE ONE: REEVALUATE

Reevaluation encompassed examining the effectiveness of our leaders and churches by asking three crucial questions:

1. Who are we NOW? What is our identity and what does that mean for our Kingdom work?
2. What are we called to do NOW? What is our mission and how has it or will it change in current conditions?
3. Who is our neighbor NOW? Who are our neighbors and communities, local and global, that we are trying to provide ministry for? How has that changed?

Getting a more accurate assessment of our identity, mission and ministry context was the necessary first step.

STAGE TWO: REFOCUS

Refocusing, the second stage of our process, identified the gap between where and who we were and where and who we need to be to produce more effective ministries in 2025 and beyond. Forming a Think Tank group of leaders from the region was our primary effort.

THINK TANK: Beginning in early 2022, the group of five sought to answer the questions, “What are the greatest needs of regional synod churches and leaders now?” and “How might we address them in the restructure process?”

Three critical outcomes to pursue in organizational restructure:

Outcome 1: Healthy leaders in collaborative relationships with leaders in communities or networks

Outcome 2: Personal and communal, relationally-focused discipleship processes producing deeper, well-rounded, reproducing Christ-followers

Outcome 3: Maturing church leaders with willingness, capacity, knowledge and skills to be Christ's faithful presence in secular culture.

Our Think Tank conversations led to helpful discussions with church and classis leaders, other regional synods, and benefitting from the expertise of church leaders outside the RCA. The refocus stage encompassed two years of observation and listening to inform and provide a solid foundation for our restructure efforts.

STAGE THREE: RESTRUCTURE

All the preparatory work of reevaluating and refocusing was necessary to be equipped and informed to “understand the times” and make wise decisions about the right thing to do based on the circumstances surrounding us (1 Chronicles 12:32). Restructuring, the last stage of the process, involves gathering the wisdom and input from leaders, churches, and classes through dialogue and conversation about the way forward in complex and challenging times. This stage involved several opportunities for our leaders to gather for dialogue.

COLLABORATIVE CLASSES STRAWMAN DISCUSSIONS:

Beginning in 2022, our goal was to provide a hypothetical synod structure focused on classes doing more and a drastically reduced synod doing less than in previous years. Our first dialogue regarding restructuring was around a strawman organization based on forming collaborative classes. A strawman is an argument for a possible structure in order to generate dialogue, input, ideas, values and boundaries of any future organizational structure. The hypothetical option of forming classes bound in collaborative relationship around mission and shared resources began the difficult step of considering how we may need to restructure, in light of input from reevaluation and refocusing stages.

Feedback from the strawman sessions was helpful, in that it surfaces fears, anxieties, and obstacles about restructuring in general and forming collaborative relationships, specifically. While some classis leaders saw the value of collaborative relationships, others were hesitant or saw no need for them. No alternative organizational structures were suggested by classis representatives. So, our next move was to gather representatives in dialogue to formulate their own possible structure. That was begun with three quarterly sessions.

RESTRUCTURE DIALOGUE GATHERINGS

Three one-day dialogue sessions with classis representatives.

Session one (July 27, 2023): This was a listening session, intended to help representatives hear about needs, priorities, values, and non-negotiables from other classes. Table discussions regarding big-picture needs and wants of classes. What are the most pressing needs? What are the absolutes (must have, must not, etc.)? What might be better alternatives to collaborative classes? The input was helpful. The discussion surfaced several important points, First, there would not be a one-size-fits-all solution for the organization. We will need to create a flexible structure which allows differing types of working relationships among classes. Second, there was not sufficient agreement on the needs and wants to make any meaningful suggestions about organizational structure.

Session two (October 26, 2023): This session was intended for more listening and some evaluation. The primary outcome of this session was a consensus that we would pursue a structure in which the regional synod was eliminated, or at least radically reduced to basic BCO functions.

Session three (January 25, 2024): This session was intended to open dialogue about our interpretations of the needs, values, and priorities of the classes, based on the previous sessions. As we heard from representatives, numbers of interpretations surfaced (although we didn't use that word). For example, a major interpretation was that we lack sufficient communication processes and structures to support classes working more closely together. We need to share resources, but we may not agree on who does what. It may be necessary to form an element that provides ministry services to all classes, or ministry-specific groups from all classes. For example, a student care group or a leadership development group, or a church planting group. Numbers of other significant and helpful interpretations are included in the notes of that session attached to the adaptive change proposal.

The most important outcome of this session was the discussion of adopting an adaptive change process to address our future needs and organizational structure. Based on that outcome, an adaptive change proposal was recommended and approved at the March Executive Committee meeting. And that is how this recommendation has come to the Regional Assembly for your consideration and action.

Let me provide some insight into the value of an adaptive change process.

Why adaptive change?

Although it may not seem like it, this is a time of great opportunity for the RCA. The great challenges we are facing provide opportunities to re-examine and re-think not only what we do, but how we do it. But there are no clear, set answers. We are in a time when what worked is no longer effective.

Just as in Numbers 13, the spies explored Canaan. Some saw danger and too much risk that overshadowed God's promises. Others saw opportunity and risks worth taking because of God's faithfulness to his promises. We are faced with the same challenge.

That's what defines this as an adaptive challenge. We don't have subject matter experts on the future. We have to figure it out together, as we go. That's the reality we are facing. So, rather than trying to apply fixes from a decade or more in the past, rather than trying to maintain a status quo, we will look forward and adopt a new approach. We will learn and experiment our way into the future.

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:

I strongly encourage you to take up the adaptive change process because it will serve our needs more effectively. The most important change is internal, not external. Maybe that is the most important point of all. We must allow ourselves to be changed first. An adaptive process can help if we are willing.

I leave you with these recommendations and thoughts. May you be blessed as you move forward.

Tom Grabill, our Transition Ministry Catalyst for the past two years, will be taking over as regional executive, and will guide you and equip you for that process. Tom is highly capable, experienced, and uniquely gifted to move us forward in the coming years. Please work with him.

John Messer, Regional Executive

Tom Grabill spoke about his commitment to serve the regional synod and build relationships across the region as the new Regional Synod Executive. Three videos were shown representing the work of the regional synod.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE REPORT CONTINUED

RCA Anti-Racism Policy

For more information go to: <https://www.rca.org/about/dismantling-racism>. At the 2022 General Synod, 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. The General Synod recommended that all assemblies of the RCA adopt the antiracism policy found in the 2022 Minutes of General Synod on pages 235-236 and printed below:

The Reformed Church in America shall:

1. Build on the 2009 General Synod declaration that “racism is a sin because it is an offense to God” and declare that the sin of racism is expressed as a policy, behavior, and/or belief against a person or people based on their identification and/or membership in a particular racial or ethnic group that is considered a minority.
2. Define antiracism as the practice of confronting and changing policies, behaviors, and beliefs that perpetuate racist ideas and actions.
3. Confess that our sin has led us to erect religious, cultural, economic, and political barriers along racial and ethnic lines and that these barriers have separated us from one another and deprived many of us the right to develop our personal and corporate identities.
4. Respect the rights and freedom of all people of color regardless of race, ethnicity, or nationality where the cries of people who have become victims of racial injustice and/or discrimination are to be taken seriously and are given full voice and opportunity to make their complaints, without retaliation, to their appropriate judicatories; and inform the Office for Advocacy and Race Relations as well as the Commission on Race and Ethnicity.
5. Support allies who speak out against persons and systems that perpetuate racial injustice.
6. Commit to dismantling racism in its attitudes and structures in all assemblies (local churches, classes, regional synods, and General Synod).

On June 26, 2023, the RSGL Executive Committee voted to adopt the RCA antiracism policy as one of the Guiding Principles for this committee.

On March 18, 2024, the RSGL Executive Committee voted to recommend to the 2024 RSGL Assembly that the classes adopt the RCA Antiracism Policy. Nancy Boote spoke about the importance of adopting the Antiracism Policy.

R-4

To recommend to the classes within the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes that they adopt the RCA Antiracism Policy recommended by the 2022 General Synod. (ADOPTED BY A UNANIMOUS VOTE)

The Adaptive Change Process

The Adaptive Change recommendation from John Messer includes three actions:

1. Adopt the adaptive change process which includes ongoing phases:
 - a. Observations: watching and listening
 - b. Interpretations: making interpretations of the observations
 - c. Interventions (experiments): deciding what changes to implement as experiments to learn and adapt.
2. Form a Guiding Coalition (GC) of classis representatives who will implement the Adaptive Change process in order to accomplish leadership and organizational changes to “maximize the ministry of churches within the bounds” of the regional synod. The GC will continue to meet quarterly through the transition/restructuring period.
3. Equip and provide ongoing support for classis Adaptive Change Coaches who will facilitate adaptive change in their classis through their work as part of the Guiding Coalition. Coaches will facilitate the work of the process (observations, interpretations, and interventions), and coordinate the implementation and review of experiments within/among classes.

On March 18, 2024, the RSGL Executive Committee voted to recommend to the 2024 RSGL Assembly the Adaptive Change Process as presented by the Regional Executive.

R-5

To adopt the Adaptive Change Process as presented by the Regional Executive and refer the implementation of this process to the RSGL Executive Committee. (ADOPTED)

Church Transfer Requests

The RSGL received three petitions from consistories for the transfer of their church to another classis within the RSGL region.

On March 31, 2023, the RSGL received a formal request from The Branch, a member church of the Great Lakes City Classis (GLCC), to transfer to North Grand Rapids Classis (NGRC). Unfortunately, there was not enough time for the necessary steps to be completed before the Regional Synod's May 1, 2023 meeting. At their meeting on October 24, 2023, the GLCC voted to approve the request by the consistory of The Branch to transfer to North Grand Rapids Classis. Consideration of this petition was postponed by concerns raised by the NGRC. Those concerns have been addressed and the NGRC voted in favor of receiving the church (confirmed on March 18).

The Voyage Church in Kalamazoo requested a transfer from Southwest Michigan Classis to the Great Lakes City Classis in a petition received by the RSGL on February 20, 2024.

The Urban Apostolic Network Church along with Vanguard (organized as an RCA congregation by the SWM Classis on June 13, 2010) requested a transfer from Southwest Michigan Classis (SWM) to the Great Lakes City Classis in a petition dated February 26, 2024.

The SWM Classis met on February 27, 2024, and approved the following motion: "M/S/C that the Southwest Michigan Classis recommend the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes approve the requests from The Voyage Church and the Urban Apostolic Network to transfer their membership from the Southwest Michigan Classis to the Great Lakes City Classis. This recommendation comes with our gratitude for their fellowship in the Gospel and prayer that God will richly bless their continued ministry in our community."

On March 16, 2024, the GLCC approved the following motions in their Spring Session:

"M/S/C to approve the request from The Voyage Church Consistory requesting transfer from the Southwest Michigan Classis to the Great Lakes City Classis."

"M/S/C to approve the request from the Urban Apostolic Network - Vanguard Church Consistory requesting transfer from the Southwest Michigan Classis to the Great Lakes City Classis."

On March 18, 2024, the RSGL Executive Committee voted to recommend that the May 6, 2024 RSGL Assembly vote in favor of the following motions:

R-6

To approve the request by The Branch, a member church of the Great Lakes City Classis (GLCC), to transfer to North Grand Rapids Classis (NGRC), effective on July 1, 2024. The church will begin paying assessments to the North Grand Rapids Classis on January 1, 2025. 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 (2024) and the subsequent calendar year (2025), based on the consistorial report form ("CRF") data and assessment rates in effect for each year. The church will continue to pay the Great Lakes City Classis all assessments or covenant shares from the General Synod and regional synod as long as the Great Lakes City Classis is required to pay assessments or covenant shares for the church named above. (ADOPTED)

R-7

To approve the request by The Voyage Church Consistory to transfer from the Southwest Michigan Classis to the Great Lakes City Classis, effective on July 1, 2024. The church will begin paying assessments to the Great Lakes Classis on January 1, 2025. 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 (2024) and the subsequent calendar year (2025), based on the consistorial report form ("CRF") data and assessment rates in effect for each year. The church will continue to pay the Southwest Michigan Classis all assessments or covenant shares from the General Synod and regional synod as long as the Southwest Michigan Classis is required to pay assessments or covenant shares for the church named above. (ADOPTED)

R-8

To approve the request by the Urban Apostolic Network - Vanguard Church Consistory to transfer from the Southwest Michigan Classis to the Great Lakes City Classis, effective on July 1, 2024. The church will begin paying assessments to the Great Lakes Classis on January 1, 2025. 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 (2024) and the subsequent calendar year (2025), based on the consistorial report form (“CRF”) data and assessment rates in effect for each year. The church will continue to pay the Southwest Michigan Classis all assessments or covenant shares from the General Synod and regional synod as long as the Southwest Michigan Classis is required to pay assessments or covenant shares for the church named above. (ADOPTED)

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

Mike Gafa, reporting

Mike Gafa presented the report of the RSGL Finance Committee using a video recording. He reviewed the content of the written Finance Committee report below that was included in the Assembly Workbook.

During the past year, the Finance Committee:

- Reviewed the investment manager’s report on earnings for 2023, and the current portfolio with the Synod’s investment manager.
- Reviewed financial statements for the year ended September 30, 2023, along with quarters ended on December 31, 2023, and March 31, 2024.
- Updated the Compensation Guidelines for Ministers of Word and Sacrament, and voluntary Church Staff Salary and Benefit Guidelines, for 2025.
- Continued to work with RSGL leadership to actively monitor and reduce our expenses to align with current (and future) reality.
- More deeply explored financial considerations and legal ramifications in the eventuality of dissolving the RSGL in the future.

COMPENSATION GUIDELINES

The Executive Committee requests that the Finance Committee review and update 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 3.0% increase in 2025, as compared to the 2024 guidelines. Background information and rationale is summarized below, as well as on both of the compensation documents:

Historical Adjustments to Compensation Guidelines:

- CY’2025 (proposed May 2024): 3.0% increase
- CY’2024 (approved May 2023): 4.0% increase.
- CY’2023 (approved May 2022): 8.5% increase.
- 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.

Average Annual Increase Based on Last 7 Years: 3.3%

Supporting Information for 3.0% Increase to Compensation Guidelines:

2023 Inflation Measures (as of January 2024)

- December PCE (Personal Consumption Expenditures) - Core: 2.9% annual rate (ex Food & Energy). This is the Federal Reserve Board’s favored inflation metric.
- December PCE – All Items: 2.6% annual rate.
- 2023 Q4 GDP (Gross Domestic Product) Deflator: 1.5% (annual rate)
- 2023 GDP – all 4 quarters Deflator: 2.6%
- December 2023 CPI (Consumer Price Index): 3.4% (annual rate)
- December 2023 CPI – Core only (ex - Food and Energy): 3.9%
- December 2023 PPI (Producer Price Index): 1.0% (annual rate)
- December 2023 PPI - Core only (Ex. – Food and Energy): 2.5%
- 2024 Social Security Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA): 3.2%

The Finance Committee recommended the following motions:

R-9

That the proposed 2025 Compensation Guidelines for Minister of Word and Sacrament be approved and recommended to the classes in our region. (ADOPTED)

R-10

That the proposed 2025 Church Staff Salary and Benefits Guidelines be approved and recommended to the churches to be implemented on a voluntary basis. (ADOPTED)

MINISTRY FUND - 2024-25 BUDGET

The Finance Committee has spent ample time considering – and in light of ongoing church petitions, actively reconsidering – a viable Ministry Fund budget for 2024-25.

The proposed 2024-25 Ministry Fund budget represents a 3.1% decrease in total revenue, which comes on the heels of a 27.2% decrease in total revenue in the current fiscal year (2023-24). More tellingly, expenses in 2024-25 are budgeted at 22.5% less than in 2023-24.

Whereas our approach the past two fiscal years has been to draw down cash on-hand in order to present deficit-level budgets (so that the RSGL could continue critical restructuring work, assist churches in transition, and impact churches through its Luminex ministry), the budget proposed in 2024-25 is a zero-based (balanced) budget.

2024-25 is the second year we'll be using the "covenant shares" model implemented by the RCA last year. In 2024-25, we are carrying over the current RSGL covenant share multiplier of 0.75%. (For clarity, the 0.75% multiplier is applied against each church's total giving, as entered on line 21 of its 2023 CRF. To mitigate against excessive increases or decreases, an annual cap of 10% is applied, such that churches pay no more than 10% over, or under, what they paid the prior year).

By carrying over last year's assessment rate, 2024-25 is the fifth consecutive year that the RSGL has either maintained, or reduced, assessment costs to its churches.

The Finance Committee recommended the following motion:

R-11

That the 2024-25 Ministry Fund Budget, including a 0.75% covenant share multiplier (vs. CRF line 21), be approved as proposed. (ADOPTED)

FINANCE COMMITTEE

- Chuck Brower, chair (ZEE)
- Gordon Vander Slice (NMI)
- Tim Elzinga (NGR)
- Irv Boersen (MUSK)
- Alison DeBoer, RSGL staff
- Mike Gafa, RSGL Treasurer (Ex-Officio)
- John Messer, RSGL Regional Executive (Ex-Officio)

STAFF REPORTS

A Staff Report from Tom Grabill (Transition Ministry, Church Vitality Catalyst) was included on page 40 in the Assembly Workbook.

CLASSICAL MINUTES COMMITTEE

John Koedyker, reporting

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

RESOLUTIONS/LEAVE OF ABSENCE COMMITTEE

Dave Kingma, reporting

The following Resolutions were recommended by this committee:

R-12

**To thank Rev. Dan Gillett for his four years of service on the Executive Committee.
(ADOPTED)**

R- 13

**To thank Rev. Suzanne Hart for her seven years of service on the Executive Committee.
(ADOPTED)**

R- 14

**To thank Mr. Jim Van Sickle for his two years of service on the Executive Committee.
(ADOPTED)**

R-15

WHEREAS, The Reverend John Messer has served the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes since May 1st, 2017, as the Regional Synod Executive.

WHEREAS Rev. Messer has led our Regional Synod through historically uncertain and challenging times and charted a pathway through the chaos, leading us to plan for worst case scenarios while staying positive and praying for the best.

WHEREAS John has pastorally provided for the gracious exit of congregations from our Regional Synod for the sake of the wider Kingdom and has done so with tact and compassion.

WHEREAS John Messer has assisted churches, promoted dialogue, and disciplined leaders in the midst of all our changes.

WHEREAS Pastor John has also been a proactive voice for our Regional Synod with the General Synod and wider church, positioning the RSGL as a leader among Regional Synods and setting a positive example for various regions while participating in the General Synod 2020 task force and as a proponent of positive change within our denomination.

WHEREAS John Messer has consistently placed the needs of the Regional Synod above his own needs, including the offer of this transition.

WHEREAS Regional Synod Executive Rev. Dr. John Messer has done all this as a humble servant leader....

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED... that on this 6th day of May 2024, the Reverend Regional Synod blesses, commends, and with deepest gratitude, thanks the Lord's servant Rev. John Messer for his faithful service to the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes. (ADOPTED)

The committee reported that Cobus Manders, from the Northern Michigan Classis, and Gordon Wiersma, from the Holland Classis, were granted excused absences.

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 69th 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 6, 2024."

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, Michelle Chahine, congratulated Linda Kolk, the newly elected president, and Jamie DeVries, the newly elected vice-president. The new officers were asked to come forward and were installed in their offices with the affirmation of the delegates. Appreciation was expressed to all those who allowed their names to be submitted in nomination.

CLOSING PRAYER and ADJOURNMENT

Linda Kolk, the newly elected president, expressed appreciation to all the delegates for attending this session and expressed appreciation to Tim Dieffenbach for his leadership as president. Linda closed the Assembly meeting with prayer. The motion was made, seconded, and carried to adjourn this Assembly at 2:06 p.m.

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

Documents that appear in the Appendix:

Financial Reports

2024 Compensation Guidelines for Ministers of Word and Sacrament

2024 Church Staff Salary and Benefits Guidelines

Staff Report by Tom Grabill