



- ▶ The Synod's mission is to encourage and equip its classes so they may faithfully follow Christ in ministry and mission.
- ▶ The vision is to see the Synod's classes and congregations made healthy through revitalization and multiplication.
- ▶ The Synod believes that, building on the foundations of discipleship, leadership, and mission and working in accordance with the Word of God, the Synod of Mid-America best serves congregations through its classes; accomplishing this by focusing on casting vision, equipping leadership, building partnerships, sharing resources, and sharing stories of our joys and pain.

Delegates, Staff, Ex-Officio Members and Guests Present:

Chicago Classis: Rich Schuler (E - 2016), Pedro Windsor (M - 2017), Christopher Poest (M - 2018)

Illiana-Florida Classis: Aaron Klein (M - 2016), Stu Swenson (E - 2016), Troy Nanninga (M - 2017), Glenn Sterrett (E - 2017), Jason DeVries (M - 2018)

Illinois Classis: Ken Renkes (E - 2016), Kurt Bush (E - 2017; alternate for Dawn Bird), Bob Hoffman (M - 2018)

Wisconsin Classis: Lyle Zumdahl (M - 2016), Jill Harmelink (E - 2016), Bill Flavin (M - 2017), Ken Hoogstra (E - 2018)

Officers and Staff: Bob Wierenga (VP), Jimmie Stevenson (PP), Chad Schuitema (SC/T), Wayne Van Regenmorter (VL)

Ex-Officio Members/Representatives: Laura Vroom (Manitoqua Director)

Excused Absence: Edie Lenz (P)

Minutes

- 1. Chad Schuitema welcomed the delegates and guests.**
- 2. Elder Delegate Glenn Sterrett led us in devotional reminding us that we are ambassadors of Christ and opened the meeting with prayer time.**
- 3. President's Report** (Rev. Edie Lenz, [page 4](#))
 1. It was moved, seconded, and carried to give guests privilege of the floor.
 2. It was moved, seconded, and carried to approve minutes from last year.
 3. Edie was not present, but Vice-President Bob Wierenga led a discussion and prayer time based on the President's Report.

4. Business Reports

1. Financial Reports (**page 7**)
 1. Chris Poest expressed gratitude for the urban ministry grants.
2. Executive Team/AML Report (**page 8**)
3. The Journey Report (**page 11**)
4. General Synod Council (oral report given by Jimmie Stevenson)
 1. Jimmie gave a brief oral report from GSC. The GSC has been discussing MFCA, Commissioned Pastors, LGBT issues, alternate biennial plan for General Synod among other things. GSC has set \$51.45 as the assessment for 2017 unless something is added at General Synod.
5. Manitoqua Ministries (**page 13**)
 1. Laura Vroom represented Manitoqua highlighting her report and also added that summer numbers are great and that about 1/3 of overnight campers are from the RCA. She also highlighted some RCA churches that have blessed and supported Manitoqua.
 2. Off-season retreats and events are happening less and less by churches. Manitoqua is looking at doing a feasibility study for continuing these types of events in the off-season.
 3. Manitoqua is trying to connect with the unchurched kids who come to the camp and mark no affiliation with any church. They are holding regular events (game nights, etc) for families and these kids.
 4. Laura took questions and discussions ensued. Bob Wierenga prayed for Laura in closing.
6. Visionary Leader Report (**page 15**)
 1. Glenn Sterret made a motion based on the Visionary Leader report to form a task force to examine and rewrite the RSMA mission/vision/core values. Seconded. Passed.
7. Election of Vice-President
 1. Bob Hoffman and Troy Nanninga both accepted the nomination to the vice-president office. Our vice-president term is 2 years, and then per our bylaws that person becomes our president for 2 years and then moves into the past president role for 2 additional years.
 2. Troy Nanninga was elected. He was installed and prayed over with laying on of hands.
8. Out-going Past-President Jimmie Stevenson was thanked with a gift for his work on the RSMA Executive Team.
9. Congregations in Transition Presentation - Andy Bossardet
 1. Andy Bossardet, Coordinator for Equipping Thriving Churches and Thriving Leaders presented a new vision for helping congregations through pastoral transition.
 2. Training is being offered to classis supervisors to help lead classes and churches through these transitions.
 3. A new pastoral search guide will be released soon.
10. New Thing Classis Proposal

1. **Recommendation 1:** That the Regional Synod of Mid-America begin to form a new classis, known as the New Thing Classis, for the purpose of multiplying and reproducing new churches as per authority given to regional synods in the Book of Church Order Chapter 1, part 3, article 2, section 3. This new classis will begin with three anchor churches including Calvary Church Orland Park, Illinois, Faith Church Dyer Indiana, and Living Springs Community Church Glenwood Illinois. The approval of this recommendation allows the proposed New Thing Classis the ability to move forward in a provisional manner.
 1. Moved by Ken Hoogstra, Seconded by Christopher Poest, passed unanimously.
2. **Recommendation 2:** That the Regional Synod of Mid-America direct Chicago Classis and Illiana-Florida Classis with working alongside the provisional New Thing Classis regarding assets and liabilities.
 1. Moved by Ken Hoogstra, Seconded by Christopher Poest, passed unanimously.
3. **Recommendation 3:** That the Regional Synod of Mid-America continue to dialogue with Chicago Classis and Illiana-Florida Classis about the realignment of existing churches within the bounds of those classes.
 1. Moved by Bill Flavin, Seconded by Troy Nanninga, passed unanimously.
4. **Recommendation 4:** That the Regional Synod of Mid-America would call a special synod assembly on November 10, 2016 for the purpose of making a final decision regarding the formation of the New Thing Classis.
 1. It was moved to combine recommendations 4 and 5 into one recommendation by Ken Hoogstra, Seconded by Christopher Poest, passed unanimously.
 2. **The new recommendation reads:** That the Regional Synod of Mid-America would call a special synod assembly on November 10, 2016 for the purpose of receiving reports on realignment from Chicago Classis and Illiana-Florida Classis and make a final decision regarding the formation of the New Thing Classis.

11. Stories of Celebration

1. Bill Flavin and Ken Hoogstra shared about God's work in the community of Brown Deer especially in the schools with Kids' Hope and with the village leadership.
2. Pedro Windsor and Christopher Poest shared on the Missional Mosaic Learning Community they participated in and learned about cultural competence and agility. They've learned new ways to engage their own cultures within their contexts. Stickney has used this to enhance their current work in the community. La Capilla is working at this through some mentoring relationships with older men and younger men.
12. President Bob Wierenga closed with some thoughts on trust and faith and confidence and boldness.
13. Jason DeVries moved to adjourn following prayer. Glenn Sterrett supported and passed unanimously.
 1. Newly elected Vice-President Troy Nanninga closed the annual session in prayer.

President's Report

Rev. Edie Lenz

As I am putting the finishing touches on my report, the Special Council for the RCA is making their way to Chicago. I am well aware that the work of this council is exceptionally important and that the views on what needs to happen in that space vary widely. I have no intention of addressing the work of the council in this report, in part because they have not even met yet, their work has barely begun and I believe that to speculate or to take time to ponder that outcome here would be inappropriate; I believe that both the council and General Synod should be given the space to meet and prayerfully consider a way forward before our region, classes, or churches begin reacting to their work. I also believe that while the special council is extremely important - it is not the most important thing happening at this time. There are a myriad of other things that are happening in our classes and region that can be more directly addressed and I believe that the most important work that we can do as a Synod, classes, and individual churches is to take a step back, get up in the balcony and look, wonder, and pray for what God is already doing among us as well as the work that God has laid out before us to do in this time and space. What is the Spirit saying to the churches?

When we move to the balcony our perspective changes, things look very different from above than they do in the lower levels, sometimes we get lost in our own immediate struggles and missions, sometimes we lose sight of the bigger picture when we are in the midst of the day to day work of ministry, Therefore, it is vital that we look and listen from both perspectives. We must wonder together, what are the common joys and struggles that we share? Are we really as diverse and varied as we imagine or do we have more in common than appears on the surface?

In the Classis President's reports, the Synod staff reports, and in other conversations happening around our Synod it becomes clear that many of the questions, struggles, concerns, hopes and dreams that we have are shared. The challenges we face are similar, our sense of God's calling us beyond ourselves, beyond where we are is a common thread throughout our region:

What has been is coming to an end, what has worked does not always anymore. Our impact in our culture has decrease and we seem unable or unsure of how to respond. We find ourselves divided as much by debates that are raging around us as they are in the church. The temptation is to claim that the sky is falling, the world is going to hell in a handbasket - the mission of God in this world has failed, the devil has won and the death of the church as we know it obviously spell the death of our faith as well as God's mission. This is what our panic and our fears, the voices that whisper to us in the darkness make us worry about, this might even be what keeps you up at night. But do we really believe that God's mission to a lost and broken world depends on the efforts of broken and sinful human beings? Do we really believe that WE are the only ones able to bear the message of God's love to the world?

What if God is doing a new thing? What is old is no longer working, what has been is drawing to a close. I believe that God is doing a new thing – it is springing forth. We may not always have the eyes to see it, but God is active and moving among us. Our call then is to be a part of God's re-creation of the world. Our call is to be a part of this new thing. For some of you it means that you will be called to plant new churches – churches that may look nothing at all like the 150 year old congregation that I serve. For some of you it will mean that you will be sent into places of darkness and deep wounding, places where you can't imagine the church going yet you will be sent. For some of you it will mean standing with existing churches and ministries and helping them to adapt, change, revitalize is the word we often use – to imagine that God can make new what is old. For some of you it will mean that you are sent to places that are dying, to churches that cannot change, whether they are unwilling or incapable, to places where ministry as we know it will come to an end. You will need to learn to celebrate well what has been while wondering – where is the resurrection? Where will God bring new life out of death?

We proclaim in this season of the year that we believe our God is a God of creation and new things, that God is also a God of re-creation where the old can become new AND that God is God of the living and the dead, that resurrection follows what we perceive to be the end. We claim all of this as our hope and yet, we are often afraid. We fear change, we fear new things, and we fear the losses that come from things no longer being what they have been. But this says more about us and our needs for deeper faith and God's assurance than they say about the God we serve. If we really believe that God is at work in the world, that there are things happening around us that belong to God, then maybe just maybe it is time to get on board with what God is doing. I believe that God is at work in us, around us, among us, beside and in front of us and sometimes in spite of us.

It is clear from the reports from the presidents of all of our Classes that we need to wrestle with our current missions, visions, structures, and agendas. There is a need to wonder; how might we do what we are doing in better ways? How might we better serve the kingdom of God? What emerges from all of the reports is that we are none of us doing all that we could do, none of us are serving the Church of Jesus as well as we could. I wonder then; if in our diversity we find that we are in a similar position, what might we learn from one another? What best practices are emerging that we could learn? What is working well that could be tried somewhere else? If the Synod's mission is to equip classes then we need to be a place where these conversations take place; where we can learn together and from one another – to that end a group from the Executive teams have been meeting to wonder together what we can learn together and what God is calling us to. I would encourage you to be a part of that conversation, to be in prayer for their work and to listen well when they make final recommendations.

In addition, the proposal of "New Thing" Classis is something that we need to wrestle with, we need to listen well, we need to ask good questions, to be willing to learn and discern the will of God together. I would challenge you and invite you to let go of what you have already decided you believe and seek to listen and hear what is being said. We have been asked to

wrestle with our structures and our mission. This is an important conversation for all of us, not just the classes that will be immediately affected.

In the coming year the Executive team of Mid America Synod is committing to wrestling with these same questions. Does our current mission and vision accurately reflect the direction of the Synod or is there something else God is calling us to? Does our current structure and staffing accurately reflect the needs, work and mission of the Synod? These are all questions that I do not feel competent to answer for you. These are questions that I believe will be best discerned together in wondering together, in taking the time to share our best practices and our failures.

It is the uncertainty that makes us anxious, the not knowing that gets us stuck but I wonder - what would we do as a region to serve the Kingdom of God if we knew we could not fail? What would we try and experiment with, knowing that if it doesn't work at least we tried to do something? What conversations would we have that are honest, courageous, challenging and loving? I believe that it is time for these conversations to happen. What has been is no longer working and we are at risk of becoming resigned and cynical - assuming that nothing that we do will matter anyway. It is time that we were courageous in sharing with one another both what IS working and what IS NOT working. It is time that we told the truth about our hopes as well as our fears, it is time that we allowed space for sharing together the places we see God at work, the areas we feel God is calling us, and the places that we have not yet dared to go.

I would call on you as the Synod Assembly to be in prayer with and for one another, to take the opportunity today and going forward to share with one another - what is working, what is not working, where do you believe God is calling us? I would invite you into the conversation about structures and mission; what is the role of the regional synod in our area; are we fulfilling the mission of God or is there something more, something different, something God is calling us to next?

I would like to close my report with a time of prayer with and for one another. I would like to ask you to move around the room, gather together in groups of 4, no more than 5 with no more than 2 people per Classis in each group. Take 5 minutes to share with those around you what they can be praying for in your particular area of ministry, your classis, your region and let us pray together for the mission, vision, and work of our churches, Classes, and Synod. I will close us with prayer for the meeting and this assembly. This time of prayer is just a place to begin, I would challenge you in the coming year to involve yourself in the conversations that are happening, to be a part of our wondering together, to listen well to one another, but to come to the table and be a part of the conversations as you are invited, don't assume that this job belongs to someone else, it belongs to us all.

Let us then gather in prayer for our region.

2015 RSMA Budget Status

As of 01/13/16 (100% through year)

General Fund Income	Budget	Actual
Assessment Income	\$297,405.03	\$297,405
Interest Income	\$35.00	\$26.68
TOTAL	\$297,440.03	\$297,431.71

Urban Ministry Income	Budget	Actual
Asking (\$4/member; \$2 SS)	\$30,000.00	\$22,321.00
TOTAL	\$30,000.00	\$22,321.00

Urban Ministry Disbursements	Budget	Actual
Assistance	\$34,000.00	\$33,374.84
TOTAL	\$34,000.00	\$33,374.84

Fund Totals	01/01/2015	12/31/2015
RCA-CGF 3-yr Certificate #1	\$102,269.07	\$104,589.61
RCA-CGF 3-yr Certificate #2	\$102,269.07	\$104,589.61
RCA-CGF Demand Certificate	\$258,418.49	\$210,607.60
Providence Bank Checking	\$89,622.54	\$66,433.13
Winterfest	\$0.00	\$0.00
TOTAL	\$552,579.17	\$486,219.95

DISBURSEMENTS	BUDGET	CURRENT	PERCENTAGE
Visionary Leader			
Services	\$113,657	\$114,596	100.8%
Continuing Education	\$1,072	\$1,081	100.9%
Travel	\$17,000	\$18,048	106.2%
Admin & Ministry Leader			
Services	\$107,302	\$109,352	101.9%
Continuing Education	\$973	\$1,041	106.9%
Travel	\$7,500	\$5,177	69.0%
Administration Expenses			
Executive Team	\$2,000	\$531	26.6%
OJB	\$500	\$0	0.0%
Synod Annual Session	\$3,000	\$757	25.2%
Leadership Assemblies	\$5,000	\$369	7.4%
Equipping Events	\$2,500	\$3742	149.7%
Office Expenses			
Insurance	\$2,500	\$2,378	95.1%
Financial Review	\$900	\$885	98.3%
Utilities	\$4,000	\$4,557	113.9%
Rent Expense	\$200	\$0	0.0%
Office Supplies	\$3,000	\$3,295	109.8%
Office Equipment	\$2,000	\$2,559	128.0%
Miscellaneous	\$2,000	\$1,241	62.0%
Ministry Expenses			
Manitowish Contribution	\$40,000	\$40,967	102.4%
Journey Expenses	\$500	\$0	0.0%
Journey Leader	\$3,000	\$3,000	100.0%
Journey Leader Expenses	\$200	\$0	0.0%
Commissioned Pastor	\$2,000	\$0	0.0%
Ridder Church Renewal	\$8,000	\$14,350	179.4%
STM	\$3,000	\$0	0.0%
Miscellaneous Ministry	\$5,000	\$802	16.0%
Multiplication Consultant	\$25,000	\$23,904	95.6%
MC Training	\$500	\$500	100.0%
Total Expenses	\$362,304.00	\$353,133	97.5%

Executive Team Report to the Regional Synod Annual Assembly

Chad Schuitema

The Regional Synod of Mid-America **Executive Team** is comprised of Edie Lenz (President), Bob Wierenga (Vice-President), Jimmie Stevenson (Past-President), Wayne Van Regenmorter (Visionary Leader), and Chad Schuitema (Stated Clerk/Treasurer/Administrative and Ministry Leader). Per our bylaws, this team is responsible to carry out the will of the Synod Assembly and to act on behalf of the Synod Assembly between sessions. The ET annually evaluates the staff of the RSMA, determines budget and oversees business and ministry. The ET meets monthly through video/telephone communication methods and at least quarterly in person.

The ET makes decisions regarding the disbursement of **Urban Ministry Grants**. Urban Ministry Grant assistance is for ministries to, in, and/or for areas considered urban in geography of our regional synod. The minimum criterion is that it is a ministry to, in, and/or for the urban area with a vision, plans, and goals for outreach into the community. Those ministries applying for a grant that aren't in a traditionally geographic urban setting should take into account that the ideal of the grant is that it be used for those living in geographically urban areas, multi-cultural areas, and lower socio-economic areas. The synod's goal is to see lives changed through the work of Christ and the Gospel. Grants also may not be applied for beyond 5 consecutive years and each year the recipient must reapply.

This year's requests totaled over \$91,000. Ultimately we awarded \$33,000 in grants to the following ministries: First Reformed Church, South Holland, IL - First Campus Ministries; Faith Community Church, Stickney, IL; Ross Community Reformed Church, Gary, IN; North Ridge Church, Apopka, FL; Hope Reformed Church, Sheboygan, WI, Trinity Community Church, Brown Deer, WI; Faith Church, Hammond, IN Arts Center; Living Springs Riverdale, IL Ministry Center; Well of Excellence, Well of Hope Church, Orlando, FL.

Churches who would like to help fund Urban Ministry within the RSMA are encouraged to give \$4 per member and \$2 per Sunday School participant. In recent years we have received approximately \$22,000 per year towards Urban Ministry Grants and using our previous Urban Ministry reserves to fund the difference. There is \$35,491 remaining in that fund. At our current rate, we will only be able to fund the annual average difference for another 3 years. At that time, the RSMA will face a decision to continue funding Urban Ministries with only about \$20,000 annually or decide to stop doing the grants all together.

Financially, the RSMA ran at a budget deficit again in 2015. The income was \$297,432. Our expenditures were \$353,133 (vs. \$362,304 budget). A full 2015 financial status summary is found in this agenda along with a 2016 budget.

The ET appoints individuals to serve on **RCA commissions**, this year we didn't have any vacancies to replace. The ET also appoints a delegate from the RSMA Assembly to **General Synod** annually and this year Stu Swenson was appointed. Marge Vander Wagen and Pam Otten were both appointed as Women Corresponding Delegates. Tanner Reklaitis is our Young Adult Corresponding Delegate. Jimmie Stevenson and Bob Wierenga both serve on General Synod Council.

The **Salary Committee** of the RSMA is moderated by the AML. This committee is:

Chicago Classis:

Rich Schuler - 2017 (2nd Term)

Paul Tuuk - 2017 (2nd Term)

Illiana-Florida Classis:

Justin Kats - 2017 (1st Term)

Andy Shaver - 2017 (1st Term)

Wisconsin Classis:

Susan Kist - 2017 (2nd Term)

Dan Harmsen - 2017 (2nd Term)

Illinois Classis:

Brian Lenz - 2018 (1st Term)

Don Kincaid - 2018 (2nd Term)

The action taken by the Salary Committee has been previously published and is available on our website: www.rsmam.org

The ET has **partnerships** with Manitoqua Ministries and The Journey. Laura Vroom gives excellent leadership to Manitoqua Ministries and gives reports to the RSMA. Larry Bolt continues to provide excellent leadership to The Journey and a full report can also be found in this agenda.

The AML has duties of 75% focus on administrating the business and details of the RSMA and 25% focus on Transformed and Transforming initiatives. Website design and maintenance, efficient accounting procedures, monthly newsletters, all communications, clerk requirements, treasurer responsibilities, administrative duties, staff support, IT support, and many other daily activities comprise the administrative responsibilities of the AML. I am a member of the Local Missional Engagement Team and work in the areas of Transformational Experiences, Cultivating Redemptive Relationships in Christ, and Thriving Leaders/Thriving Churches. In 2016 I will begin working with initiatives in Global Mission, the new Lilly Grant for Pastoral Economic Hardships, and some Next Generation work. I also coach many pastors from our region as we try and live into Transformed and Transforming.

I have served alongside Andy Bossardet, RCA Coordinator for Equipping Thriving Congregations in helping develop a plan for Congregations in Transition. Andy will present this work at our Annual Session.

I am also beginning to work on implementing the revitalization process called Vitality Pathways in our region with Ben Ingebretson. Ben has been trained in VP and I will be shadowing him and learning from him as we seek at least 3 pilot churches to begin this work.

Ben and I will be coached by Peter Sjoblom (Central Conference Associate Superintendent, Evangelical Covenant Church). More information can be found at <http://vitalitypathway.org>.

Some other areas I serve are on the Ridder Church Renewal Implementation team for our region and also as a RCR faculty presenter for Western Canada. I am also the Congregational Revitalization Team Leader for the Classis of Illiana-Florida.

– Chad Schuitema, Regional Synod of Mid-America Administrative and Ministry Leader

Report to the Regional Synod of Mid-America

The Journey

Larry Bolt

In thinking about this report to the synod this year, I decided to provide some history of The Journey in the synod and what has changed in the last 10+ years. I trust this will be helpful to each of you.

Name

- Until two years ago the name was Living Fire
- For the last two years it has been called The Journey

Churches participating

- Initially there were 3 churches. Living Springs and Faith Church have been involved every year
- Today there are churches from Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Florida and Wisconsin

Cost

- The cost initially was \$650 for each participant and some churches helped with this cost
- Today the cost is \$250 for each participant and some churches still offer scholarships

Workshops

- 4 workshops was the norm in the beginning including an adventure camp for 3 days in Wisconsin
- Today there is 1 workshop (The Strengthfinder)

Length of time

- 36 weeks per year was the length of time at the beginning with sessions meeting for 2 hours and participants expected to study from 2-5 hours per week
- 22 sessions are held now with the sessions meeting weekly for 2 hours and the participants expected to study the same amount of time (the more you put into it the more you get out of it).

Selection process

- Initially churches invited specific people to participate in the program
- Today there is an open invitation to anyone who wants to participate

Extent of the program

- Participants signed up for only one participant for an additional 2 the first year but could years. The time commitment

was 108 weeks.

- Today they may also participate for 3 years but the commitment is 67 weeks.
- The philosophy of the program
- In Living Fire, the intent was to train specific individuals for leadership roles within the church. While some people opted out because they did not see themselves as leaders, others were truly blessed that someone had particularized them and they did become leaders after participating in Living Fire. Spiritual growth was always emphasized.
- In The Journey, the emphasis is on the spiritual development of each individual as they meet in community. They learn how God has been impacting their lives and has always been there with them. They also learn how to help others in their spiritual growth.

What has not changed?

- Who is God? Who am I? Why did He place me here on this earth? These are the three questions that have always been emphasized during all the years of this spiritual development program. Participants wrestle with these questions individually and collectively and it has been a blessing to see how they have grown.

I trust this report has increased your knowledge about the process of growth that has led us to where The Journey is now. Please pray that men and women will continue to grow spiritually as they are a part of this Synod of Mid-America program.

SYNOD REPORT

Board Members:

Brad Haitzma	Ben Kappers
Joan Iwema	Joe Paglia
Mark Reynhout	Dennis Colton
Kevin Kavanaugh	Susan Lange
Ronald Sanford	

God's Spirit Changing Lives

TO: REGIONAL SYNOD GENERAL ASSEMBLY
FROM: LAURA VROOM, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
DATE: May 3, 2016

Manitoqua Ministries, a God-Centered organization, serves guests by providing a setting and programs for retreating, camping and outdoor education.

Personally:

- This has been a learning year for me; I found out in December that I have thyroid cancer. I had the cancer and thyroid removed in January and treatment in April. I am feeling good but hope by next fall I will be feeling great.

Camp Struggles

- This winter we have continued to see our retreat attendance go down. We are finding it harder to find groups that want to retreat. This has left camp \$85,000 dollars below last year.
- We still continue to carry a 2.5 million dollar loan.
- We had frustrations with one of our buildings that caused 2 groups to cancel.
- We received about \$22,000 dollars less in RCA giving so far this fiscal year.
- All struggles really hurt our ministry. We, as a staff and the board, are looking at many different ways to try to get a handle on these changes and be good stewards of what we have been given.

Property:

- Just like us, the camp property continues to age and we, as it leaders, continue to notice this.
- In my last report I shared that we were looking into the possibility of developing more indoor space but with our lack of retreat groups this year and our low financials, I believe that will have to wait.
- Kings Camp is maintaining but with its aging population, we continue to look at how to grow that ministry as well as looking at the longevity of the ministry there.

Events:

- Work Day: I want to give a big thank-you to all who attend and a special thanks to American Reformed, DeMotte, and to Calvary in Orland Park, for sending a group every year.
- I would like to invite all to attend our 12,000 foot run and Spring into Summer on June 4, 2016.



Programs:

- Summer camp stats:

SUMMER CAMP REGISTRATION STATS			
Registrations as of 3/31/2016			
	2014	2015	2016
Overnight	1012	1024	988
Explorer	2048	2129	2392
Journey	123	109	136
Swim	114	98	91
Total	3297	3360	3607
% increase from previous year		2%	7%

- The amount of church holds was the highest that it has been in the past 2 years which is great and frustrating. We love that our churches want to send kids to camp but the problem comes when those kids do not sign-up! Once the empty spots are released, the staff works to fill those spots with kids on the wait list. We are working at refining this process so that our supporting churches can have an opportunity to get the kids in without it being so labor intensive.
- We are going to do more year round programs for campers. We want to highlight that we are looking to do some adult backpacking trips as well as parent/child overnights.

Prayer Requests:

- For plenty of quality summer staff. Also that they become equipped to share the gospel as much as possible.
- That campers, staff and families be changed by our work!
- That we could grow our donor list and find people who have a passion to help us in our ministry.
- For wisdom for the board on how to move forward in our ever-changing world and what is best for the Kingdom.
- That God reveals what He has next for Manitoqua Ministries.

Thank you:

- The staff finds it a pleasure to serve the Synod. We really want to take this time to say thank you. If we can serve you in any way please let us know.
- For more information about Manitoqua, please visit Manitoqua.org.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Vroom
Executive Director



Report to the Regional Synod of Mid-America

Wayne Van Regenmorter, Visionary Leader

May 2016

In his report to the General Synod Council, our General Secretary, Tom De Vries, shared the definition of the word "synod". He noted that the definition we often give to it is that of an ecclesiastical council of the church. Historically, a synod usually convenes to decide an issue of doctrine, administration, or application. In modern usage, the word often refers to the governing body of a church such as a General Synod.

The word "synod" comes from the Greek "σύνοδος" (synodos) meaning "assembly" or "meeting", and it is synonymous with the Latin word "concilium" meaning "council".

Originally, synods were meetings of bishops, and the word is still used in that sense in Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. But if one were to look closer at the word "synod" and break it down, one actually discovers a combination of two Greek words: *sūn*, meaning with or together, and *hodos*, meaning road or way. We are people who are walking together, on the road or on the way. Think about that! We're on a journey together and God is providing a vision for our journey through Transformed and Transforming.

Jesus lived, died, and rose again to save a people who would live to journey every day, every moment for His glory. A people who understand how the Gospel transforms and permeates every aspect of their life. The journey involves: living life 24/7 in submission to Jesus Christ, joining others on God's mission, and seeing ourselves as God's sent ones into the places and spaces where we have been called to serve. Bringing the story of Jesus' rule and reign into a lost and broken world so loved by God.

Imagine your town or city, neighborhood, schools, and workplace proclaiming the glory of Jesus through word and deed so that every man, woman, and child has a daily encounter with Jesus.

Imagine laity and pastors unleashed, hungry for ministry; and congregations mission-minded and inviting, authentic and healing, growing and multiplying, alert to the opportunities around them.

Imagine classes and synods as communities of nurture and vision--accountable, responsible, sustained by prayer, alive to the Spirit.

Imagine hurts being healed, the lost being found, the hungry being fed, peace healing brokenness, hope replacing despair, lives transformed by the love of Jesus Christ.

Imagine transforming the world one classis, one congregation, one person at a time - walking together in pursuing and engaging a vision of Transformed & Transforming within our region and the RCA.

Our Current Mission and Vision Needs to be Updated

Currently, as a region we have emphasized that primarily we want to be working with classes (versus directly with congregations). We have focused on seeking church health through revitalization and multiplication - echoing the vision of Our Call which was completed as a ten-year denomination emphasis in 2013. We have articulated our focus through our mission, vision, and values statements:

- The Synod's mission is to encourage and equip its classes so they may faithfully follow Christ in ministry and mission.
- The vision is to see the Synod's classes and congregations made healthy through revitalization and multiplication.
- The Synod believes that, building on the foundations of discipleship, leadership, and mission and working in accordance with the Word of God, the Synod of Mid-America best serves congregations through its classes; accomplishing this by focusing on casting vision, equipping leadership, building partnerships, sharing resources, and sharing stories of our joys and pain.

Here is the current reality in our regional synod. For over two years we have been living into the RCA vision of Transformed and Transforming. We have been casting vision, encouraging church leaders, and equipping congregations and classes to live into Transformed and Transforming. We have been working together and connecting with RCA staff and others to get the right people and the right resources in the right places to help pastors, church leaders, congregations, and classes to walk together into a deeper spiritual journey of transforming relationships and missional experiences. We have invited pastors and congregations into learning communities where teams have worked together to design unique missional pathways that have enabled congregations to be transformed by the Holy Spirit, more outwardly focused, and engaged in loving their community. We have heard stories and witnessed pastors and church leaders grow in their emotional maturity, in their marriages and families, and in their reflective living with Jesus.

So the vision of our synod has become much wider and longer and deeper than just focusing on classes and congregations made healthy through revitalization and multiplication. Therefore, we need to take some time together for visioning, to discern and dialogue and pray about updating our mission and vision. We will not be able to accomplish this call of

God to mission and vision in the last 45 minutes of a Synod Assembly when people are tired from the day-long meeting, looking at their cell phones and ready to hit the road. I believe we need to gather together a task team composed of visionary leaders from our classes along with regional leaders to work on updating our mission and vision. I believe we need to give greater focus to our efforts and energies in pursuing the vision to which we have been called. I believe we need to be walking together in addressing this as a Synod Assembly.

Three Strategic Priorities

The 15-year vision for the Reformed Church in America focuses on three strategic priorities in what it means to radically follow Christ in mission together. I believe one of our values as a region needs to be to not only come alongside classes but also congregations through our classes to walk together to help congregations discover God's unique assignment for each church and the community in which they live and serve. It's about learning from each other and sharing struggles and successes. It's about discovering ways to better equip each other for the challenges and opportunities for mission. It's about developing a future and a hope to be thriving, missional, and multicultural. God gives us these words: "For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord. They are plans for good, not for evil, to give you a hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11 (LB) Here is our current focus:

- Cultivating Transformation in Christ
- Equipping Emerging Leaders of Today and Tomorrow
- Engaging in Christ's Kingdom Mission

Walking Together Cultivating Transformation In Christ

- Transformational Experiences - One of the ways in which congregations in our region are being equipped for mission is through transformational experiences known as learning communities and leadership communities. A learning community is a group of leaders from churches meeting together for regular gatherings, united in a common commitment to learn from each other and with each other. Faith Church (Dyer, IN) and Living Springs (Glenwood, IL) are both a part of a Holistic Discipleship Learning Community which meets in Dallas, Texas, every six months and practices what they are learning between gatherings. During this past year three other congregations - Calvary (South Holland, IL), Faith (Stickney, IL), and La Capilla dei Barrio (Chicago, IL) - have been engaged in a Missional Mosaic Learning Community to increase the cultural competency of individuals and congregations. I'll report more on this later.

A leadership community brings together leadership teams from six to twelve congregations that are innovators and leaders in a specific ministry area. The intent for this collaborative learning experience is to move ideas into real action and tangible results. In leadership communities, churches are already engaged in a selected ministry area and want to move

forward with greater effectiveness and impact. Bethany (Sheboygan, WI) is presently involved in the Leadership Development Leadership Community (Leadership Network in Dallas).

Chad and I and three other classis leaders, along with leaders from four other regional synods have formed a Regional Leadership Learning Community. Our purpose is to sharpen the focus of mission and vision in our region and to consider and think about change in systems in the regions, classes, and the RCA. We are seeking to learn from each other and with each other as regions and classes. As you know, there is no magic bullet to produce change in systems. Dave Izenbart shared with the group that one of his favorite axioms is: "Nothing grows by mistake except weeds and your waistline." Harold Korver, a pastor in a church in Paramount, CA, next door to a church in Lakewood, CA, where I previously served, used to say, "Change is decadal." You might be able to see a little change in a year or two, but in 10 years you are able to see significant change. Changing a system is always very slow, and leaders need to be intentional over a period of time. But as leaders, we want to see change; we want to see something better; something more fruitful in the kingdom. We see that we are here now, but we want to be there. So we need a clear, shared, and compelling vision for change to happen.

The Apostle Paul had a compelling vision. He says in I Corinthians 9:19-23: "For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings." Paul's vision was to win the lost at all costs. Paul had a compelling vision for his life and ministry. As leaders in our classes and region, we may be active or busy, but we aren't going anywhere without a compelling vision and focus. Vision gives us the courage to deal with issues and changes that we need to make, to face challenges we need to face, to be intentional in looking at current reality, and then to move forward to seek change in systems.

Here are some of the goals that the Regional Synod Learning Community have developed and are initiating:

- 1) To seek after God's heart to bring clarity, simplicity, and refinement to the current vision, mission, core values, and structure of the Regional Synod of Mid-America with Transformed and Transforming, radically following Christ in mission.
- 2) To gather together all classes' executive teams for a one-day summit to seek an openness, a spirit of discernment, and a shared sense of vision by hearing from God and each other how the leadership of classes and the region can engage in ministry and mission -

held on January 19, 2016. A Wisconsin Classis equipping seminar also was the fruit of this gathering.

- 3) To come alongside classes to engage in conversations, discernment, and partnership about their unique vision and mission statements in an effort to build alignment with the Regional Synod of Mid-America and the RCA around the core strategic priorities of Transformed and Transforming.
- 4) To process with classes the request within the Regional Synod of Mid-America to potential formation of a new multiplying classis to start new churches.
- 5) To gather classis executive teams to explore adding value and meaning to classis meeting structure. To share best practices and cast vision for what "could be" in regards to relationships, learning, and classis business.
- 6) To train a team of classis supervisors for each classis that will be utilized in vacant churches to help congregations in transition
- 7) To hold vision conversations with and ask classis executive teams if a new classis cluster/network model (or other model we may not yet see) is worth exploring.
- 8) To work with the Illinois Classis Executive Team and dream concretely about possible ways Illinois Classis could employ a staff person to help lead the classis into the future.

Faithwalking is the personal transformation component of Ridder Church Renewal. Over this past year in our classes, a number of churches have banded together to plan Faithwalking Retreats as one dimension of their discipleship pathway. The Faithwalking retreat model is being reproduced as pastors who are trained in this personal transformation process are willing to help other pastors and churches explore hosting a Faithwalking Retreat in their own contexts.

Women's Transformation and Leadership - On April 16, Downers Grove Community Church in Downers Grove, IL, hosted a one-day women's retreat called "Honoring Our Stories". The event consisted of lively music, prayerful reflection, interactive workshops, and meaningful fellowship. The Rev. Liz Testa, denominational leader for RCA Women's Transformation and Leadership, and Lesley Mazzotta, Director of Spiritual Formation for Community Reformed Church and Christ Episcopal Church in Manhasset, NY, led the event. Women's Transformation and Leadership works toward full inclusion of women and their gifts in the life of the RCA.

Walking Together Equipping Emerging Leaders of Today and Tomorrow

Emerging Leader Processes - Developing processes for identifying, growing, and mobilizing emerging leaders who are able to live, love, and lead like Jesus is an area of weakness in our classes and region. As far as I know, we have no learning communities in our region who are meeting regularly, focused on the next generation, or Sticky Faith discipleship pathways.

Over the past two years, the Illiana-Florida Leadership Development Team has developed a comprehensive Commissioned Pastor Training Program with Dr. Burt Braunius and Dr. Mark Veldt of the Church Leadership Center. Bob Grysen, the Director of the Illiana-Florida CMT, has designed an integrated process for training church planters to become Commissioned Pastors. At the current time, there are several planters enrolled in the Commissioned Pastor training process. Many of these planters are leading church plants in Florida or engaged as campus pastors on the multi-site campuses of Faith Church (Dyer, IN). One of the most significant transitions on the Leadership Team of the Illiana-Florida Classis is that the Student Supervision Team (who supervises our traditional route students) and the Commissioned Pastor Team have been combined into one team. They did this for three reasons:

- 1) They wanted to affirm that both processes effectively train and prepare emerging leaders for ministry.
- 2) They wanted greater consistency in the supervision and examination process for students preparing for ministry, whether they are in the commissioned pastor process or are those attending seminary.
- 3) They felt that this would improve communication and cooperation between the teams.

Seven classis leaders within the RCA have confirmed their participation in an effort to develop a process to equip elders and deacons as leaders in the church. Two of these leaders are in our regional synod: Lyle Zumdahl, Classis of Wisconsin, and Tim Truesdell, Classis of Illinois.

Thriving Leaders, Thriving Churches

Ridder Church Renewal (RCR) continues to be a major personal and spiritual transformation process among pastors, congregation leadership teams, and other church leaders in our region. RCR helps leaders develop the tools to confront unhealthy models that hinder personal and congregational growth. It has now been reproduced in seven regional synods of the RCA. I have personally engaged in Faithwalking 201 and the Leadership Course and have grown in my spiritual journey with God and with others in authentic community. Ken Hoogstra, the President of the Wisconsin Classis, writes in the president's report: "Multiple churches are continuing to work on intentionally developing leaders, using the Ridder Church Renewal process and other leadership development tools." Within the Wisconsin, Illinois, and Chicago Classes, there are currently five churches engaged in Module 1 of RCR and five churches in Module 2 of RCR. Each module consists of five retreats, each about six months apart, with coaching and homework between retreats. Congregations who participate in RCR choose a leadership team of four to six congregational leaders plus the pastor.

Retool is another resource used in the Wisconsin Classis to assist in congregational renewal. The Retool Kit Pathway is designed to help churches become vital, Christ centered,

community focused congregations that will transform lives for eternity. Lyle Zumdahl, the Wisconsin Classis Leader, is helping churches engage in this process.

In the Illiana-Florida Classis, seven pastors will be participating in the next classis learning community studying the book Kingdom Come by Reggie McNeal. Each participant is asked to read a chapter in the book to participate in an every other week online video meeting and develop personal action plans to implement between meetings. Chad Schuitema is leading this learning community for leaders. The Classis of Illiana-Florida has set aside \$10,000 in grant money for churches to engage in revitalization processes so that they can thrive in mission. All grants from the classis come with the expectation of 6 monthly coaching sessions for accountability and encouragement. Pastor Alan Salwei of Faith - Kankakee received a grant at the end of 2015 to work with The 95 Network. Reformed Community Church in Venice, FL, and Bayshore Gardens Community Church in Bradenton, FL, also received grant funds to aid in a church health assessment process and consultation for identifying mission, vision, core values, and setting missional goals.

After participating in a March 2015 RCA congregational gathering in Chicago, I was asked to serve on a Zoom Task Team to help create and provide feedback on a training guide for classis supervisors to be used by pastors and congregations in transition. The equipping tools being developed will more effectively serve churches and pastors in the midst of ministry transitions. The training guide will include training and certification mechanisms for transitional ministers and vocational assessment for pastors between ministries. It also helps to clarify the roles of RCA staff, the region, and the classis in helping ministers and congregations through transitions. One of the goals is to recruit, train, and resource teams of classis supervisors. Andy Bossardet will participate at our Synod Assembly to share the equipping and training pathway. Chad Schuitema will be working alongside classis leaders to help train and equip teams of classis supervisors in our classes.

Congregational Vitality Pathways (CVP) is another tool the region is exploring with classis leaders to help pastors and congregations increase church health and thrive. This process of transformation was created by the Evangelical Covenant Church and is currently being utilized by the Far West Region to help congregations discern and live into God's vision for their church. Health and vitality are measured by ten markers. CVP uses assessment tools, events, and an empowered vitality team to help a congregation move toward its goals. A learning community format is used for congregations who engage in CVP. Ben Ingebretsen and Chad Schuitema are leading the charge to invite a few pilot churches into this process. Ben and Chad will be coached by experienced church health leaders in Evangelical Covenant Church. We have much to celebrate within our classes and region.

However, our classes and churches also have concerns and challenges. Several years ago, the Illiana-Florida Classis tried on a new model of ministry teams with team leaders receiving

a stipend for their work. This model has created considerable tension within the classis between volunteers and paid ministry team leaders, especially with those receiving higher stipends. Other issues raised involve the current bylaws limiting the power of classis members which in turn limits their ownership and the formation of a new classis. The following recommendation was approved by the Illiana-Florida Classis: "That the Executive Team and the Vision Nomination Team appoint a transition team to evaluate our present structure, bylaws, financial costs, and the impact of the formation of a new classis. Also the team will recommend a model and staffing for classis ministry that will be more affordable and still be effective in realizing our classis mission and vision. The transition team will present a report with recommendations to our Fall Classis meeting."

Ken Hoogstra, president of the Wisconsin Classis, reports the challenges facing the classis this way: "We're in a period with an unusually high number of vacancies. Churches continue to report that they are having a hard time reaching and retaining young adults, and that Sunday worship is becoming less and less of a priority for their members. Many churches are also experiencing declining numbers of people willing to help with the work of the church." But he ends his report with a word of encouragement - "...remember this - God is still sovereign, and He always will be. His kingdom will still advance, sometimes by using us and sometimes in spite of us. He can use our successes or our failures for His glory. It's my prayer that those truths will free you to take risks as you look for ministry opportunities that are profoundly transformational."

Engaging in Christ's Kingdom Mission

Local Missional Engagement - Congregations within our classes are expressing the Gospel of Jesus Christ in transformational ways. There are signs of bringing reconciliation, justice, blessing, and hope to individuals and families within communities. This is creating mutual transformation between churches and their communities. Ken Hoogstra shares in his report to the classis: "Remedy in Sheboygan has seen visible and tangible transformation of lives through its discipleship program called 'the Trek,' which has produced many saved marriages, new converts to Christ, and less addiction and depression. Bethel Reformed Church in Brandon has been reaching out to military veterans who are in need. In Brown Deer, the many years that Trinity Community Church has partnered with the community has led the village of Brown Deer to organize a meeting of local churches at the village hall, the purpose of which is, 'for churches to meet one another and hear key initiatives and visions of the village of Brown Deer and discuss ways churches can partner with one another and the village.' Many churches in the Sheboygan area are continuing to be involved with LOVE, INC., which brings churches together to meet needs in Jesus' name."

There have been meetings with pastors, regional staff, and RCA staff over the past two years casting vision for local missional engagement. Recently I had a conversation with Eliza Cortes Bast, the new RCA Coordinator for Local Missional Engagement. She is seeking to

understand a little more about the culture and climate of engagement inside the Chicago area RCA churches. Eliza has been communicating with World Vision about their USA site (particularly Chicago) and how the RCA might be able to engage churches in long-term partnerships to help with community work. Next week a conference call is scheduled with local pastors as Eliza is asking help in answering the following questions:

- 1) Is there an interest to pursue a location in Chicago for local missional engagement?
- 2) Are the churches working together to do work in Chicago?
- 3) Do churches need some assistance in finding a project, or combining efforts in their community strategy?
- 4) Are there some smaller churches that feel less equipped or resourced to tackle big problems in a big city, but might be willing to come together inside of their classis to do something together?
- 5) Is this something that fits into the scope of the churches in the Chicago area and their vision for outreach?

The regional synod, walking alongside classes and churches, has a deep desire to see churches embrace local communities with good news and good works that grow out of a graceful fervor and an eager expectation around the kind of transformation that matters most to God.

Global Missional Engagement - For over 150 years, RCA Global Mission has been bringing the Word of God to people around the world. Hundreds of missionaries and volunteers have left the comforts of their own community to be present in distant places, all in an effort to "live and love like Jesus." I am in the early stages of beginning to have conversations with the new coordinator for congregational mission engagement, Megan Hodgkin, who was hired in November 2015. Megan has been called to consult with and equip congregations for deeper global impact. I am beginning to help Megan identify congregations who may desire to explore their call from God in a global context, to develop the capacity to live out their call, and to develop partners (other congregations and missionary organizations) in order to carry out God's call for mission. The hope is that through service, congregations will have transformational experiences that will equip them to become agents of transformation to the indigenous populations with whom they serve in the global community.

One of the goals is to invite mission teams of congregations into a one day global mission engagement process to help congregations in the evaluation of their current missions paradigms, developing gospel-centered values and strategies for missions, and implementing a mission action plan that is in alignment with their values and vision. The aim is to host a pilot training seminar for a cluster of churches by the end of May 2016.

Church Multiplication - Churches and classes in the Regional Synod of Mid-America continue to start new churches that further the gospel—reaching the spiritually disconnected, bringing them into a community of authentic relationships, and introducing them to the God of grace

who transforms lives and eternities. The process of church planting is a high risk venture and requires great faith, so it always begins with prayer: "Then [Jesus] said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest'" (Matthew 9:37).

The Illiana-Florida Church Multiplication Team has a strong team of six leaders led by Bob Gysen. The 20/20 Vision of the Illiana-Florida Classis is to plant 20 churches by 2020. Faith Church (Dyer, IN) agreed to plant 11 new churches, and the Church Multiplication Team of the classis agreed to plant nine new churches. Since 2007, 20 new churches have already been planted. Of the 20 new church plants, 4 have closed, 1 left the RCA, and 15 are still in some phase of reaching sustainability. Out of the 15 new church plants, 7 were planted by Faith Church (Dyer, IN) and 8 were planted by the Church Multiplication Team of the Illiana-Florida Classis.

New church planters DaRon, Aaron, Jason, and Erik have launched and are currently worshipping with between 75 and 100 people. New church planters Gianni and Bobby are preparing for launch in the first half of 2016 and are currently gathering their core groups. These new starts are all in Florida. The mission of the classis is to grow a greater Reformed Church in America presence in Florida. This effort began by the New Wave Network in 2011 with the simultaneous launch of 5 new starts. New starts are higher risk, but without strong parent churches using this approach is necessary to reach the classis' goals. In spite of great energy and effort poured into these plants, 4 out of the 5 eventually closed. Aaron Klein has not only survived but is thriving. To reach a self-sustaining ministry after 5 years is very hard work. DaRon, Jason, and Erik are also working hard to reach their respective communities in Florida and to get to the point of sustainability. The CMT of Illiana-Florida is working hard to realize our shared vision of being a healthy and multiplying classis. These new church plants and those in process that need our prayers:

- DaRon Dixon - Well of Hope, Orlando, FL.
- Aaron Klein - Current Community Church, Lakewood Ranch, FL.
- Eric Kingsley - Salt Life Church, Pembroke Pines, FL.
- Jason Densberger - North Ridge Church, Apopka, FL.
- Bobby Blakely Jr. - Vanguard Family Church, Miami, FL.
- Gianni Garcia - Vida y Esperanza (Life and Hope), Miami, FL.

There are other church plants in the classes of Chicago and Wisconsin that need our prayers as well:

- CrossRoads Community Church - Chicago, IL
- Remedy - Bob Abel - Sheboygan, WI
- River Rock Community Church - Vacant - Sheboygan, WI

These campus plants also need our prayers:

- Vacant - Cornerstone Church Manteno, Manteno, IL.
- Ann Bilbrew - Living Springs Riverdale Ministry Center, Riverdale, IL.
- Nathan Prairie - Faith Church Beecher, Beecher, IL.
- Jason DeVries - Faith Church Highland, Highland, IN.
- Brett Dood - Faith Church Schererville, Schererville, IN.
- Dave Weemhoff - Faith Church Cedar Lake, Cedar Lake, IN.
- Brad Haitzma, - Faith Church Valparaiso, Valparaiso, IN.
- Charlie Contreras, Faith Church Hammond, Hammond, IN.
- David Mojica - Faith Church-Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

The Illinois Classis is seeking to live into their new church planting vision of 10 new congregations by 2030. The classis is pursuing a cluster model of four/five churches in an area to start a new church. Prayer Clusters have been formed to pray specifically for new planting opportunities. A "West" Cluster and "North" Cluster are gathering for prayer in exploring the possibilities of starting new church plants.

The Illinois Church Multiplication Team has been in a relationship with Resurrected Life in St. Louis, MO. for about 6 months. This church, along with their pastors, were exploring the adoption process to become a part of the Reformed Church in America. Recently they have withdrawn their request to become a part of the Illinois Classis and seek out another classis in the RCA. This has been a disappointment to the Church Multiplication Team but also a learning experience for them and the classis. Tim Truesdell, the chairperson of the team communicated these words to the team: "As I have assessed the situation, I see two components: administration and spirituality. Administratively, as I had experienced this past month or so, our classis was unprepared in welcoming a new congregation into our classis. I had difficulty working with other teams of the classis in formulating a plan to incorporate both church and the pastors. The major hurdle was educational requirements and contracts. Secondly, as things drew out, there developed some spiritual mistrust with some members of our classis. Whether this mistrust was real or unreal, I realized that there needed to be more prayer and more intentionality in how we handled these sensitive relationships." The regional synod has been asked to come alongside the classis to help establish a better pathway and process for adopting churches and pastors into the Illinois Classis. Likely a guided step by step guide book document will be developed as a tool to better equip the classis for pastor and church adoptions.

The Multiplication Commission of the Wisconsin Classis is seeking to move forward with the classis goal of starting 15 new congregations in the next 15 years. This goal includes 5 new church plants and 10 new "second services" that have an intentional form of outreach to a new demographic. Currently, the Wisconsin Classis has two church plants in process; neither one is self-sustaining at this point. Remedy is a plant out of Bethany Reformed Church in Sheboygan which reaches the needs of people focusing on addictions, mental illness, and

deliverance ministry. River Rock meets in a renovated building on the north side of Sheboygan and seeks to connect with the unchurched or de-churched people.

The Wisconsin Classis has not successfully planted a self sustaining congregation in over 50 years. However, that story of dryness is about to change. Ken Hoogstra writes in his president's report: "We are receiving a motion today from River Rock Community Church to become an organized church, which would be the first time that a new church has been formally organized within our classis in decades, and Remedy Church may also soon move toward becoming an organized church." I am encouraged to see the power of God at work through the Holy Spirit as opposed to old patterns of maintenance. A funding stream for new plants and second services is being developed through a "Mission Share" approach to seek shares from existing churches. A secondary funding stream comes from the sale of the Trinidad property where 50% of the funds were designated for church planting and second services, while another 50% will be used to help strengthen existing churches.

In the Chicago Classis, CrossRoads Community Church, a new church plant in Chicago, is worshiping over 40 in attendance on Sundays. Thursday Night Alive (kids program, adults Bible studies) is doing well. Rev. Maryteresa and Steve Orshonsky and Rev. Walt Pickup continue to serve CrossRoads. CityWave, a new church plant led by Jason Nelson, had their official launch on Easter Sunday, April 5, with 143 enthusiastic people. The community of CityWave has 111 total people who call CityWave home. Worship gathering attendance is currently averaging 60-80 people per week, with new visitors every week. God is at work transforming people at CityWave - 21 people have been baptized - 3 babies in infant baptism and 18 teenagers/adults in new believer baptism.

Ben Ingebretsen continues to work with our region and classes as a church multiplication consultant. He serves the Synod of Mid-America under contract to resource and coach various classes church multiplication teams. Here are some of the ways he is walking with classes:

- Helping the Illinois Church Multiplication Team learn about organic church models and how to engage bi-vocational planters.
- Working with Doug Evenhouse and North Ridge Church to develop a new site initiative for Kurt Bush in a small town north of Eldridge, IA.
- Assessment of a church planter using the ISA.
- Working with Jim Dykstra in Lafayette, IN, to assess and refine a Hispanic ministry.
- Worked with Pastor Eddy Arismendy and Eddy Aleman to explore a church adoption into the RCA.
- Worked with the Wisconsin CMT to manage the pastoral transition at River Rock in Sheboygan.

- Helped in the development of Chicagolandchurchplanting website. This website is now up and complete as a key promotional tool to sell the vision and opportunity of the KEZ in Chicagoland.
- Worked with Peter Kelder on developing a residency program that will accommodate a range of church plant projects including bi-vocational, large capacity, and orientation year.
- Meeting the new church planters in St. Louis, MO, and encouraging stronger relational support in the Illinois Classis.
- Conference calls on managing existing plants and casting vision for new opportunities in Wisconsin.
- Trained at a Cluster Event with five churches in Illinois exploring options in moving forward to church planting or new second service.
- MissionInsite consulting and planning with Larry Teigs.
- Exploring opportunities in Florida on nesting Hispanic churches.
- Exploring the possibility with Rev. Dr. Dutt on a potential Chicago Indian church plant.
- Worked with Doug Evenhouse on organic plant in DeWitt, IA.
- Working with the Illiana-Florida CMT to move forward with 4 proposals for new church possibilities in Florida.
- Weekly church planter encouragement email to all planters and classis leadership.
- Worked with Eddy Aleman and Gary Dekoekoek at Bethel Church in Sterling, IL, to talk about next steps for planting a Hispanic church and finding a good fit Hispanic church planter.

The Chicagoland Kingdom Enterprise Zone (KEZ) was birthed in 2012 and has now grown into a Sustaining Zone. The KEZ was developed from the CRC/RCA Church Multiplication Initiative focused on creating a collaborative and sustainable multiplication movement. Currently the Chicagoland KEZ has an 8-person team representing the city and suburbs of both CRC/RCA denominations and 5 classes. Here have been some of the key areas of mission focus:

- The creation of a church planter residency system to generate a church planting movement and provide consistent support and a training process
- Hosted a Mission on Business luncheon for business leaders to cast vision for developing a unique funding stream for church plants by way of entrepreneurial Christian business leaders creating a business/franchise model to provide funding for church starts and employment for bi-vocational planters
- Hosted a Missional Cafe event with Dr Rah as a guest speaker focusing on multi-cultural ministry in the neighborhoods of Chicago
- Any congregation or group can reach out and build relationships with their neighbors and friends using the KEZ BLOCK PARTY TRAILER. The trailer is equipped with grilles, tables, and a gazillion games to turn your average block party into an event the neighbors will never forget. The rental fee for the BLOCK PARTY TRAILER is \$100. Rich Schuler can be contacted for details - rich@calvaryop.org

Prayer continues to be an important core value of the Chicagoland KEZ. Weekly communications and prayer requests are sent out by email to prayer partners who communicate with God and watch as He moves in miraculous ways. To learn more about Kingdom Enterprise Zones as it comes under the Church Multiplication Initiative between the RCA and the CRC, check out the website: www.chicagolandchurchplanting.com

We celebrate what God is doing in expanding the kingdom through the planting of new churches. Continue to pray for our classis leaders, our church planters, and their families as they are sent into the harvest. Pray that the Lord will protect them in this journey of faith and that they seek the power and presence of the Holy Spirit as they work in a spiritually charged environment.

Missional Mosaic

Missional Mosaic focuses on equipping congregations with the cultural agility to discern how to be good neighbors to everyone in God's diverse kingdom. Three congregations in Mid-America - Calvary (South Holland, IL), Faith (Stickney, IL), and La Capilla del Barrio (Chicago, IL) - and Western Theological Seminary completed a learning community in February 2016. Congregational teams all identified goals to be achieved by February 2018. Some of the goals included:

- Calvary Community Church - Partnership with Pregnancy Assistance of South Suburbs (PASS) for mentoring and parenting classes/coaching; Partnership with Samantha's Closet and Safer Foundation for job preparedness for ex-offenders; Transitioning an Existing Ministry - Wednesday night Bible & basketball to a multifaceted ministry approach
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- Faith Reformed Church - Worshiping community demographics - Reach neighborhood Hispanic population and increase church membership by 30 neighbors; New Ministry Start - Food for Hope Ministry. Weekend food knapsacks for 200 free-lunch students for nearby elementary school. Partnerships.
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- La Capilla del Barrio - Worshiping community demographics - take steps to reflect more in membership of its changing, gentrifying neighborhood; New Ministry Start - Children's church for 6-12 year olds; Transition Existing Ministry - Move existing men's ministry from essentially discipleship to one that also develops emerging leaders for deployment in other ministry opportunities.

My hope is that Missional Mosaic learning community participants openly share their stories of learnings with others in their respective classes and the regional synod. May the outcomes of living into the goals produce sustainable changes in the life of these congregations and in the communities they are called to serve.

Walking Together in Other Areas of Ministry and Mission

Lilly Grant Project - The RCA was awarded a \$1,000,000 grant in early December 2015 from the Lilly Endowment. The purposes and goals of the grant include:

- Increase awareness about the financial challenges and pressures RCA pastoral leaders face, and the effect of those pressures on pastoral leaders, congregational leaders, and congregations; and in the process, break the "code of silence" that prevents helpful conversation and effective problem-solving.
- Equip pastoral and congregational leaders in a variety of areas of congregational leadership, including creating cultures of congregational generosity, effective congregational financial management, compensation packages, and budget-building.
- Equip clergy through training and learning experiences that will increase their skills in personal financial planning, more robust retirement planning, and debt management.
- Create a Ministerial Excellence Fund of up to \$800,000 (\$100,000 for each of the eight regional synods in the RCA) launched with a proposal for \$400,000 in seed money from the Lilly Endowment; to be matched by gifts totaling \$400,000 from congregations and individuals within the various regional synods, to address pastors' pressing needs, and to help pastors invest more wisely and fully in their future—especially their retirement.
- Continue building awareness of the financial challenges facing RCA clergy and nurturing donor relationships that will help provide the financial resources necessary to sustain the project after the three-year period ends.

Part 1 of the grant is the Ministerial Excellence Fund. This fund is to be used for financial challenges and pressures that RCA pastoral leaders face. \$50,000 would be designated for the Synod of Mid-America to be matched by gifts totaling \$50,000 which equals \$100,000. Classis could match the grants from new money or existing money in classis funds.

Part 2 of the grant is to be used for growing the financial capacity of congregations. This is realized through three key partnerships:

- 1) The Lake Institute of Faith and Giving would offer three seminars on three separate days over a six to eight month period. So a "Learning Community" of congregations would be built around this model.
- 2) Growing Generosity Leadership Community collaborating with Leadership Network. This would include teams up to five people from 10 to 15 RCA congregations meeting four times a year over a period of two years.
- 3) Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability - this organization would offer congregations free e-books, webinars, and church resources on the web. These resources will help consistories to increase financial management, financial stewardship, and clergy compensation skills.

New Thing Classis - The vision of "New Thing" Classis is to start new congregations, churches, and eventually even classes that further the gospel - reaching the spiritually disconnected, bringing them into community, and introducing them to the God of grace who transforms lives and eternities. The "New Thing" Classis seeks to be exponential in both its disciple-making, and sending capacity. Romans 10:15 says, "And how are they to preach unless they are sent?" (Romans 10:15 ESV) This new classis seeks to be a catalytic Gospel movement, producing Spirit-saturated disciples, leaders, missional communities, congregations and churches by continuing to foster a synergetic and intentional systematic church planting movement. Therefore, these pastors and churches join God in mission, seeking to be the very presence of Christ in word, deed, and character--through many people in multiple locations doing one thing--living and loving like Jesus.

The Synod of Mid-America has received request letters from the consistories of each of the three anchor churches desiring to form the "New Thing" Classis: Faith Church, Dyer, IN (Classis of Illiana-Florida); Living Springs Community Church, Glenwood, IL (Classis of Illiana-Florida); and Calvary Reformed Church, Orland Park, IL (Classis of Chicago). The regional synod has hosted a number of meetings for information, dialogue, discernment, and discussion with Executive Teams of both the Illiana-Florida Classis and the Chicago Classis. A joint meeting with classes' executive teams and "New Thing" pastors was held at Calvary Reformed Church on April 6. These are the five general statements that were recorded and distributed in the notes of the meeting:

- There was consensus to move forward by both classes in processing this request and affirm it.
- Illiana-Florida: Creative tension is a good thing for us to "see things as they are" and respond missionally.
- Chicago: We must pastor people through this process. There was a request to move everything at once in terms of a realignment or structure change; also to develop a plan and follow through with it to create and renew trust.
- A task force was called for to be led by Wayne and Chad including Illiana-Florida Classis president Al VanderMeer and Chicago Classis leader Rich Schuler. An additional person will be suggested by Al and Rich for this task force.
- It was requested that Wayne and Chad develop a starting point to begin this task force.
- This task force will meet April 25 in Cedar Lake with Al, Chad, and Wayne in person and Rich joining by conference call.

The Synod Assembly delegates are invited to participate in a Go-To-Meeting online video conference on April 25, 2016, to talk about the request to form a new classis. Please pray that the Holy Spirit will give direction and clarity in decision-making.

Special Council on Human Sexuality - On April 15 to 18, a Special Council of 74 participants will gather in Chicago to share in worship, prayer, and seeking the leading of the Holy Spirit

to discern "a constitutional pathway forward for the Reformed Church in America to address the questions of human sexuality as it relates to ordination and marriage." In our classes, there have been ongoing tensions, frustrations, and challenges over this issue. People have gathered in different places throughout our region during this past year for clarity, dialogue, and prayer to address the issues of human sexuality in the RCA. I echo President Ken Hoogstra's words in the report to the Wisconsin Classis: "As we approach the meeting of the Special Council in April that will work on whether there is a way forward, I am calling on all of our churches to set aside an intentional time of prayer for the Special Council.... I don't know what that time of prayer would look like in your church, and whether it would be a time set aside by your consistory, prayer team, or church as a whole, but this Council and its delegates need to be bathed in prayer." Our God is a God of miracles. My hope is that we discover a way forward as we walk together in the mission we have been called to in the church.

Walking Together in Hope

In Romans 15:13, the Apostle Paul blesses the church: "May the God of hope fill you with joy and peace in your faith, that by the power of the Holy Spirit, your whole life and outlook may be radiant with hope" (J. B. Phillips)

Let us be the company of believers in the Synod of Mid-America who plant the seeds of the resurrection hope as we walk together through these challenging times of life and ministry. We walk forward in faith and obedience, not knowing quite where the road will lead, but always assured that trusting in God will generate tender Easter shoots of new life, vitality, transformation, and hope.

Walking Together in Mission,

Wayne Van Regenmorter