



*The **vision** of the Regional Synod of Mid-America is healthy classes, congregations and leaders following Christ in mission. Our **mission** is to create and strengthen classes through relationships, mutual accountability, and equipping leaders. Our **values** are: casting vision, cultivating trust, building partnerships, sharing resources, demonstrating mutual accountability; all through open and honest communication, while exercising flexibility and creativity, and being available in crises.*

Minutes

- 1. President Jason DeVries led an opening devotion from Joshua 1 highlighting how God's faithfulness allows us to continue to move forward even in uncertainty. President DeVries opened the meeting in prayer.**
- 2. Guests were recognized and given privilege of the floor. A quorum of delegates was present by roll call. (page 2)**
- 3. Minutes from the 2019 Annual Session were approved by M/S/C. (page 3)**
- 4. President's State of Religion Report & Classis Sharing (page 4)**
- 5. The Executive Team Report, Administrative and Ministry Leader Report, Financial Reports, and Vision Leader Reports (page 42) were approved without question. (page 6)**
- 6. Laura Vroom presented the Manitouqua Ministries Report and highlighted the ministry of Camp and also the ministry of the RSMA and the servants who have served a long time. She prayed for the RSMA and Camp. (page 12)**
- 7. Wayne Van Regenmorter gave a brief report of the General Synod Council (page 14)**
- 8. Amendments to the RSMA Bylaws were approved in entirety by M/S/C (page 15)**
- 9. Rev. Bob Grysen spoke on behalf of the the Request from The Cornerstone Church to Transfer from Illiana-Florida Classis to New Thing Classis. The recommendations from the Executive Team were approved by M/S/C (page 24)**
- 10. Guest from some of our new churches in Florida joined us via Zoom online video conferencing and highlighted their work in Florida among an increasingly diverse population. The supporting documents for the formation of a new Florida Classis (Classis de las Naciones) were presented for information (page 33)**
- 11. Bob Wierenga was elected Vice-President for a one year term. Each classis' members of the Executive Team were highlighted: Scott Stephan (IL), Jason DeVries (NT), Dale Buettner (I-F), Chad DeJager (CHI), Bill TeWinkle (WI)**
- 12. President Jason DeVries closed the meeting in prayer.**

Synod Assembly Delegate Sign-in		April 11, 2019	
	Minister or Elder	Term Ending	Sign-in
Chicago (3):			
Pedro Windsor	M	2020	
Chad DeJager	M	2021	<i>Chad DeJager</i>
Rich Van Swol	E	2022	<i>Richard A. Van Swol</i>
Illiana-Florida (3):			
Stu Swenson	E	2020	<i>Stu Swenson</i>
Dale Buettner	M	2021	<i>Dale Buettner</i>
Corey Buchannon	E	2022	<i>Corey Buchannon</i>
Illinois (3):			
Scott Stephan	M	2020	<i>Scott Stephan</i>
Keith Hamstra	E	2021	<i>Keith Hamstra</i>
Gary DeKoekoek	M	2022	<i>Gary DeKoekoek</i>
New Thing (4):			
Aaron Klein	M	2020	<i>Aaron Klein</i>
Jason DeVries	M	2021	<i>Jason DeVries</i>
Glenn Sterrett	E	2021	<i>Glenn Sterrett</i>
John Jelderks	E	2022	<i>John Jelderks</i>
Wisconsin (4):			
Bill Flavin	E	2020	<i>Bill Flavin</i>
Bob Wierenga	M	2021	<i>Bob Wierenga</i>
Bill TeWinkel	E	2022	EXCUSED
David Venard	M	2022	EXCUSED
Officers/ex officio members:			
Chad Schuitema (n-v)	M		<i>Chad Schuitema</i>
Wayne Van Regenmorter (n-v)	M		<i>Wayne Van Regenmorter</i>
Other representatives:			
Cary Winn (OJB) (n-v)	M		EXCUSED
Laura Vroom (Manitoqua) (n-v)			<i>Laura Vroom</i>
Guests		Minister or Elder	Church/Ministry
<i>Bob Gryszen</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>First Church</i>
<i>Ray Tibstra</i>		<i>CL</i>	<i>Illinois Classic</i>
<i>Bob Hafeman</i>		<i>MM</i>	<i>Illinois (Class)</i>



Minutes

- 1. President Bob Wierenga called the meeting to order of the 2018 Regional Synod of Mid-America Annual Session by reminding the delegates of the mission and vision of the Regional Synod of Mid-America and opened with prayer.**
- 2. Guests were welcomed and given the privilege of the floor by motion, second, and carried unanimously. A quorum of delegates was present by roll call (page 47).**
- 3. Minutes of the Regional Synod Assembly from all of 2017 were approved by motion, second and carried unanimously. (pages 3-9)**
- 4. Reports from the Executive Team, the Administrative and Ministry Leader, General Synod Council, Manitouqua Ministries, the Visionary Leader, and Financial Reports were offered for information and questions asked. (pages 13-37)**
- 5. RSMA Bylaws Amendments (page 38)**
 1. The Executive Team presented the bylaws amendments, the Overtures and Judicial Business Committee gave a written recommendation and the assembly approved these amendments after clarification by motion, seconded, and carried unanimously.
 2. From among the delegates from each classis, these officers were chosen:
 1. Chicago: an officer was not able to be chosen at this time due to only one regular delegate present. A meeting will be had with Chicago to determine an officer.
 2. Illinois: Bob Hoffman was chosen as an at-large member to the executive team.
 3. Wisconsin: Bob Wierenga was chosen as an at-large member to the executive team.
 4. Illiana-Florida: Dale Buettner was nominated but Dale was not present at the meeting to accept. The Executive Team will follow-up with Dale.
 5. New Thing: Jason DeVries, as vice-president will assume the president role at the conclusion of the annual session.
- 6. President Bob Wierenga presented his President's State of Religion Report**
- 7. RSMA Restructure Conversation**
 1. The Synod Assembly spent significant time examining restructure options, brainstorming, and directing the executive team in how to proceed in moving the vision forward.
- 8. Jason DeVries was elected president. Past-president Edie Lenz was recognized for her six years of service to the regional synod.**
- 9. Past-President Bob Wierenga closed the meeting in prayer.**

State of Religion 2019

President Jason DeVries

The last year of ministry in our region, our classes, and our denomination have been carried out while the unknown decision and subsequent ramifications of "Decision 2020" looms on the horizon.

When General Synod 2018 approved "Decision 2020" and all that could potentially mean it raised questions, anxieties, and some fears. What will happen to our denomination? Will we still be doing ministry alongside the same people and churches we have been, some for decades?

What lifts my soul is the fact that ministry has continued to move forward despite the unknown of "Decision 2020." Some of that ministry has been painful as churches have left our denomination or moved to other classes and regions. But I believe that even those transitions were done in the interest of having growing and thriving ministry instead of only maintaining something or even watching ministry decline. I applaud changes being made to be on mission instead of taking a passive approach and waiting until next summer to see what happens. I believe this honors the imperative "GO" that Jesus commands to his disciples in the Great Commission.

I was also glad that our Regional Synod intentionally made the decision to keep moving forward even in the midst of this great unknown. We have continued to keep pushing into how we can serve in our role of partnering with classes in order to help them partner with their churches for thriving ministry. And I believe that because we have remained committed to moving forward for the name of Jesus Christ he has provided unexpected blessing and tangible reminders that he can do "immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine"!

I do not believe that any of us, in our own thinking, would have planned on a potential revitalization of the Florida Classis through a large infusion of Hispanic and Latino pastors and churches who are not currently a part of the RCA. Who in their right mind would choose to pursue a denomination that is currently facing the potential changes that we are? Friends, our God is bigger than our denomination, our region, our classes, and our churches. And he will see his work through to completion with us, or in spite of us.

We still face a lot of questions outside of "Decision 2020." How will we function in Wisconsin with the loss of churches that has happened? What ramifications are we going to see from starting the New Thing Classis? How do we revitalize churches and get them back on mission to "Go"? What is the best structure to facilitate the partnership between the denomination, region, classes, and churches? Should we, and how do we, restart the Florida Classis?

Friends, while a lot remains unknown, again our God is known. He goes before us. He already has a plan. The gates of Hell will not stand against his mission. May he bless us with the faith and strength to follow wherever he leads us for his honor and his glory!

Submitted in hope for what is yet to be!

Rev. Jason E. DeVries
3/19/19

Executive Team/Administrative and Ministry Leader Report to the 2019 Regional Synod Annual Assembly

Chad Schuitema

Regional Synod of Mid-America Administrative and Ministry Leader

The Regional Synod of Mid-America Executive Team is comprised of Jason DeVries (President), Bob Wierenga (Vice-President), Dale Buettner (At-Large), Bob Hoffman (At-Large), Chad DeJager (At-Large), 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 Executive Team annually evaluates the staff of the RSMA, determines budget and oversees business and ministry. The Executive Team meets monthly through video/telephone communication methods and quarterly in person.

This was our first year living into the bylaws changes we enacted at our last Annual Session which incorporated the At-Large members so that every classis was represented on the Executive Team. This increase in size has worked well and keeps us better connected to each classis.

Our changes in the bylaws had some “messiness” which we began a process to clean up as evidenced in a draft of changes we are asking you to vote on at the Annual Session. Note changes: I.B.6; II.F; II.F; III.B; III.D; IV.D; VI.A.1.c; VI.A.2; VI.B.

I.B.6 - this clears up that we no longer have a past-president.

II.F - as our annual session is not always on the same day, it is more prudent to count in 21 day increments rather than a static date.

II.G - an overture needs to be sent to our OJB team and to the Synod Assembly prior to a meeting, so ten days is not long enough. We changed it to 21.

III.B - the vice-president is elected by the annual session, not the Executive Team.

III.D - clarification from simply twice to twice per year.

IV.D - we no longer have Urban Ministry Grants.

VI.A.1.c & VI.A.2 & VI.B - the Synod Assembly is the body that makes these decisions for the Regional Synod.

Financially, the RSMA ran at a budget deficit again in 2018. The income was \$312,773.54 Our expenditures were \$343,510 (vs. \$339,772 budget). A full 2018 financial status summary is found in this agenda along with a 2019 budget. We continue to try and work toward a budget that is fully funded by assessments and this year we are within \$14,000 due to Wayne asking to only be paid 2/3 of his salary as a gift to the RSMA. We have already experienced high non-budgeted expenses that will come out of reserves due to meetings in Florida to form a new classis.

The AML works with the RCA Commission on Nominations to fill vacancies on denominational commissions and boards. Troy Nanninga was recently appointed to the Commission on Christian Discipleship. The Executive Team also appoints a delegate from the RSMA Assembly to General Synod annually and this year Rev. Dale Buettner was appointed. Linda Roller and Barb Grevengoed were both appointed as Women Corresponding Delegates. Ronnie Holmes, who works with youth at Faith Church Dyer was appointed as a Young Adult Corresponding Delegate.

The Salary Committee of the RSMA is moderated by the Administrative and Ministry Leader. This committee is:

Chicago Classis:

Rich Van Swol - 2020 (1st)
Coleen Winterfeld - 2022 (2nd)

Illinois Classis:

Vacant - 2022
Rich Huizenga - 2020 (1st)

Illiana-Florida Classis:

Andy Shaver - 2019 (2nd)
Gary Summers - 2020 (1st)

New Thing Classis:

Nate Simmons - 2022 (2nd)
Justin Kats - 2020 (2nd)

Wisconsin Classis:

Lynette Peters - 2019 (1st)
Anne Daane - 2020 (1st)

The action taken by the Salary Committee has been previously published and is available on our website: www.rsmam.org. These guidelines are submitted to each classis as recommended salary guidelines and each classis tends to adopt them.

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 Thriving Leaders, Thriving Churches Guiding Coalition of the RCA and work in the areas of Transformational Experiences, Cultivating Redemptive Relationships in Christ, and Thriving Leaders/Thriving Churches.

I represent our region on the Commissioned Pastor Advisory Board. Commissioned Pastors continue to have an ever-increasing role in the RCA. Training continues to become more standardized. Both seminaries are involved on different levels as well as MFCA. RSGL and some of RSMAM are utilizing Coram Deo for training. Other synods have different processes. There are 2 synods that have no commissioned pastors (Canada and Albany). This year we also met with the Pastoral Formation Coordinating Committee as they seek to follow the General Synod directive to create a Pastoral Formation Oversight Board. We gave input into how CP's will fit into this process and what the role of the CPAT will be in the future. We gave input into the creation of bylaws and continue to work to hone those bylaws.

I coach many pastors from our region and have led multiple online learning communities for our pastors (and we've had elders join as well). This past fall we did a Small Church Essentials Learning Community and are currently repeating that one with a new group of pastors. For the group that finished the learning community in the fall they have begun a new learning community on Small Church Discipleship and Mission. I lead both of these learning communities and prepare content, facilitate discussion, and help formulate action steps for the participants.

I oversee the Specialized Transitional Ministers in our region and in partnership with Andy Bossardet, the Coordinator for Equipping Thriving Congregations, we started a STM Learning Collaborative that is equipped STM's from our region and around the country. We will be doing another/similar one later in 2019. I also meet quarterly with those STM's willing to work in our region as we share best practices, opportunities, and prayer requests. I work with congregations in hiring STM's as well as receive periodic performance evaluations of these ministers.

In addition to attending classis executive team meetings I also led a mediation between a church and a classis this year and have helped other classes either in similar ways or by advising classis presidents and/or leaders on how to handle issues they face with pastors, churches and classes themselves. Wayne and I also worked in conjunction with Andy Bossardet from the RCA to develop a classis church assessment process for Wisconsin Classis. Ultimately, the classis chose to go with a church consultant group for this assessment but one church in Wisconsin has decided to utilize the process through Andy.

I had been leading our Ministerial Excellence Grant team and as you may be aware, the RCA is moving the Ministerial Excellence Grant to be a denominational grant housed by the Board of Benefits Services. They did not get the results they were hoping for having it run through the regions/classes. In 2016, the Classes of Illinois, Illiana-Florida, and Wisconsin put \$10,000 each into this grant and that amount was matched by the Lily Grant the RCA received. Of that initial \$10,000 in funding, Illinois Classis received \$8000 back after helping 2 pastors with \$4000. Half of that \$4000 was funded by the Lily Grant and half by the money the classis put in, so the classis essentially funded \$2000 of that \$4000. Illiana-Florida Classis helped 3 pastors with \$6000. Half of that \$6000 was funded by the Lily Grant and half by the money the classis put in, so the classis essentially funded \$3000 of that \$6000. Wisconsin Classis helped 4 pastors with \$8969.43. Half of that \$8969.43 was funded by the Lily Grant and half by the money the classis put in, so the classis essentially funded \$4484.72 of that \$8969.43. Each classis has had this money refunded them by the RCA through the RSMA. The classes were encouraged to set this money aside for any clergy financial crisis that may arise. Also, the RCA is willing to have that remaining money sent back to them and they will earmark it for a specific classis' pastors if they so choose. I helped with the accounting for these refunds and advised each classis that received money back.

2018 RSMA Budget Status

As of 12/31/18 (100% through year)

General Fund Income	Budget	Actual
Assessment Income	\$312,773.54	\$312,773.54
Interest Income	\$35.00	\$76.98
TOTAL	\$312,808.54	\$312,850.52

Urban Ministry Income	Budget	Actual
Asking (\$4/member; \$2 SS)	\$25,000.00	\$20,902.13
TOTAL	\$25,000.00	\$20,902.13
Urban Ministry Disbursements	Budget	Actual
Assistance	\$17,000.00	\$16,416.71
TOTAL	\$17,000.00	\$16,416.71

Fund Totals	01/01/2018	12/31/2018
RCA-CGF 3-yr Certificate #1	\$108,847.08	\$110,764.44
RCA-CGF 3-yr Certificate #2	\$108,847.08	\$110,764.44
RCA-CGF Demand Certificate	\$83,421.19	\$73,595.46
Providence Bank Checking	\$85,106.34	\$66,065.30
TOTAL	\$386,221.69	\$361,189.64

DISBURSEMENTS	BUDGET	CURRENT	PERCENTAGE
Visionary Leader			
Services	\$120,956	\$121,109	100.1%
Continuing Education	\$1,143	\$1,143	100.0%
Travel	\$17,000	\$19,933	117.3%
Admin & Ministry Leader			
Services	\$119,265	\$120,498	101.0%
Continuing Education	\$1,058	\$1,101	104.1%
Travel	\$7,000	\$7,213	103.0%
Administration Expenses			
Executive Team	\$1,000	\$1078	107.8%
OJB	\$500	\$0	0.0%
Synod Annual Session	\$1,500	\$1025	68.3%
Office Expenses			
Insurance	\$2,500	\$2,346	93.9%
Financial Review	\$900	\$885	98.3%
Utilities	\$4,700	\$4,873	103.7%
Office Supplies	\$2,000	\$1,969	98.4%
Office Equipment	\$2,000	\$4,242	212.1%
Miscellaneous	\$2,000	\$1,549	77.4%
Ministry Expenses			
Manitoqua Contribution	\$30,000	\$33,647	112.2%
Leadership Equipping	\$5,000	\$3649	73.0%
Ridder Church Renewal	\$6,000	\$5,129	85.5%
STM	\$3,000	\$0	0.0%
Illinois Class Leader	\$11,250	\$11,667	103.7%
Miscellaneous Ministry	\$1,000	\$454	45.4%
Total Expenses	\$339,772.00	\$343,510	101.1%

DISBURSEMENTS	2017	2018	2019	NOTES
Visionary Leader				
Salary + Housing	\$81,158	\$83,187	\$63,830	with 2% inc; \$40062 (salary at 2/3)+\$23768 (housing at full amount)
Health Insurance	\$22,892	\$22,254	\$22,568	estimate 5% increase (incl. \$5400 HSA Funding)
RCA 403(b)	\$8,927	\$9,151	\$7,021	11% of Salary+Housing
SS Allowance	\$6,209	\$6,364	\$4,883	7.65% of Salary+Housing
Continuing Education	\$1,115	\$1,143	\$770	1/52 of salary
Travel	\$17,000	\$17,000	\$17,000	
VL Total	\$137,301	\$139,098	\$116,072	
Admin & Ministry Leader				
Salary + Housing	\$75,131	\$77,010	\$78,550	salary schedule with 2% inc; \$56107 (salary)+\$22433 (housing is 40%
Health Insurance	\$26,713	\$27,893	\$29,018	incl. \$5400 HSA Funding
RCA 403(b)	\$8,264	\$8,471	\$8,641	11% of Salary+Housing
SS Allowance	\$5,748	\$5,891	\$6,009	7.65% of Salary+Housing
Continuing Education	\$1,032	\$1,058	\$1,079	1/52 of salary
Travel	\$7,000	\$7,000	\$7,000	
AML Total	\$123,888	\$127,323	\$130,297	
Administration Expenses				
Executive Team	\$1000	\$1,000	\$1,000	approx. \$250 x4 meetings per year
OJB	\$500	\$500	\$500	projected expense only if necessary
Synod Annual Session	\$1500	\$1,500	\$1,500	
Office Expenses				
Insurance	\$2,500	\$2,500	\$2,500	
Financial Review	\$900	\$900	\$900	
Utilities	\$4,500	\$4,700	\$4,700	
Office Supplies	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$2,000	
Office Equipment	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$2,000	
Miscellaneous	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$2,000	
Admin/Office Total	\$16,900	\$17,100	\$17,100	
Ministry Expenses				
Manitoqua Contribution	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$30,000	
Leadership Equipping	\$7500	\$5,000	\$5,000	
Illinois Classis Leader	\$15,000	\$11,250	\$6,250	3 mo. @ \$833.33/mo; 9 mo. @ \$416.67
Ridder Church Renewal	\$7,500	\$6,000	\$6,000	
STM	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$3,000	no cost unless we have to pay financial assistance to an STM
Miscellaneous Ministry	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	
Ministry Total	\$64,000	\$56,250	\$51,250	
Total Expenses	\$342,089	\$339,772	\$314,719	

Income	Projected
Assessment Income *RSMA Members 17,172; current assessment \$17.50	\$300,510 (@ \$17.50)

Summary	Proposed
Personnel Expenses	\$246,369
Administration Expenses	\$17,100
Ministry Expenses	\$51,250
TOTAL	\$314,719

SYNOD REPORT

Board Members:

Brad Haitzma	Mark Reynhout
Joan Iwema	Ronald Sanford
Kevin Kavanaugh	Don Spender
Susan Lange	Bob Wierenga (Synod Rep)
Joe Paelia	

God's Spirit Changing Lives

TO: Regional Synod General Assembly
FROM: Laura Vroom, Executive Director
DATE: March 2019

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

Exciting news!!!

- The new cabin is being built as you read this report. The weather this past winter has not made this process an easy one, but our prayer is that the cabin will be ready by June 1, 2019. We would like to build 2 more cabins, and our hope is to come to the Classis and ask for financial help.

Personally:

- I am thankful to celebrate my 20th year here at camp in a full time position. I also took on a new role representing camp as a member on the board of directors of the chamber of Frankfort.

Property:

- We are constantly looking at ways to upgrade the facilities. This year we have done many new flooring and painting projects to try to continue to provide a comfortable place for God's spirit to change lives of all people who visit camp.

Events:

- I would like to invite all of you to attend our 12,000' Obstacle Run and Spring into Summer on Saturday, June 1, 2019



Programs:

- Here are our summer camp stats:

March 15, 2019

	2017	2018	2019
Overnight	995	1049	1129
Explorer	2410	2548	2452
Journey	95	121	114
Swim	74	82	105
Total	3574	3800	3800
% increase from previous year		6%	0%

- At this time, we are 84% full for summer camp.
- We served over 1,200 unchurched campers last year.
- Our retreat program served over 15,000 people last year.

RCA Relationship:

- We received about \$14,000 less in RCA asking from the previous fiscal year.
- As of March 15, 270 overnight campers registered from RCA churches within our Synod.

Prayer Requests:

- For plenty of quality summer staff. Also that they become equipped to share the Gospel as much as possible.
- That we could grow our donor list and find people who have a passion to help us in our ministry. That we can grow more church partnerships.
- That we can raise enough money to build new cabins.
- Safety for all volunteers and workers who are working on the cabin.

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



Churches Learning Change (formerly Ridder Church Renewal) is led by the AML. This transformational process has been impactful in our region for many years. CLC focuses on learning and leading change in the church and will help you keep your focus on mission while navigating adaptive challenges. We have three churches currently participating and four presenters as well as two online cohort leaders and three coaches (of which I am one). I currently provide leadership to the team overseeing CLC in our region and also am part of the bi-national leadership group.

In response to the 2018 General Synod's recommendation to develop and implement a Sexual Harassment policy and provide training on the subject I have worked with Eliza Cortes-Bast from the RCA advising on our region's policy and how we can assist the RCA in following this recommendation. I updated the RSMA's outdated Sexual Harassment policy and encouraged each classis to either update theirs or create one. We shared our updated policy with each classis and also promoted the Christian Reformed Church's Safe Church material to each classis to consider utilizing.

I have been leading the process of encouraging classes to form Classis Clusters. After our last annual session we have had meetings with classis executive teams and leaders and I have presented the cluster idea to each classis and worked with their executive teams to begin exploring how clusters might work in each of our classes. Our conviction is that greater connections between churches, to the classis, the region, and the denomination will occur when churches form smaller groups of churches to focus on ministry. Collaboration, connectedness, sharing of wisdom and resources, accountability for goals, prayer, and deeper relationships will be hallmarks of classis clusters. Working together, clusters will have a greater Kingdom impact on their communities. This has been a slow process but we are moving forward.

I thank you for continuing to give me the opportunity to serve and use my gifting in this role.

– Chad Schuitema, Administrative and Ministry Leader

**General Synod Council met from March 20-22, 2018 in Tempe,
Arizona.**

No written report received.

Wayne Van Regenmorter reported on some of the possibilities regarding the Vision 2020 group and how that will be processed and discerned at General Synod.

Recommendations to the RSMA Assembly to Amend Bylaws

April 11, 2019

From: The Synod of Mid-America Overtures and Judicial Business Committee
Subject: Proposed By-Law Revisions
Date: 3/12/2019
To: The Delegates of the 2019 Synod of Mid-America Annual Session

In consultation with the members of the RSM-A OJB, I recommend passage of the revisions set before you. It is our belief that they are proper, more functional and will better serve the ongoing ministry of the Synod.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Cary J. Winn, Chair
on behalf of the Regional Synod of Mid-America Overtures
and Judicial Business Committee

REGIONAL SYNOD OF MID-AMERICA BYLAWS

Preamble

The Regional Synod of Mid-America, a constituent part of the Reformed Church in America, will be governed by these Bylaws and the Book of Church Order (BCO) of the Reformed Church in America.

Responsibilities of the Regional Synod per the BCO:

1. The regional synod shall exercise a general superintendence over the interests and concerns of the classes within its bounds.
2. The regional synod shall exercise an appellate supervisory power over the acts, proceedings, and decisions of its several classes.
3. The regional synod shall form, combine, and disband classes, and may transfer churches from one classis to another within its bounds.
4. The regional synod shall create whatever organization it desires for the furtherance of the work of the gospel within its bounds, provided such organization does not infringe upon the prerogatives of the several classes or churches.

The Regional Synod is a permanent continuing body which functions between Stated Session through committees. (BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER, Chap. 1, Part III, Art. 1, Sec. 3 and Chap. 1, Part III, Art. 2)

ARTICLE I - MEMBERSHIP

Sec. A - The Regional Synod will consist of the appointed minister and elder delegates, known as the Synod Assembly, from each of the classes within the bounds determined for it by the General Synod.

Sec. B – The delegates of the Synod Assembly:

1. They will be ministers and elders appointed by the classes of the Synod after considering those persons recommended by the Synod.
2. The number of ministers and elders from each classis will be set by the synod's Executive Team in proportion to the size of the classis. Each classis will have at least one minister and one elder delegate. Effort will be made to have a balance of minister and elder delegates.
3. The term of each delegate will be for three years without a limit on the number of terms. The classis may make delegate changes with appropriate notice to the synod.
4. Terms for oncoming delegates begin at the start of their first annual session and terms conclude for the delegates whose term is ending at the conclusion of that same annual session.
5. If a delegate is unable to attend a Synod Assembly meeting, the synod may recommend an alternate delegate and request that the classis appoint that person to take the place of the regular delegate for that particular meeting. The classis may appoint the recommended person or another person of the same office as the regular delegate to be its alternate delegate for that particular meeting.
6. The serving president, vice president, and ~~immediate past president~~ **at-large members of the Executive Team** will be delegates to the Synod Assembly during their terms of office.

Sec. C - The stated clerk, the treasurer, and the synod executive will serve as ex-officio members of Regional Synod without vote and attend Synod Assembly meetings. The chairperson of the Overtures and Judicial Business (OJB) Committee, the regional synod representative to the General Synod Council, and the Executive Director of Manitoqua Ministries will be ex officio members of the regional synod without vote.

Sec D – Manitoqua Ministries is a partner in ministry with the Synod of Mid-America, both working together in mission to further the kingdom of God.

ARTICLE II - MEETINGS

Sec. A - Annual Sessions of Regional Synod will:

1. Convene annually in the month of March or April at the time and place determined by the Executive Team.
2. Have specific agendas, formats, and timetables that are determined by the Executive Team.
3. Include reports from the Executive Team and from other synod teams or committees if appropriate. The synod has ultimate authority over the actions of its teams and committees.
4. Spend significant time with the following duties of the Synod Assembly:
 - a. Be responsible to see that the Mission of the Synod is carried out, to establish policy to realize the Vision of the Synod, and to continually evaluate the progress towards realizing the Vision of the Synod.
 - b. Be responsible for long-range plans and goals of the Regional Synod.
5. Begin with devotions including prayer and end with prayer.

Sec. B - Special Sessions of Regional Synod will:

Be called in accordance with the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part III, Art. 4, Sec. 2.
Be held at the time and place determined by the Executive Team.

Sec. C - Quorums will at all sessions consist of a majority of the minister delegates and majority of the elder delegates. (BCO, 1, III, 4. 3.)

Sec. D - All sessions will be conducted in accordance with the Book of Church Order, the Bylaws of Regional Synod and also the Robert's Rules of Order. If there are any conflicts the Book of Church Order takes precedence over the Bylaws of the Regional Synod and Robert's Rules of Order; and the Bylaws of the Regional Synod takes precedence over Robert's Rules of Order.

Sec. E – Agenda

The business of Regional Synod will include the following elements when applicable:

1. Devotional service
2. Roll call and seating of guests
3. Receive a report of the approval of minutes of last session
4. State of Religion Report
5. Report of Executive Team and consideration of its actions
6. Staff reports
7. Election of officers
8. Special committee reports and consideration of their actions
9. Overtures and Judicial Business report
10. Other business
11. Roll call and reading of the journal
12. Seating of the new officers
13. Adjournment
14. Closing prayer

Sec. F - Reports

All items for consideration by the Regional Synod must be in the office of the Stated Clerk ~~by March 1~~ **by at least 3 weeks prior to the annual session** each year.

Written reports with recommendations from the Executive Team, synod staff, and the synod's committees including special committees will be sent by the Stated Clerk to each delegate ten days prior to the annual meeting. The Overtures and Judicial Business Committee may delay its report until the annual meeting, if necessary. All reports may be communicated electronically.

Sec. G – Overtures

The Regional Synod may receive overtures from a classis. It shall not receive overtures which deal with matters under adjudication or which make either direct or implied charges against persons. Overtures shall be submitted to the Regional Synod office at least ~~ten~~ **three weeks** prior to the published date of the annual session to be considered at that session.

Sec. H – Methods to Hold Sessions

Synod Assembly sessions will usually be held in person. Upon the decision of the Executive Team, a Synod Assembly session may meet through the use of a conference telephone or interactive technology, including but not limited to electronic transmission, Internet usage, or remote communication, by means of which all persons participating in the meeting can

communicate with each other. Participation in such meeting shall constitute attendance and presence in person at the meeting of the person or persons so participating.

ARTICLE III - OFFICERS AND PERSONNEL OF REGIONAL SYNOD

Sec. A - Officers of Regional Synod will be president, vice president, three at-large members, stated clerk, and treasurer.

Sec. B – Election

An election for president and/or vice president will be held whenever there will be a vacancy in that office at the time of the close of a stated session.

The president will be elected as follows:

The current vice-president shall be the sole nominee on the first electing ballot. If the vote is affirmative, the current vice-president shall be declared elected.

If the vote is not affirmative, the election for president shall follow the process prescribed for election of vice-president, electing the president from among the at-large members of the Executive Team.

The vice-president will be elected by the ~~Synod Assembly Executive Team~~ from among the at-large members of the Executive Team. ~~Election will occur at its first meeting after the Synod's annual session.~~

The stated clerk will be elected by the Executive Team, meeting in executive session without the stated clerk or treasurer, at its first meeting following the Synod's annual session. Election will occur in odd numbered years, except in case of vacancy where election will occur as soon as possible.

The treasurer will be elected by the Executive Team, meeting in executive session without the treasurer or stated clerk, at its first meeting following the Synod's annual session. Election will occur in odd numbered years, except in case of vacancy where election will occur as soon as possible.

In case of mid-year vacancy in the office of president, the vice president shall automatically assume the position of president and be eligible for reelection at the next Synod Assembly session to a full term.

In case of mid-year vacancy in the office of vice-president, the Executive Team shall endeavor to make an ad interim appointment to fill the office from the delegates of the Synod Assembly.

Sec. C - Terms of Office

1. The president will serve for two years and will assume that office at the close of the Synod Assembly session at which he or she was elected and serve to the close of the second annual Synod Assembly session after he or she was elected.
2. The vice president will serve for two years or until elected to the office of president, whichever occurs first, and will assume that office at the close of the Synod Assembly session at which he or she was elected and serve to the close of the second annual Synod Assembly session after he or she was elected.
3. The at-large members will serve a 1 year term and will be eligible for reappointment.
4. The stated clerk will serve a two year term and will be eligible for reelection.
5. The treasurer will serve a two year term and will be eligible for reelection.

Sec. D - Duties

The president will:

Begin each session at the appointed time and place with prayer.

Clearly state and explain, if necessary, the business to be transacted.

Enforce the Bylaws of Regional Synod.

Maintain the decorum and dignity becoming a judicatory of the church of Christ.

Present at the annual Synod Assembly session the State of Religion Report.

Appoint subsequent to consultation with the stated clerk, temporary clerks and tellers for each annual Synod Assembly session.

Be a member of and preside at all meetings of the Executive Team.

Personally meet not less than twice ~~per year~~ with the synod executive and other staff as appropriate to inquire about his or her work in the terms of joys, frustrations, needs, and progress toward the achievement of goals. These meetings will take place seasonally, and are in addition to the official annual review of his or her work by the Personnel Committee of Regional Synod.

Meet with other synod staff as necessary or when requested.
Be a member of the personnel committee who will review the work and progress of Regional Synod staff.
Have a desire to fulfill this office to the best of his/her ability and will provide leadership to the Regional Synod.

The vice president will:

Be a member of the Executive Team.
Assume the duties of the presiding officer at the request of, or in the absence of, the president.
Assume the responsibilities of the president upon the leaving of the incumbent president.
Be a member of the Personnel Committee and will meet with the synod executive and other synod staff as appropriate or when requested.
Have a desire to fulfill this office to the best of his/her ability and will provide leadership to the Regional Synod.

The at-large members will:

Be a member of the Executive Team.
Elect from among them one member to be a member of the Personnel Committee.
Meet with the synod executive and other synod staff as appropriate or when requested.

The stated clerk will:

Be a member of the Executive Team.
Notify each classis of place and date of the meeting for the Synod Assembly session.
Notify all Synod Assembly delegates, 21 days prior to Regional Synod meeting, of the time, place and purpose of each Stated Session and Special Session.
Maintain an accurate record of all acts and proceedings of Synod.
In the order of the prescribed Order of Business.
Signed by the officers of Regional Synod.
Preserve, together with original papers.
All Minutes of Regional Synod.
All Actions of the Executive Team.
Prepare and distribute copies of the Minutes of Regional Synod as directed by the Executive Team.
Forward one copy of the Minutes of Regional Synod to:
The General Secretary of the General Synod.
Other persons or organizations when requested.
Notify all members of the Executive Team, at least ten days prior to the meeting, of the time, place and purpose of the meeting.
Forward to the respective committees of Regional Synod all pertinent documents and such materials which may pertain to their respective duties.
Have available at all sessions on the president's table ample copies of the Bylaws and one copy of the Roberts Rules of Order.

The treasurer, either personally or through a designated person, will:

Be a member of the Executive Team.
Receive and disburse all moneys from the several funds of Regional Synod.
Pay salaries and all proper claims for expenses incurred in the performance of Regional Synod business.
Be authorized, in consultation with the Executive Team, to manage and invest Synodical funds.
Arrange for accurate record keeping of all accounts and their transactions.
Prepare a monthly financial report and distribute this monthly report to the Executive Team.
Prepare an annual report of all accounts of Regional Synod and present this report to the annual Synod Assembly session.

Sec. E - Additional Personnel (non-officers of Regional Synod)

Temporary clerks will:

- a. Serve under the direction of the officers of Regional Synod.
- b. Maintain an accurate journal of all Regional Synod acts and proceedings.

2. Tellers, will:

Serve the officers and delegates of Regional Synod in the distribution of materials.

Be responsible for all tabulation of votes and ballots.

Sec. F - Synod Staff

The Executive Team will determine the duties of, retain, and supervise a synod executive.

Executive Team business involving the synod executive will be done in executive session without the presence of any synod staff who may also be members of the Executive Team.

The synod executive may carry a title that is more descriptive of his/her function.

The Executive Team has sole authority to add or reduce staff. The Executive Team shall do the following for each staff person who is added:

- a. create or approve a position description;
 - b. assign a person or team responsible for his or her hiring and firing;
 - c. assign a person or team responsible for his or her supervision.
3. The synod executive and other synod staff will have authority in their respective areas of responsibilities as defined by their position descriptions. In undefined areas the synod executive will have responsibility and authority with the final authority resting in the Executive Team.
 4. The Executive Director(s) of Manitouqua Ministries will be selected by the Manitouqua Ministries Board. One voting member of the search committee for an Executive Director will be appointed by the Regional Synod Executive Team.

ARTICLE IV - EXECUTIVE TEAM

Sec. A - Membership will consist of:

The president, vice president, stated clerk, treasurer, three at-large members, and synod executive.

The four at-large members (one of which will be chosen as vice-president) of the Executive Team will be appointed by the Synod Assembly at its annual session from among its regular delegates and may be either elders or ministers from classes not already represented on the Executive Team.

The chairperson of the Overtures and Judicial Business Committee, the regional synod representative to the General Synod Council, and the Executive Director of Manitouqua Ministries will not be members but periodically will be invited to attend and participate in specific meetings of the Executive Team as determined by the team.

Sec. B - Terms of office

1. Terms of office will be determined by the term of the respective office or position.

Sec. C - Meetings

Will be held at least monthly.

The method, time, and place of the meetings will be determined by the president, or in the absence of the president, the vice president. Provided there is full communication and no objection by any member of the Executive Team, meetings may be adjourned without meeting by the president, or in the absence of the president, the vice president.

Upon the decision of the president, or in the absence of the president, the vice president, meetings may be held utilizing conference telephone or interactive technology, including but not limited to electronic transmission, Internet usage, or remote communication, by means of which all persons participating in the meeting can communicate with each other. Participation in such meeting shall constitute attendance and presence in person at the meeting of the person or persons so participating.

Discussion and decision on specific issues may be held by utilizing technology, including but not limited to email, provided that no objection is made by any member of the Executive Team.

Upon such objection, regular methods of meeting shall be employed.

Any two or more members may request a special meeting upon written request to the president allowing five days for the call of any special meeting.

A quorum is defined as at least four members.

Sec. D - Duties

The Executive Team will:

Be responsible to carry out the will of the Synod Assembly.

Act for Regional Synod between sessions, and on all matters referred to it by Regional Synod.

Report annually to Regional Synod Assembly concerning its actions and deliberations.
 Make recommendations to Regional Synod Assembly on all matters that are not provided for elsewhere.
 Act as trustee of synod funds, with authority to manage all synod finances including acceptance, investment, transfer, mortgaging, and disbursement of money, real estate, personal property, both tangible and intangible, and devises and bequests. It may borrow money, make loans, and hold title to real estate.
 Make interim appointments for vacancies in synod positions.
 Serve as program committee for each session of Regional Synod Assembly as appropriate.
 Approve the president's appointments for special committees.
 Appoint a temporary chairperson of Regional Synod Assembly meeting in case of vacancies in offices of Regional Synod.
 Retain adequate staff, including contract positions, to carry out the mission and vision of the Synod and the will of the Synod Assembly.
 Establish and maintain a relationship with Manitoqua Ministries.
 Receive and review annually recommendations from the personnel committee regarding the synod staff.
 Appoint annually the Regional Synod delegate to General Synod. The delegate will be from the membership of the Synod Assembly. The team should maintain a balance between appointing ministers and elders.
 Approve and appoint all nominees for committee member replacements, with an effort to receive input from the classes and to maintain a balance of classes representatives on all permanent committees of Regional Synod.
 Administer budgeted funds for congregational aid, ~~e.g., Urban Ministries~~.
 Make official Regional Synod nominations to General Synod commissions and agencies as necessary.
 Receive and study the treasurer's monthly report.
 Review and approve personally or through its representative all travel and expense vouchers relating to Regional Synod and her committees.
 Review and approve the Ministers Salary Committee report and make recommendations of it to the classes of the Regional Synod.
 Review personally or through its representative the minutes of classes within Regional Synod bounds and take action as might be necessary.
 Review all requests for leaves of absence from Regional Synod Assembly meetings and take action as might be necessary.
 Be responsible for the Synod's annual budgets. It will present the full annual budget to the Regional Synod.
 Arrange for an annual review of the synod's prior year financial records to be completed by May 1. The results of the review will be reported to the Executive Team and made available upon request.—
 Will act as a Nominating Committee for the purpose of presenting nominees to the synod for the office of vice-president and for president when necessary.
 Will have the authority to approve the minutes of the annual and special sessions of the Synod of Mid-America.

Sec. E – Personnel Committee

1. Members are the president, vice president, and one at-large member.
2. The purpose of the Personnel Committee of the Executive Team is to:
 - a. Facilitate communication between the synod staff and the Executive Team.
 - b. Review synod staff unless other provision or agreement is made.
 - c. Receive personnel reports on contract staff and support staff from the appropriate staff person and make appropriate recommendations.
 - d. Review overall synod direction as it relates to staff, making appropriate recommendations.
3. The Personnel Committee will:
 - a. Meet individually and/or as a committee with the synod staff.
 - b. Give an annual review of the work of the synod staff to the Executive Team at its last regular meeting of the calendar year.
 - c. Make recommendations to the Executive Team concerning the synod staff's compensation, benefits, job description, performance, goals and direction of synod, etc.
 - d. Consult with the appropriate staff person about contract staff and support staff concerning their performance, compensation, job description, etc.

- e. Meet with contract and/or support staff at the discretion of the Personnel Committee or at the request of the contract/support staff person or other staff as appropriate and annually give recommendations to the Executive Team when appropriate.

ARTICLE V - PERMANENT COMMITTEES

Sec. A – Permanent Regular Committees of Regional Synod will be:

1. Overtures and Judicial Business
2. Minister's Salary

Sec. B - Membership

1. The Overtures and Judicial Business Committee will consist of three ministers and two elders. Skills, especially in law, and interest will be considered.
2. The Minister's Salary Committee will consist of two laypersons from each classis.
3. Members will be appointed by the Executive Team

Sec. C - Terms of Office

Terms of office will be three years.

Overtures and Judicial Business committee members are eligible for reappointment without limit of terms. Minister's Salary Committee members are eligible for reappointment to a second three-year term.

Initially terms will be staggered by lot.

Terms will begin when the member is appointed and will end after the last day of the Synod Assembly session of the Regional Synod in the last year of the member's term.

Sec. E - Specific Duties-

The Overtures and Judicial Business Committee will:

Have a chairperson as well as other officers if necessary that are appointed by the Executive Team.

Be present at each annual Regional Synod Stated Session as determined by the committee or if requested by the Executive Team.

Receive, consider and make recommendations on all referrals, appeals, complaints and overtures as referred by the stated clerk.

May initiate overtures for Regional Synod's consideration.

Upon recommendation of the Executive Team, formulate overtures for Regional Synod's consideration.

Consider all proposed amendments in the Regional Synod's Bylaws and make recommendations to Regional Synod.

2. The Minister Salary Committee will:

a. Study the salaries and perquisites of the ministers serving in Regional Synod.

b. Report annually by way of the Executive Team such recommendations it considers necessary.

c. Assist each classis in its responsibility for implementing Regional Synod's action on the recommendations in accordance with the BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER, Chapter 1, Part II, Art. 7, Sec. 1g.

ARTICLE VI - AMENDMENTS AND SUSPENSIONS

Sec. A - These Bylaws may be amended as follows:

1. When the proposed amendment originates with and is recommended by the Executive Team,
 - a. The proposed amendment must be included in the notice of meeting to all delegates,
 - b. The Overtures and Judicial Business Committee will give its recommendation to the synod, and
 - c. Adoption must be ratified by a two-thirds vote of ~~Regional-Synod~~ the Synod Assembly.
2. When the proposed amendment originates from the floor of an annual Stated Session,

The proposed amendment must first be approved in principle by a majority vote of Regional Synod and then be referred to the Executive Team for the specific incorporation into the Bylaws.

The Overtures and Judicial Business Committee will give its recommendation to the synod, and

The Request of Cornerstone Church To Transfer to the New Thing Classis

Request to Transfer

The Consistory of the Cornerstone Church of Bourbonnais and Manteno is petitioning the Regional Synod of Mid-America (RCA), to transfer from the Illiana-Florida Classis to the New Thing Classis and to take with it all of its real and personal property free from any claim of the Illiana-Florida Classis.

Background for Making this Request

Our Missional Vision

The vision of Cornerstone Church since its inception in 1995, has been to be a missional church that exists to fulfill the Great Commission to make disciples. Our Mission Statement is a simple summary of our calling: "Connecting the Disconnected and Building the Believer." Our missional vision is ordered around two fundamental commitments. The first is a willingness to join the Lord in what He is blessing. This means that we are willing to lay aside our own ideas and plans to follow Christ in His mission. We do not ask the Lord to bless what we want to do, rather we ask Him to lead us to join what He is blessing. The second commitment is to apply the missional principle of contextualization to our beliefs. This means that we contextualize our beliefs by absolutes (i.e., the orthodox Christian faith), convictions (i.e., Biblical interpretations and theological traditions), and preferences (i.e., personal and cultural likes). While the absolutes of the Christian faith are essential and non-negotiable, convictions and preferences are understood as offering room for inclusion of people who may not agree with each other on the non-essentials of the faith. There is a common saying, *in essentials, unity; in doubtful matters, liberty; in all things, charity*. This missional vision is at the core of who we are and how we function as a church.

Why New Thing?

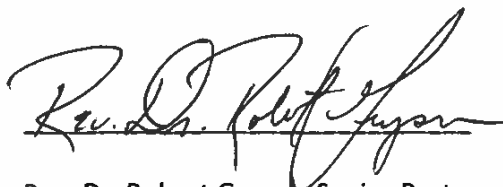
Through much prayer and conversation we believe that the Lord would have us join what He is blessing through New Thing. Our alignment with their missional approach and beliefs makes us certain that the Lord intends to further bless us through this change and also for us to be a blessing to them. We are excited by the possibilities of what the Lord has in store for us as we follow Him in mission together.

Why Now?

We have been blessed to be part of the Illiana-Florida Classis since we began in 1995. They have been with us as we have grown from meeting in a jr. high school with an initial group of forty to becoming a two campus church of nearly four-hundred today. Over the years our relationship with the Classis has been both essential and productive. We cannot begin to express how thankful we are for all the ways they have been a blessing to us over these past twenty-three years. However, as with all of life, change is inevitable. We cannot point to one circumstance that has led us to believe that now is the time to join New Thing Classis. However, we agree that there is a spiritual movement of God leading us to this timing for the life of our church. Ultimately we believe that it is not the Classis we belong to that matters, but what matters is that we are where God wants us to be to accomplish His purposes.

Thank you for being on mission together with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

On behalf of the Consistory of the Cornerstone Church,



Rev. Dr. Robert Grysen, Senior Pastor

9-18-18



Dr. Milton J. Smit, V.P. of Consistory

9/18/18

RSMA Executive Team Meeting with Cornerstone Consistory
Request to Transfer from Illiana-Florida Classis to New Thing Classis

November 27, 2018

Present: Dale Buettner, Wayne Van Regenmorter, Bob Hoffman, Chad Schuitema, Bob Wierenga; Pastor Bob Grysen, Campus Pastor John Hine, the consistory of Cornerstone Church.

a. Tell the story of what initiated the decision to consider this transfer.

- Watching New Thing closely since the new classis was formed.
- There is an evangelical alignment along with connections with Gospel Alliance and style of preaching.
- Connecting the disconnected and building the believer is Cornerstone's mission and that aligns very well with New Thing.
- This opportunity creates some excitement in the church as a consistory as well as unity and consensus.
- They did a 40 days of prayer and journaled every day as a lead team and God rose this to the top and that sparked a continued conversation as a lead team that they have continued to explore over the last year.
- There is a hunger to learn from New Thing.
- Cornerstone believes that they are growing into a better body of Christ and sees New Thing growing in similar ways and wants to continue to move forward with them in this kind of alliance in order to enrich the ministry and grow from the connection. It makes perfect sense.
- New Thing's experience with satellites and growing leaders is something they would like to learn from and be mentored in. To have some energy to add to their energy.
- One of the phrases that this church started with was "Lord show us what you're doing and we will join it" - they see New Thing as something God is doing that he wants them to join in on.
- The leadership of Cornerstone Church has no negativity toward the Illiana-Florida Classis. People expressed nothing but thanks for classis support over the years.

b. How did you process this request with the consistory, the congregation or new congregation, the current classis, the new classis, the regional synod?

- There is an openness that has been in the church's DNA from the beginning and they are often asking what's next? It's been conversations within the consistory asking what's next for a period of about a year as they have explored this possibility.
- The leadership team leads - and the church was built on a corporate model in order to be fast and nimble. Each elder and deacon has connections in the church though there has not been any sort of formal congregational meeting but more informal.
- The congregation is less dutch than most RCA churches and the general church member doesn't know much about the RCA, RS, or Classis.
- There is a trust in the leadership that the leaders will lead them in the best direction.

c. By transferring to another classis, what new opportunities do you envision in faithfully following Christ in ministry and mission? What concerns do you have for your congregation?

Opportunities:

- Learn from those who have done the campus/satellite model well.
- New Thing Network possibility for church planting, learning, conferences, coaching.
- Learning how to raise up converts into disciples and then leaders. Cornerstone needs help with leadership development.
- Doing joint projects as churches

Concerns:

- A lot more meetings and time
- Being the smallest church in New Thing
- A need to pay attention to the fundamentals and not letting those get lost
- It's a change to be the new church (after being with I-F for so long) - there is a spoken need to be open to be led and invited in.

d. Tell us about how you will handle financial assets, real and personal property, legal documentation such as Articles of Incorporation, bylaws, etc.

- They will re-examine bylaws and clean them up.
- The RSMA outlined some things they need to be aware of financially regarding I-F classis. The church plans to pay assessments and assumes they will receive Manteno financial support as long as they are a part of I-F.
- NT has not promised any financial support but the Manteno campus is dependent upon I-F Classis. These financial realities will need to be communicated with NT.

e. What do you see as the anticipated impact that this transfer would have on the current existing classis or on the new classis?

- Spiritually, physically, and emotionally both pastors feel energized by this. For Bob specifically, the completion of his Dmin and ending his duties with the classis as well as getting healthy has been a huge blessing and energizer.
- John feels very encouraged by this whole process and feels very comfortable - even looking for houses in order to settle in has been an encouraging process.

NT classis impact: NT has more to gain than I-F has to lose. NT is excited and very welcoming of the church. There is a strong familiarity with the churches and pastors of NT.

I-F classis impact: The classis seems as if there hasn't been a better time for Cornerstone to leave. Leaving never seems like an easy thing to anticipate, but it seems like the classis is more stable with some new beginnings in the classis. Change can be a healthy thing - it has been for Cornerstone and they see it being a healthy thing for an organization.

They see no negatives for either classis nor the church.

f. Tell us about the vote of affirmation.

Their organizational system does not operate under congregational votes. The elders and deacons operate as a representative government and so they, as leaders, are trusted and expected to make these decisions.

*Note, this is not a requirement found anywhere in the BCO or the RSMA process to transfer.

Regional Synod Executive Team Meeting with Illiana-Florida Classis Executive Team
Re: The Cornerstone Church Transfer Request

February 5, 2019
Community Reformed Church of Lafayette, IN

Present from the Regional Synod of Mid-America: Wayne Van Regenmorter, Dale Buettner, Bob Hoffman, Bob Wierenga; via Zoom: Jason DeVries, Chad DeJager
Present from Illiana-Florida Classis: Don MacDonald, Al Vander Meer, Dean Schraam, Shawn Gerbers, Barb Grevengoed; via Zoom: Thom Archer, Stu Swenson, Dave Hubbart

Chad Schuitema opened the meeting in prayer.

Our Purpose: **The Regional Synod shall meet with the executive team of the requesting church's classis of origin for the purpose of understanding the impact of this transfer request.*

Our Questions:

1. In what ways has this existing classis best served to support, equip and resource the mission and vision of the congregation desiring to transfer?

- The Regional Synod and the classis were part of the process in planting Cornerstone. It began with the idea to relocate Faith Kankakee and that was voted down. They later talked about planting a new church from Faith Kankakee and the church was split down the middle on whether to plant. From there, Rev. Dr. Bob Grysen cast the deciding vote and Cornerstone was planted.
- The classis has contributed approximately \$600,000 toward the Manteno Campus since its inception approximately 6 years ago.
- Rev. Dr. Grysen was the Multiplication director for many years from the classis and was compensated well and did a thorough job.

2. Share the concerns that you have regarding the transfer request of this church to a new classis.

- The classis executive team states that there has been a lack of transparency on part of Cornerstone to the classis.
- There is concern about personnel issues regarding how the church has handled employee relationships in the past.
- There may be human resourcing needs that New Thing Classis be aware of in how to best resource Cornerstone.
- New Thing Classis Executive Team needs to be made aware of the history of the Manteno Campus in order to be watchful that history doesn't repeat itself.
- Cornerstone has a DNA that probably matches (functionally) with New Thing Classis and less with Illiana-Florida.
- The church doesn't explicitly express that it is part of the Reformed Church in America though they do explicitly express Reformed theology.
- Illiana-Florida Classis may not be the best classis to provide care for Rev. Dr. Grysen based on past history.
- Mike Ceratto is currently the treasurer of Illiana-Florida Classis and a member of Cornerstone Church. What will Mike's role be if this transfer goes through? The feeling of I-F Classis Executive Team is they would like him to continue in this role and leave it up to Mike on if he wants to continue as treasurer.

- I-F would like Cornerstone to pay first and second quarter's assessments for 2019 (through June 2019) and I-F will not pay any funds to Cornerstone for church multiplication through June 2019). This is for classis assessments only. We will ask Mike Ceratto how he wants to handle Regional Synod and General Synod Assessments.
- New Thing will be made aware that Cornerstone has outstanding loans that they will now be responsible as a classis.

Tom Archer closed the meeting with prayer.

**Regional Synod Executive Team Meeting with New Thing Classis Executive Team Re:
The Cornerstone Church Transfer Request**

February 12, 2019
via Zoom

Present from the Regional Synod of Mid-America: Wayne Van Regenmorter, Dale Buettner, Bob Hoffman, Bob Wierenga, Jason DeVries, Chad DeJager

Present from New Thing Classis: Dave Izenbart, Ron Citlau, Rich Bawinkel, Aaron Klein

Jason DeVries opened the meeting in prayer.

Our Purpose: **The Regional Synod shall meet with the executive team of the requesting church's classis of origin for the purpose of understanding the impact of this transfer request.*

Our Questions:

1. In what ways do you envision how this new classis this would best serve to support, equip and resource the mission and vision of the congregation desiring to transfer?

- Rev. Bob Gysen has been meeting with the New Thing Network for a few meetings which has helped to align in mission, vision, and values.
- They seem to be having the same conversations about ministries in terms of multiplication and leadership.
- The initial conversations have been very encouraging and positive.
- New Thing Classis has learned from the transfer in of First Church Wheatfield. They are seeing a need for representation in leadership of the classis from each of its churches.
- New Thing has been inspired by Cornerstone already and has a desire to learn from them and what they are doing in ministry.
- There is definitely a like-mindedness in the mission of the Gospel.

2. Share the concerns that you have regarding the transfer request of this church to a new classis.

- New Thing does not have an understanding of Cornerstone's debt and financial situation and has not had conversations regarding "significant" financial concerns though Cornerstone has stated that they are rebuilding health financially.
- Illiana-Florida supports the Manteno Campus of Cornerstone at \$30,000 in 2019. New Thing has not had conversations about financial funding and recognizes the need to do that.
- New Thing Classis had concerns previously with the idea of this transfer but they have witnessed a significant change in the relationship with Rev. Gysen.
- New Thing believes it would be helpful to have a conversation around reformed identity, especially identifying with the Reformed Church in America.

Chad DeJager closed the meeting in prayer.

At the next annual Stated Session the proposed amendment is presented for adoption by a two-thirds vote of ~~Regional-Synod~~ the Synod Assembly.

Sec. B – These Bylaws may be suspended in whole or in part, for a whole session, part of a session or for another period of time not to exceed until the next annual session, by two-thirds vote of ~~Regional-Synod~~ the synod assembly.

Recommendations to RSMA Synod Assembly

Cornerstone Petition to Transfer

Recommendation 1: That the Regional Synod of Mid-America transfer The Cornerstone Church, Bourbonnais, IL, from the Illiana-Florida Classis to the New Thing Classis as per authority given to regional synods in the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part 3, Article 2, Section 3. This transfer is effective after June 30, 2019.

Recommendation 2: That the Regional Synod of Mid-America direct the Illiana-Florida Classis to work with New Thing Classis to release all real and personal property of The Cornerstone Church, Bourbonnais, IL, to come under the jurisdiction of the New Thing Classis.

Recommendation 3: That The Cornerstone Church, Bourbonnais, IL, pay to the Illiana-Florida Classis half of the 2019 assessments based on the current year rate by June 30, 2019.

Current Reality of Florida Classis

In December 2011, the Classis of Florida was merged with the Classis of Illiana to form the Illiana-Florida Classis. Since that time this classis has been functioning as a classis with churches located in the states of Illinois, Indiana, Ohio and Florida.

Existing Florida churches from the original Florida Classis:

1. First Reformed Church in Tampa, FL. Pastor Dave Hubbartt is the pastor. Average worship is 117 people.
2. Rolling Hills Community Church in Zellwood, FL. Pastor Bill Bengston is the classis supervisor/supply pastor. Average worship is 120 people.
3. Bayshore Gardens Community Church in Bradenton, FL. Dustin Sedlak is the contract pastor. Average worship is 82.
4. Venice Community Church in Venice, FL. Jeff Krause is a PCA Elder under contract. Average worship is 42.
5. Chinese Reformed Church in South Florida, Miami, FL. The church is currently vacant.
6. Christ Community Church in Pompano Beach, FL. The church is currently vacant. David Tellinghuisen is serving as the interim pastor. Average worship is 50.
7. Good News Christian Fellowship in New Port Richey, FL. Pastor Jerry Hekhuis is the pastor. Average worship is 60. Jerry also owns a Christian coffee house and bookstore across the street from where the church leases a building. This is RCA congregation that is an unorganized RCA church.
8. Korean Choong Hyun Church of Orlando in Orlando, FL. The Grace Way Church, a CRCNA, now leases the property with a future vision to purchase the property from the Illiana-Florida Classis.
9. Iglesia Comunidad de Fe in Palm Springs, FL. Alex Meza is the preaching elder. This church claims to have left the RCA in 2016. The consistory did not inform the classis and now the property dispute is being dealt with in Florida courts.
10. New Horizons Church in Deerfield Beach, FL. The Consistory sold their property to Cross Community Church in 2015 for \$5,000 and left the RCA. The classis settled a property dispute outside the court system. The settlement agreement comes was due on November 30, 2018. This debt has not yet been paid to the Illiana-Florida Classis.

New church plants existing, funded by the Illiana-Florida Classis prior to 2018:

1. In 2014, Salt Life Church in Pembroke Pines with Eric Kingsley was launched. Worshipping between 100 to 150 people weekly.
2. In 2016, Vida y Esperanza in Miami with Gianni Garcia was launched. Worshipping between 70 to 85 people weekly.

New church plants started and funded by Illiana-Florida Classis for 2019:

1. The Outpost in Apopka, FL, led by Joe & Rebecca Robinson. This is basically a house church with 30 people in worship.
2. El Buen Pastor in Fort Worth, FL, led by German Moreno. About 45-50 people in worship.

3.Church planter Andres Sancho from Chili starting with a small group of about 12 people. Exploring being adopted by the classis.

4.Overflow Worship Center led by Walt & Theresa Price in Orlando, FL. Worship with a small group of people. Pursuing a Commissioned Pastor route with Coram Deo.

5.12 Springs Church in Sarasota, FL, led by Ryan McBride, with about 75-90 in worship. NCP was approved and working through the process of adoption into the Illiana-Florida Classis.

6.Global Ministries, Inc. in Orlando, FL, led by Jose Rea, with 100+ in worship. NCP has been approved and working through the process of adoption into the Illiana-Florida Classis.

7.Chad Farrand of South Harbor Churches in Michigan will move to Florida in June 2019 and plant churches in the Orlando area.

Conversations with other new church planters exploring being a part of a reconstituted classis:

1.Sebastian Geminez, the pastor of Montreal Reformed Church, a Hispanic church in Miami worshipping about 200 is working through the process of coming into the Illiana-Florida Classis. In December Chad Farrand worked with him to complete a NCP in Spanish which is now being translated into English asap. He just found a new warehouse space in northern Miami for worship. He is exploring coming into the Illiana-Florida Classis.

2.Bishop Jerry Hutchins and additional church plants in Atlanta area and beyond are exploring the process of being adopted into the Illiana-Florida Classis and the RCA.

3.La Casa Del Rey led by Jesualdo Bolanito, a freelance evangelist, in West Palm Beach, FL, wishes to plant a Hispanic church. Exploring being adopted by the classis.

4.Conversations with Sam Torres. Sam has been the worship pastor of a very large Hispanic church in Miami for a long time and has been taking steps towards planting a new congregation. Chad Farrand is having ongoing conversations with Sam. Sam also knows Erik Kingsley.

5.Conversations with Mark Rodriguez. Mark is the executive pastor at a mega-church in Miami and has a call to plant a new church. He had his first preview service in November with 200 in attendance. He was born and raised in the Miami area and exploring being adopted into the Illiana-Florida Classis.

6.Daniel Davilla is a close friend of Jose Rea (Orland) and has been leading a Hispanic church in southern Florida for 14 years. He is interested in being adopted as a Hispanic church into the Illiana-Florida Classis.

7.Brazilian Portuguese Speaking plant. The RCA Global Mission and Multiplication have a partnership with these pastors of a Brazilian Presbyterian ministries who are planting 94 new churches down the Amazon and run three medical ships that travel up and down the river and provide care to local tribes. They are interested in planting a church in Florida and want to partner with the Illiana-Florida Classis to do it. This would be a Portuguese speaking congregation primarily targeting Brazilians in the Miami area. This is in the early stages of process, but if it became a reality this would be the first time the RCA has helped plant a congregation with a foreign country inside the USA.



Regional Synod
of Mid-America

Reformed Church in America

Equipping classes to faithfully follow
Christ in ministry and mission.



Classis de las Naciones

“Classis of the Nations” (Proposed Name)

A New Classis of the Regional Synod of Mid-America

Revelation 7:9a (ESV): *“After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb...”*

What it is: RCA existing congregations, planned adopted congregations, and new church plants in Florida, Georgia, and beyond are requesting the Regional Synod of Mid-America to form a new classis for churches in the Southeastern part of the United States.

Our Priorities

- **Multiplying Churches** – *Extending God’s love and grace by starting new churches in neighborhoods and communities.*
- **Healthy & Renewed Churches** – *Pastors and churches renewed and equipped for vibrant ministry.*
- **Evangelism and Discipleship** – *Reaching new people in new ways by sharing the Gospel and building authentic relationships.*
- **Leadership Development** – *Equipping, training, and raising up leaders for the harvest.*
- **Multicultural and Diverse** – *All God’s people praying and working together in ministry and mission.*
- **Holy Spirit Lead** – *Giving the Holy Spirit freedom to do new works through new leaders.*
- **Loving Relationships** – *Loving, trusting, caring deeply for each other and building strong relationships.*
- **Reformed** – *The Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and practice.*
- **Churches Collaborating Together** – *Together is better. The classis exists to serve the churches; churches don’t exist simply to serve the classis.*

Rationale

1. **Empowerment for a Diversity of Leaders (Hispanic, African-American, Asian, Caucasian)** – *Leaders using their spiritual gifts and abilities for God's kingdom.*
2. **Pastoral and Lay Leadership Development** – *Designing pathways for theological education and equipping lay leaders*
3. **Bold Vision for New Church Planting** – *20 new churches by 2021.*
4. **Local Leadership and Support** – *Indigenous leaders for maximum impact.*

Our Anchor Churches

The churches that will anchor our new classis are:

1. First Reformed Church, Tampa FL
2. Rolling Hills Reformed Church, Zellwood FL
3. Bayshore Gardens Community Church, Bradenton FL
4. Planned Adopted Congregations

Churches that Make Disciples and Multiply

A new classis calls for new paradigms. The concerns about church health no longer need to be a deterrent for a plan for church planting and multiplication. There is a perceived natural order and progression of how churches grow and become healthy churches. Most pastors think that healthy churches are places where disciples make other disciples, leaders train other leaders, groups give birth to other groups, and ministries plant the seeds of other ministries. These may all be measurements of health and grow. However, many church leaders stop short of recognizing that churches should continue to grow beyond their walls. God designed churches to start other churches. And those churches are designed to start more churches, which will go on to start yet more churches. Reproducibility is the Biblical model for a church planting and multiplication movement. A significant paradigm shift is required to move from growth by addition to growth by multiplication. Bob Logan believes that the best way to reach the harvest isn't through large churches, or even through planting more churches, but through churches that multiply—whatever the size. Whether it is disciples, leaders, small groups, ministries, or churches, all must multiply. Reproducibility empowers ordinary people to do extraordinary things. Reaching the harvest will call for a fresh openness to the working of the Holy Spirit as new churches are birthed. As the harvest comes in, capacity increases; and with that increased capacity comes more and more workers for the harvest who live and look like Jesus.

So Why Now?

- 1) God has called the RCA to add 1000 new churches, and our General Secretary believes that Florida will be at the center of this new vision.
- 2) We need local leadership for maximum impact.
- 3) If we wait for the perfect time, we will never re-launch the classis.
- 4) We have the opportunity to partner with Classis of the Americas and help launch new congregations together throughout the state.
- 5) God is already raising up new leaders and congregations for this work and we must be faithful to partner with His leading.
- 6) We can strengthen our existing Florida congregations with the local classis.
- 7) God is opening doors in expanding the harvest in Georgia and beyond.

Draft Proposal of Classis Team Structure

Executive Team: *Focuses on keeping mission/vision of the classis upfront and center. Empowers the work of the teams and acts on behalf of the classis between sessions. The executive team is accountable to the classis.*

- Appoints interim officers
- Supports the work of the ministry teams
- Receives and reviews regular reports from the teams to include goals and objectives
- Acts as trustee of classis funds, with authority to manage all classis finances including acceptance, investment, transfer, mortgaging, and disbursement of money, real estate, personal property, both tangible and intangible, and devises and bequests. It may borrow money, make loans, and hold title to real estate
- Be responsible for the agenda of each session of the classis and will act as a clearinghouse of business brought to the classis by assigning such business to the appropriate team if possible, including financial requests
- Recommends classis budget
- Receives, reviews, and recommends proper disposition of all grievances, complaints, appeals and other issues directed to the classis. May assign items to a task team.
- Prepares and recommends to classis any bylaws changes
- Process and recommends request for permission to borrow from congregations
- Recommends annual automatic credit limits for congregations
- Shall appoint the classis representative to Regional Synod
- Shall appoint the classis representative to the General Synod
- Act as a nominating team for officers and task team champions and team leaders
- Appoints members to task teams
- Meets with all churches and ministers desiring to join the classis or appoints a task team to meet with interested individuals
- Provides financial accountability for treasurer work including financial reviews
- Acts as the personnel committee for classis staff
- Coordinates and proposes nominations
- Prepares and recommends bylaw changes
- Approves and arranges for ordinations and installations
- Process and recommends overtures unless appropriate to assign to a ministry commission

Church Health & Renewal Team: *To cultivate an environment of innovative ministry and resources for renewing and revitalizing existing congregations.*

- Assist churches in mission and vision development
- Discover and provide church health and renewal resources in areas of worship, discipleship, evangelism, and dynamic prayer ministries
- Promote connectedness between churches and interdependence
- Provide people and resources for local church assessment; such as Transforming Church and Unstuck Church

- Provide support, guidance, and direction to consistories as requested
- May supersede the authority of a local consistory with the vote of the classis and work with other teams to develop a future plan for the church property
- Complete a church health assessment in every congregation every three years. There needs to be connectedness between the classis and churches and also church to church
- Assist in evangelism training for local churches, as well as other training events
- Development of clusters for church health and renewal
- Process applications received for financial assistance grants
- Review strategies and analyze progress towards church health and renewal

Leadership Development Team: *To identify, equip, raise up, and release effective and gifted leaders.*

- Identify emerging leaders
- Clarify a clear pathway for emerging leaders to avoid conflict between structure, and theology and culture
- Come alongside and work with a church in the search process and transition of pastoral leadership in a church
- Give pastoral care and oversight to enrolled candidates for ministry to include financial assistance
- Act upon request for approval of a call to a pastor
- Approve pastor contracts with the congregation
- Facilitate the process for receiving a pastor from another denomination
- Facilitate the process for all candidates desiring to become approved by the classis as a Preaching Elder, Commissioned Pastor, Minister of Word and Sacrament, , or Minister under Contract.
- Approve and process dissolution of pastoral relationship
- Give pastoral care to Commissioned Pastor candidates
- Develop training programs for Christian education in local churches
- Oversee and support the training of youth leaders and development of youth programs
- Development of leadership/discipleship networks and lay leadership training
- Develop Elder/Deacon training
- In collaboration with other teams, develop a theological and lay leadership training center for equipping and training classis pastors and leaders

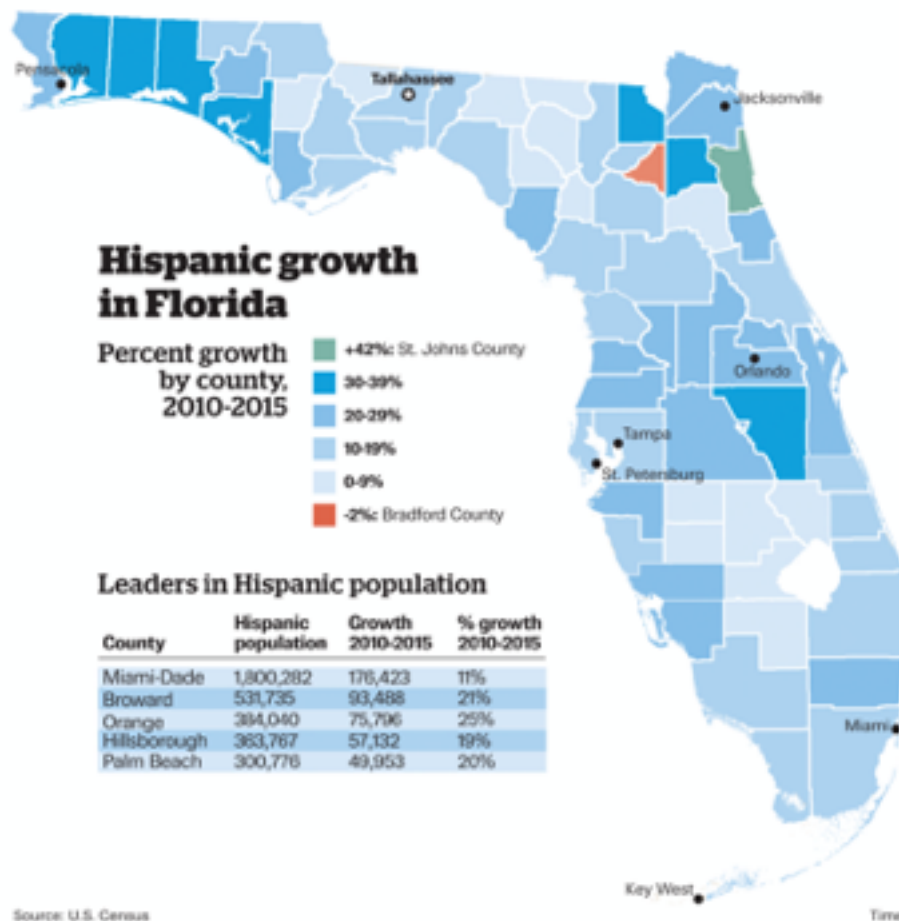
Church Multiplication Team: *To implement strategies and plans to grow the Kingdom of God by starting new churches.*

- Plant a diversity of new churches to include implementing long-range plans which determines and evaluates new sites including micro-churches, traditional models, mid-level churches, and multi-site church networks.
- Recruit new church planters through the administration of church planter assessment tools
- Develop a strategic plan to raise up new church planters
- Appoint oversight teams for new church plants

- Prepare financial plans, develop financial resources, and assist in the funding application process for new church starts
- Assist pastors in the development of New Congregation Plans and approve plans
- Provide for pastoral coaching, mentoring and care to new church planters
- Develop parent church and new church planter connections and networks
- Empower and encourage congregations to develop and implement strategies, and plans, to grow the Kingdom of God by parent/multi-site campuses and other creative types of ministries
- Plant churches with planting residents in every new church start so that every church will birth “pregnant” with an eye to multiply rapidly

Care Team: *To build loving relationships focused on emotional, physical, and spiritual health of classis ministers and lay leaders on teams and task teams (specialized, retired, called, under contract, commissioned).*

- To value every person from every culture and nation – breaking down cultural barriers and building a sharing of cultures
- Develop Christian love, life, and unity between cultures and churches
- To generate relational connections between pastors and lay leaders in a multi-cultural classis
- Accountable to classis to seek equal standing and diversity in leadership
- Proactively support the work of pastors in their ministry context
- Organize pastoral gatherings to build loving relationships
- Connect with all pastors through face-to-face contacts, zoom, or phone calls for support, encouragement, and care
- Respond to the needs of pastors and classis lay leaders if emergencies arise
- Foster inter-church ecumenical relationships
- Develop mentoring/coaching relationships
- Assist in developing positive pastor-church relationships
- Link churches together in supportive clusters for pastoral and classis lay leader care
- Establish coached networks for support, learning, care, and accountability
- Provide for conflict resolution and mediation
- Help churches provide pastoral care for their pastors and pastor’s families
- Communicate the prayers needs of pastors and churches
- Provide support to vacant churches (prayer, pulpit supply, etc)
- Encourage and deepen prayer in the life of classis, classis pastors and lay leaders
- Facilitating churches exchanging pastors for occasional worship services to build relationships



Unaccounted in the studies are the response to recent events, and the increase of migration into Florida which has occurred. After hurricane Maria, in 2017, an estimated 400,000 Puerto Ricans left the island and most of those who left the island first moved to Florida (43 percent). Within Florida, the areas that received the largest amount of Puerto Ricans were Orlando (22 percent in Orange County), Osceola County (15 percent), and Miami (10 percent in Miami-Dade County.) Many may have plans to return to Puerto Rico eventually, but the current reality shows them settling in Florida as rebuilding is done in the island and maybe beyond that.

Venezuela's political and economic turmoil have also contributed to an added migration into the United States overall. The Venezuelan population grew 18 per cent between 2014 and 2015, while in the last inter-annual variation (2015 to 2016), a 13 percent increase was registered. According to the Homeland Security Department (Office of Immigration Statistics 2016), 12,242 Venezuelans with tourist visas overstayed during the last fiscal year (from October 1, 2016, to September 30, 2017). A study presented in February this year at the University of Miami's Institute for Advanced Study of the Americas, revealed that more than 200,000 Venezuelans have settled in South Florida since 2014. Florida will continue to grow and will keep Florida as one of the top states for the Latino population in the United Sta

LAY OF THE LAND

North America is becoming more and more diverse. The Hispanic population is growing and is influencing many areas of the North American society. In the U.S. the Hispanic population represents one out of every six adults today and all demographic projections show that the Hispanic population will grow in the coming decades. This segment of the U.S. population is already impacting the nation's landscape and will increasingly continue to do so in the future.

The Pew Research Center in 2017 reported that the Hispanic population, 58 million, will rise to 132.7 million in 2050, tripling in size. Latinos will be 30.2% of the population, compared with 18% in 2015. Latinos will account for 60% of the nation's population growth from 2005 to 2050." Right now in the year 2017 the Hispanic population in the USA numbers 57.8 million and more than 4.35 million of them live in Florida making it the 3rd largest Hispanic population. This map shows the number and growth of Latinos by regions from 2010-2015.

Group	Percent of FL Hispanics	Population	U.S. Rank
Total Hispanic Population in Florida		4,354,000	3
Hispanics as Percent of State Population	23%	4,354,000	6
Hispanics as Percent of U.S. Hispanic Population	8.4%	4,354,000	3
Native-Born Hispanics	52%	2,264,000	49
Foreign-Born Hispanics	48%	2,090,000	3
Cuban Origin	29%	1,213,000	1
Puerto Rican Origin	20%	848,000	2
Mexican Origin	15%	634,000	42
Dominican Origin	3.5%	172,000	3
Colombian Origin	2%	95,000	1
Guatemalan Origin	2%	84,000	2
Other Hispanic Origin	30%	1,262,000	6

Report to the Regional Synod of Mid-America

Visionary Leader

Wayne Van Regenmorter

April 2019

There is a common consensus among most pastors and lay leaders today that the church is facing a tough reality. Many congregations are on a plateau; many more congregations are experiencing decline. The reality is that every church goes through plateaus – those times when the church simply stops growing. This is a natural and normal part of life in a church where there is little or no change. One cannot use this time as an excuse because we know God is already working ahead of us connecting with unbelievers where we live. God always does what only God can do, which is to bring renewal, revival, and a period of new growth. I have seen churches in the middle of a cornfield reach 400+ people. Just think about that. A church doing a better job of reaching people than many of our larger churches. In the challenges that churches are facing in the Synod of Mid-America, there is always hope. There is always a gateway to something new because I believe God will finish what He started in each of our churches. Thom Rainer gives us 10 reasons why God is not finished working in churches:

- 1) *More church leaders are admitting their churches are struggling.*
- 2) *Churches are increasingly connecting with their communities.*
- 3) *There is significant evidence of greater Great Commission obedience.*
- 4) *Toxic church behavior is less tolerated.*
- 5) *Church revitalization has become a major movement.*
- 6) *More young pastors feel called to lead a church revitalization.*
- 7) *More church leaders are seeking coaching and consultations.*
- 8) *Churches are working together toward fulfilling the Great Commission.*
- 9) *Church planting and church revitalization are not perceived to be either/or.*
- 10) *The multi-site and multi-venue movement is entering an era of growth and maturity.*

Philippians 1: 6 says: *“I am sure that God, who began this good work in you, will carry it on until it is finished on the Day of Christ Jesus”* (GNT). I am confident that there are exciting days ahead for our churches and communities. While I don’t wish to deny the challenges and the reality of the struggles of churches within our region, I want to celebrate the excitement where God is at work in many of our congregations.

➤ **Church Renewal and Revitalization**

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20).

✓ **Discipleship**

Jesus’ clear command is to make disciples, which is the heartbeat of the church in helping people grow and deepen their faith, enabling them to live more and more like Jesus in everyday life. Church renewal happens when God’s people spend time reading and reflecting on God’s Word, praying and listening to the Holy Spirit, and then engaging their community as disciples of Jesus. So how are these growing disciples making an impact on the communities where they live and serve?

Ken Hoogstra, the President of the Wisconsin Classis, reports that he is encouraged by hearing and reading about all the ways that churches are actively engaged in mission. He writes, *“Several of our*

churches are seeing God at work in bringing young families into their midst, an area where many churches – not just those within our Classis – struggle. Emmanuel Reformed Church in Waupun, which describes itself as ‘small in size but on the rise’, has been seeing tremendous growth.... ‘We have never had this many children running down the runway of the church like planes gone crazy.’ Emmanuel is seeing God on the move as He is bringing into their community single moms, divorced men and women, and people with addiction or abuse in their past. The Consistory at Emmanuel says, ‘There is excitement and life and joy that is palpable in the air here at Emmanuel.’” Churches in our region are increasing in love as they reach out to those who are broken and those who live on the margins.

Ken also notes that several Wisconsin churches are reaching out to other cultures living in their communities. *“Emmanuel Community Church in Clinton, WI, is reaching out to Hispanic members of their community by conducting bi-lingual Bible studies in English and Spanish, and printing the bulletins and order of worship in both English and Spanish. Bethany Reformed Church in Sheboygan, WI, has had several joint worship and fellowship events with a local Hispanic church. Hingham Reformed Church is also reaching out to a local Hispanic community, sharing Wednesday night meals and working with them to sponsor a Cinco de Mayo celebration that features members of the Hispanic community as the teachers and members of Hingham as the learners.”* The growing disciples within these churches are making contributions as teachers and leaders and are growing more Hispanic disciples.

One church in Illinois Classis involved their young people in community engagement as they hosted an event to paint five houses for under-resourced and needy people in their community. A community garden was also developed where the congregation became the hands and feet of Jesus providing for fresh food for those in the community. A community weekly meal called Suppers at Second has served as many as 165 people from the church and community – about 1/3 of these people are not connected to the church. Many participants sharing in this meal have physical needs. Another church in Illinois is building bridges into a Middle School, offering a reading program in an Elementary School, and volunteering with a homeless shelter in the community called Victory Center. These are just a few examples of building bridges into communities and deepening mutual ministries of discipleship.

A cluster of churches in Illinois Classis have gathered several times this past year for a discipleship learning community. These events have been led by Rod Tucker, Eliza Cortes Bast, Chad Farrand and others, a team of RCA practitioners in the field of discipleship who are passionate about changing lives and communities for greater kingdom impact. They have offered teaching, resourcing, and coaching for pastors and church leaders to initiate discipleship goals and pathways that are unique to their own environment and church settings to grow disciples who make disciples for deeper transformation impact.

A discipleship and leadership connection event (taste and see event) was held at the Alto Reformed Church in Wisconsin. Other churches in the area were invited to attend. The purpose of this event was to help congregations discern and dream about what future ministry in their church could look like in terms of making disciples. This event was intended to serve as an on-ramp for establishing a discipleship learning community.

Christ’s Church in St Peters, MO, is actively developing disciples through engaging in racial reconciliation conversations, events, and relationships. They are starting with groups of three people meeting regularly and then encouraging people to build relationships with people of different races outside the scheduled church functions.

The Illinois Classis also invited Rod Tucker to lead a discipleship training during their Spring Classis meeting. Ray Tilstra, the Illinois Classis Leader, says, *"...the Illinois Classis has a growing need to learn how to be authentic disciples of Jesus. It all begins with prayer. Pray for the Holy Spirit to trouble the waters of our hearts and minds until we hear God speak clearly to us about His mission to reach a lost and broken world, so loved by God."* This event is also an on-ramp to developing more discipleship learning communities within the Illinois Classis.

Ray Tilstra, the Illinois Classis Leader, and Kent Vant Hul, the Wisconsin Classis Coordinator, have played a significant role in giving a focus to discipleship and church renewal and revitalization in these two classes. Both of them have moved forward in the daunting task of encouraging churches to continue to look outward in making disciples and utilize resources and leadership training to bring renewal to churches and their communities.

Chad Schuitema has made some great contributions in discipleship and church health and revitalization in the churches of Illiana-Florida Classis and elsewhere in the region as he led a Small Church Essentials Learning Community focusing on missional discipleship in smaller churches using the book, Small Church Essentials by Karl Vaders. He is repeating this learning with a new group of pastors and beginning a new learning community on Small Church Discipleship and Mission by Jeff Allen. Chad also serves as the Director of the Church Health & Revitalization Team of the Illiana-Florida Classis.

Chad, Ray, Kent, and I meet regularly to process where God is at work in our classes, share resources with one another, build relational connection with each other, and to encourage, pray, and listen to God together. There are many areas of ministry in our classes that we have discovered we can work together. More than ever today, we are on the same team working together to fulfill the Great Commission.

Church renewal and revitalization is still an urgent cry within our classes. In his "State of the Classis Report" in October 2018, Ray Tilstra, as the Illinois Classis Leader, was honest and transparent with the classis sharing these words: *"Some of our churches have continued to lose numbers, and many congregations are aging. The future is looking a bit uncertain for them. While no one wants to see a church close its doors, there are a few that are creeping precariously close to that edge. It would be wonderful if there was a magic bullet that could correct these realities, but the honest truth is that it might be too late for some. While there may be some opportunity for a church restart in some places, that is an extremely difficult step to take, and some are just simply past the place where they have the resource to continue. It is our hope as a classis to work with every congregation that is in this situation, and seek ways to grow, adapt, and restart that ministry, if possible. Realistically, however, that may not be possible for some. It will take grace, time, and courage behind you, as you pray and discern the future."*

There are several churches in the Wisconsin Classis that can relate to Ray's compassion and concerns. The First Reformed Church in Racine, Wisconsin, closed its doors in 2018.

✓ **Revitalization and Outreach Grants**

In 2018, the Illiana-Florida Church Health & Revitalization Team gave out \$129,950 in revitalization grants to classis churches. These grants were designed for revitalizing worship, community meals, outreach events, equipment for revitalization projects, and more. Every church in the classis was encouraged to dream with God, and to pray for creative ideas to either begin anew or enhance existing ministries that not only reach out to their community, but also bear fruit within the life of their church's ministry.

The Wisconsin Classis through their Revitalization Commission has also developed an Outreach Grant Fund of \$50,000 to be available for churches to use for outreach in their community. Outreach Grants are to be used for new ministries or events which help congregations to connect, serve, and ultimately share the gospel with unbelievers. Churches can apply for up to \$5,000. Recently a grant was given to Emmanuel Reformed Church in Waupun, WI, to help them fund an evening of music and worship with the band Mass Anthem, from Nashville, Tennessee. They are hoping to connect with their community and build relationships through food, music, block parties, and future events. Hope Reformed Church in Sheboygan, WI, also received a grant to begin a new ministry called Hope Café. This is an “open house” for homeless and poor residents of the downtown Sheboygan area. The purpose is to offer coffee and a warm place in the winter and cool in the summer for people, and to have the opportunity for congregation members to share life and stories with those who come. The plan is to offer shelter to the homeless, drink to the thirsty, food for the hungry, companionship for the lonely, and Christ’s direction to the lost.

✓ **Faithwalking**

Several churches in Wisconsin and Illinois Classes continue to engage in Faithwalking which is the personal transformation component of Ridder: Churches Learning Change. Faithwalking retreats have expanded as neighboring non-RCA churches have also been invited to participate in this transformational and missional living process. Faith Reformed Church in Wisconsin Rapids, WI, is doing a Faithwalking 101 with 28 people, and Faithwalking 201 with 15 people – 5 coming from the community. Several people signed up for Faithwalking are on a journey back to God. Renee Jelsma, who now lives in Michigan, continues to provide leadership in Wisconsin for this particular ministry. Many people engaged in Faithwalking have discovered that the practical living out of their faith becomes a means of discipleship.

✓ **Classis Church Assessment Process**

The Wisconsin Classis has hired a consultant to complete a classis church assessment process along with a structure assessment process for the classis. His name is Gary Harrison, who has worked with several Wisconsin churches on prior occasions using the Retool Kit Pathway. The expected outcomes of this process are the following:

- A renewed focus in listening and trust from the classis and within the classis.
- A more cohesive nature and better sense of partnership between the classis and local churches, resulting in a growing revitalization that the classis is all of us together – it’s not us/them; it’s us/we.
- A growing understanding of what is not working, and where systems (search, conflict, and other) need improvement, and what the classis can do to strengthen them.
- A classis-wide understanding of what a healthy church is, and what steps a church can take to improve their health and impact.
- A fresh look at the key issues that separate churches and how they can work together. This is based on an understanding of a congregation’s calling (make disciples) and the realization that churches work toward doing together that which they cannot do alone.

➤ **Equipping Leaders of Today and Tomorrow**

“Remember your leaders, those who spoke the Word of God to you; consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith” (Hebrews 13:7).

God is calling leaders – men, women, youth, young adults – to be used by Him to lead the church in ministries and mission. Leaders respond in obedience to passionately live out their calling and

giftedness to passionately accomplish the mission of bringing the gospel of grace and hope to a lost and broken world. To be an effective and fruitful leader one must: 1) know how to lead himself/herself first; 2) know how to lead others; and 3) know how to reproduce new leaders. A commitment to leadership requires being authentic, humble, and a willingness to learn in order to lead pastors, congregations, and classes forward in mission.

By the end of April 2019, the Classis of Illinois will have benefited from the leadership gifts and services of Ray Tilstra for two years. The regional synod made a three-year commitment in partnership with the Illinois Classis to help fund this classis leader position for three years. President Mike Senneff of the Illinois Classis reports, *"It is clear to me that churches and pastors of the Classis are benefitting from Pastor Ray's advice, counsel, and encouragement as he carries on day to day in support of the mission of the Classis and the church. Whether in the role as a first responder in times of conflict or crises, a resource person to church leadership, or a thoughtful strategic planner, over the past two years Pastor Ray has been an invaluable addition to the Classis organization, and in particular an advisor and counselor to me while I serve in the role of classis president."* We celebrate Ray's leadership in our region.

Last year the Classis of Wisconsin offered a full-time position of Classis Coordinator to a person who initially accepted the position, only to later decline it. The classis appointed Kent Vant Hul as their new part-time Classis Coordinator. President Ken Hoogstra reports that *"...Kent is doing more work than someone who once retired should be, and I suspect (he) is putting in many more hours than his part-time status would reflect."* The regional synod would like to thank Kent for all the work he is doing in helping the churches of the Wisconsin Classis.

✓ **Leadership Development**

The raising up of godly leaders who demonstrate God-honoring character, emotional maturity, and uniquely skilled competencies is the focus within the classes, especially with a large influx of Commissioned Pastors. The Illiana-Florida Classis and the New Thing Classis are working together in collaboration to assure that quality leaders are being trained and developed for churches and multi-site campuses. Since many Spanish-speaking pastors are planting a large number of Hispanic churches in Florida, the Classis of Illiana-Florida has partnered with the Classis of the Americas from the Far West Region to guide these pastors through the Commissioned Pastor process. Jim Lankeet is leading Coram Deo, a Commissioned Pastor Training Program which is also being used to train and prepare pastors to accomplish the RCA requirements for Commissioned Pastors. Chicago Classis is working with a pastor from India and the Holland Classis as he completes his studies at Western Theological Seminary. Another pastor in Chicago is in the process of completing his CPE requirements and defending his doctoral thesis later this year. The Chicago Classis has taken him under care and provided a pastoral care grant to him as he makes future decisions about planting a new church in the Chicago area. The Wisconsin and Illinois Classes are also working with several students in leadership who are under the care of these classes. The future of leadership development within our classes will need to be adaptive to develop leaders who possess unique gifts and competencies that fit their local vision, calling, and context. We thank God for these new leaders and live with expectant hope as God uses their gifts to expand the kingdom.

The RCA has developed an Elder and Deacon Leadership Resource which is a downloadable on the RCA website. This guide is to be used to further enhance a church's ministry as Elders and Deacons can be trained to be active leaders in a congregation, rather than simply act as a board of managers. This comprehensive resource is available to help congregations develop and equip their Elders and Deacons for effective church leadership.

✓ **Thriving Leader, Thriving Churches**

The Ridder Church Renewal (RCR) process has morphed into more regionally contextual expressions and is now called Churches Learning Change (CLC). RCR has impacted the conversations, lives, and missional practices of many people and congregations in our region for many years. Each region in the RCA has its own leadership team, faculty, and format as CLC focuses on learning and leading change in participating congregations while seeking to navigate adaptive challenges. There are two churches in the Wisconsin Classis and one in the Illinois Classis engaged in this process. Chad Schuitema provides leadership, coaching, and oversight for the CLC Team in our region. A central learning organization, supported by the Reformed Partnership for Church Renewal, collects learning from the regions and provides ongoing training and focus.

This past year Daryl Cripe of Exeeco has led some churches in the Illinois Classis through a training session on discipleship. This event was intended to begin the process of refocusing the vision and mission of churches in the Illinois Classis. The Illinois Classis has offered some grants for churches working with Daryl Cripe within the unique context of their ministries.

The classis liaison ministry continues to thrive in the Illiana-Florida Classis as it offers care, support, and encouragement to pastors and consistories. Through this program there has been growing evidence in helping the classis function well, sharing information, and improving personal relationships between pastors and congregations in the classis. I am currently serving as a classis liaison to four churches in Florida.

The Chicago Classis has developed bi-monthly check-in opportunities for pastors. These events are intended to be a time of fellowship and encouragement for pastors. The only expectation is learning how pastors are doing and what others can do to help pastors physically, emotionally, and spiritually. A free lunch is also offered during these gatherings.

✓ **Next Generation Engagement**

According to the RCA, the purpose of Next Generation Engagement is to empower young adults, ministry teams, and congregations to create a culture of intergenerational ministry – that is, all people of all ages serving in leadership positions at the church, classis, and denominational levels. The goal is to reframe the mental model from seeking to “keep” young people in our congregations, to seek to empower young leaders and congregations to serve one another in future ministry endeavors.

A couple of congregations in our region are participating in the Fuller Youth Institute (FYI) which meets about every 3 months in Grand Rapids, MI. These congregations are working toward having a multigenerational discipleship pathway at the conclusion of the cohort.

President Ken Hoogstra of Wisconsin Classis reports that Trinity Community Church in Brown Deer, WI, is seeing their congregation grow younger. The Consistory of the church is seeking to follow what God is doing in their church by studying together and implementing the ideas in the book Growing Young. The First Reformed Church in Waupun, WI, is also seeking ways to grow younger by having students taking on more active roles in leading Sunday morning worship. They also have younger Consistory leaders who are growing in their leadership skills.

These are a few of the stories of equipping leaders of today and tomorrow in our churches and classes. Mobilizing young leaders is critical to turning church leadership over to future generations.

➤ **Christ's Kingdom Mission**

"May God be gracious to us and bless us and make His face to shine upon us, that your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations." (Psalm 67:1-2)

The mission of the church is to know and love Christ so supremely as to represent Him and His values accurately and vividly to our neighborhoods, cities, and throughout the world. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are to be a light to other people and willingly serve others by becoming the hands and feet of Jesus. We are to love, to care for, and to meet the needs of humanity, while upholding the redemptive truths and the righteousness of Jesus Christ. The church's mission is to present Jesus Christ to the world, while He presents to the same world His rescuing work in and through His church.

✓ **Local Missional Engagement**

Churches in our region are intentionally discerning what God is doing in their church and in their community and exploring ways to work with different partners to transform their communities. Many churches are supporting their local communities through such programs as Love INC., Kids Hope, food pantries, and prayer.

In Wisconsin, Ken Hoogstra reports: *"Even our 'small size' churches, despite struggling in many cases with finances and leadership, are actively advancing God's kingdom. Despite average worship attendance of just a few dozen, Hope Community Reformed Church in West Bend, WI, identifies a Mission of the Month each month. They share information about that mission, often have someone from that mission participate in worship, and support that mission with prayer and donations. Some of the missions that Hope supports include: Full Shelf Food Pantry, Albrect Free Clinic, Seed of Hope, supporting unexpected pregnancies, and RCA programs such as Next Gen scholarships, and RCA CARES. ...Creek Road Community Church provides financial and volunteer support for several ministries in Walworth County, and financial and prayer support for several international ministries."*

Churches in the Illinois Classis serve their communities by: 1) making their facility available for Red Cross Blood drives and Clinton's Women's Connection – a community-wide Christian women's ministry; 2) committing to pray for students by adults sending letters to students a few times each semester to get to know them and pray for them; 3) the Brown Bag Lunch program where sack lunches are distributed to the homeless in the community; 4) engaging in mission projects in the community; 5) offering a coffee house/shop and fair trade market to the community; 6) serving meals at Rockford Rescue Mission and helping people dealing with addictions, being homeless, and other needs; 7) serving appreciation dinners for fire department, ambulance, and police in the community; 8) handing out popcorn and water at community ball games; 9) tutoring students in partnership with the Boys and Girls Club; 10) tutoring the Hispanic population in the community for English as a second language.

The regional synod celebrates the transformational impact that churches are making as they are used by God to reach out in giving to their unique community, learning and sharing the needs of their community, and expanding the kingdom of God through missional engagement. I celebrate the ways that churches are more intentionally discovering the needs of their local communities and then seeking to embrace the totality of the Great Commission by offering hope, bringing reconciliation, blessing, and help to individuals and families.

✓ **Church Multiplication**

When Eddy Alemán assumed his new role as the General Secretary of the Reformed Church in America, he asked of God what Elisha asked of Elijah, *"Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit."*

More specifically, *“Lord, allow the 1,000 churches in the RCA to become 2,000.”* As a result, the RCA is trusting God to start 1,000 new churches in the next 20 years – an audacious goal. These 1,000 new churches fall into the following categories:

- **500 plants:** Like the new congregations being launched today, led by a Commissioned Pastor or Minister of Word and Sacrament with their own oversight team; these will eventually organize as RCA churches.
- **100 multi-sites:** Like the new congregations in new locations targeting new population groups, but under the governance of a common consistory.
- **200 global plants:** Located in places other than North America and formed around Reformed theology. In addition to funding, the RCA CMT will have some additional, direct involvement. The RCA CMT will be partnering with RCA Global Mission, and some church plants are already initiating plants on other continents on their own.
- **200 pilot projects:** Indications are that future churches will look different, and we want to explore new models. The future is filled with a wave of micro-churches, which meet in homes or office buildings, led by a volunteer teaching Elder who has other employment. In particular, micro-churches will be established in small towns that can't support a pastor and facility, urban settings, and among small immigrant groups. They will be simple and inexpensive. Five to ten years from now, we may be exploring other models of church not yet imagined.

The classes and churches within the Regional Synod of Mid-America are already beginning to see a new reality coming from Eddy's dream - the planting and adopting of new Hispanic churches and African-American churches and others in Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee. These new church plants which reach a diversity of all people are going to require constant adjusting, innovating, and adapting to the context of the church planter and the location. Larger churches in our region are continuing to launch new campuses or will enfold/merge an existing church to form a new campus. The regional staff is coming alongside classes and is actively involved in these multiplying and reproductive efforts, helping classes develop vision, teams, resources, and strategies for church planting. I facilitate the coaching of 6 church planters in Illiana-Florida Classis every six to eight weeks.

The Illiana-Florida Classis Church Multiplication Team is currently led by Al VanDer Meer and a team of people consisting of Chad Farrand and myself. Here is the list of church plants funded by the Illiana-Florida Classis in 2019:

- 1) Salt Life Church in Pembroke Pines with Eric Kingsley was launched in 2014. Worshipping between 100 to 125 people weekly.
- 2) Vida y Esperanza in Miami with Gianni Garcia was launched in 2016. Worshipping between 70 to 85 people weekly.
- 3) The Outpost in Apopka, FL, led by Joe and Rebecca Robinson. This is a house church with 30 people in worship.
- 4) El Buen Pastor in Fort Worth, FL, led by German Moreno. About 45-50 people in worship.
- 5) Church planter Andres Sancho from Chili starting with a small group of about 12 people.
- 6) Overflow Worship Center led by Walt & Theresa Price in Orlando, FL. Worship with a group of 40 people. Walt is pursuing a Commissioned Pastor route with Coram Deo.
- 7) 12 Springs Church in Sarasota, FL, led by Ryan McBride, with about 75-90 in worship. An NCP was approved, and the church is working through the process of adoption into the Illiana-Florida Classis.
- 8) Global Ministries, Inc., in Orlando, FL, led by Jose Rea, with 150+ in worship. An NCP has been approved, and the church is working through the process of adoption into the Illiana-Florida Classis.

- 9) Chad Farrand of South Harbor Churches in Michigan will move to Florida in June 2019 and work with church plants in Florida.

The Illiana-Florida CMT has been surprised by the number of unsolicited inquiries by Hispanic Church plants that want to join the RCA or explore joining the RCA. Courting conversations are also happening in the southeastern part of the United States like places such as Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee. Here are the churches in conversation seeking to be a part of the RCA:

- 1) Sebastian Geminez, the pastor of Montreal Reformed Church, a Hispanic church in Miami worshipping about 200. He has filled out an NCP and is working through the process of coming into the Illiana-Florida Classis.
- 2) Bishop Jerry Hutchins and an additional 8 church plants in Atlanta area and one in Nashville are exploring the process of being adopted into the Illiana-Florida Classis.
- 3) La Casa Del Rey led by Jesualdo Bolanito, a freelance evangelist, in West Palm Beach, FL, desires to plant a Hispanic church. Freddy Gonzelz is working with him. They are planning for two more new Hispanic churches.
- 4) Sam Torres is the worship pastor of a very large Hispanic church in Miami and desires to plant a new Hispanic congregation and become a part of the RCA.
- 5) Mark Rodriguez is the executive pastor at a mega-church in Miami and has a call to plant a new Hispanic church in that area. He had his first preview service in November with 200 in attendance. He is exploring being adopted into the Illiana-Florida Classis.
- 6) Daniel Davilla is a close friend of Jose Rea (planter in Orlando) and has been leading a Hispanic church in southern Florida for 14 years. He is interested in being adopted as a Hispanic church into the Illiana-Florida Classis.
- 7) Brazilian Portuguese Speaking plant. The RCA Global Mission and Multiplication have a partnership with these pastors of Brazilian Presbyterian ministries who are planting 94 new churches down the Amazon and run three medical ships that travel up and down the river and provide care to local tribes. They are interested in planting a church in Florida and want to partner with the Illiana-Florida Classis to do it. This would be a Portuguese-speaking congregation primarily targeting Brazilians in the Miami area. This is in the early stages of process, but if it became a reality this would be the first time the RCA has helped plant a congregation with a foreign country inside the USA.
- 8) Freddy Aviles has a Hispanic church plant in West Palm Beach. They are worshipping with 80 in attendance. He is pursuing being adopted into the Illiana-Florida Classis.
- 9) Pastor Angel Gastou, is leading a Portuguese-speaking congregation of about 40 people in the former West Coast Church of the Cross in Sarasota, FL. He is interested in going through the Commissioned Pastor process and having the church where he serves adopted into the Illiana-Florida Classis.
- 10) There is a UCC church in North Carolina exploring the adoption process into the Illiana-Florida Classis.

These campus plants in the New Thing Classis:

- Ann Bilbrew – Living Springs Riverdale Ministry Center, Riverdale, IL.
- Nathan Prairie – Faith Church Beecher, Beecher, IL.
- Jason DeVries – Faith Church Highland, Highland, IN.
- Aaron Klein – Faith Church Schererville, Schererville, IN.
- Dave Weemhoff – Faith Church Cedar Lake, Cedar Lake, IN.
- Charlie Contreras, Faith Church Munster, Munster, IN.

- John Hines – Cornerstone Manteno Campus, Manteno, IL. (if the transfer of Cornerstone Church, Bourbonnais, IL, is approved)
- Daniel Stedham – launching a new campus in the Oak Lawn area out of Calvary Reformed Church in Orland Park, IL.

The church plants in the Chicago Classis are:

- CrossRoads Community Church – Chicago, IL – transferred to ECO and is in a legal dispute with the Chicago Classis
- Jebasingh Jebamony is currently completing a PhD program and hoping to plant a Hispanic church in the Chicago area. The classis has given a pastoral care grant to Jebamony.

The Illinois Classis launched Renewing Life Church led by Terry Tyson in Ferguson, MO, on August 25, 2018. Renewing Life Church is a church plant in partnership with Christ's Church in St Peters, MO. I serve on the Oversight Team of the Illinois Classis for Renewing Life Church.

The RCA Church Multiplication Team wants to come alongside classes and churches to empower exponential growth and impact in a deep and permanent way. As a result, the RCA will approve up to four classis capacity grants per year, as determined by the Church Multiplication Team. The Wisconsin Classis Revitalization and Multiplication Commission has applied for this grant, approved classis funds, and appointed Brent Matzen to be the church planting champion for the Wisconsin Classis. As the classis champion, he will develop a church multiplication team, establish a vision, secure resources, recruit and prepare parent churches, create oversight teams, conduct risk analysis, and develop systems for assessment, training, and coaching. A classis with an approved classis champion can receive an RCA church planting grant for \$25,000 at one time without applying for the numerous micro-church planting grants now available.

✓ **Re-Formation of a New Classis**

Existing Florida pastors and congregations, new Florida church planters, planned adopted congregations, and new church plants in Florida, Georgia, and beyond have formed a vision team to prepare a request to the Regional Synod of Mid-America to form a new classis in the southeastern part of the United States. The priorities of this new classis include the following:

- **Multiplying Churches** – *Extending God's love and grace by starting new churches in neighborhoods and communities.*
- **Healthy & Renewed Churches** – *Pastors and churches renewed and equipped for vibrant ministry.*
- **Evangelism and Discipleship** – *Reaching new people in new ways by sharing the Gospel and building authentic relationships.*
- **Leadership Development** – *Equipping, training, and raising up leaders for the harvest.*
- **Multicultural and Diverse** – *All God's people praying and working together in ministry and mission.*
- **Holy Spirit Led** – *Giving the Holy Spirit freedom to do new works through new leaders.*
- **Loving Relationships** – *Loving, trusting, caring deeply for each other, and building strong relationships.*
- **Reformed** – *The Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and practice.*

- **Churches Collaborating Together** – *Together is better. The classis exists to serve the churches; churches don't exist simply to serve the classis.*

The rationale for the formation of the new classis includes the following:

1. **Empowerment for a Diversity of Leaders (Hispanic, African-American, Asian, Caucasian)** – *Leaders using their spiritual gifts and abilities for God's kingdom.*
2. **Pastoral and Lay Leadership Development** – *Designing pathways for theological education and equipping lay leaders.*
3. **Bold Vision for New Church Planting** – *20 new churches by 2021.*
4. **Local Leadership and Support** – *Indigenous leaders for maximum impact.*

The question of "why now" is based on seven points:

- 1) We believe that God has called the RCA to add 1000 new churches, and our General Secretary believes that Florida will be at the center of this new vision.
- 2) We need local leadership for maximum impact.
- 3) If we wait for the perfect time, we will never re-launch the classis.
- 4) We have the opportunity to partner with Classis of the Americas and help launch new congregations together throughout the state.
- 5) God is already raising up new leaders and congregations for this work and we must be faithful to partner with His leading.
- 6) We can strengthen our existing Florida congregations with the local classis.
- 7) God is opening doors in expanding the harvest into Georgia and beyond.

Conversations with anchor churches and their consistories are scheduled for the end of March. The vision team of 17 people gathered in Orlando, FL, during the first few days of March: 1) to review and clarify the new classis vision; 2) to discuss the organizational structure of the new classis; 3) to review the updated current reality of the new classis; 4) to review the lay of the land in Florida; and 5) to discuss a draft timeline and schedule outlining the details by month in the formation of a classis. All these documents will be available to Synod Assembly delegates prior to the Synod Assembly meeting. Two other meetings with existing Florida pastors, Florida church planters, and planned adopted church pastors and planters took place on November 8, 2018, and on January 31, 2019.

➤ **Other Kingdom Work**

✓ **A Praying Life**

A Praying Life Seminar was held at First Reformed Church in Friesland, WI, on November 16-17, 2018. All the churches in the Wisconsin Classis were invited to participate. The seminar centered around the concern that many people feel quietly defeated in their private prayer lives. People are tired of praying because it doesn't seem to work. As a result, Christians feel a combination of frustration and guilt. The seminar focused on learning a step-by-step process on how to begin a private life of prayer with the Heavenly Father. It dealt with practical questions like:

- How do you stay focused when you are distracted with so much to do?
- How do you pray longer than five minutes?
- How do you pray when your own life is messed up?
- How do you ask when you've tried it before, and it doesn't work?

✓ **Crisis in Churches Within the Region**

I continue to serve on the Crisis Transition Team of the Illiana-Florida Classis with Dave Hubbartt, the pastor of First Reformed Church in Tamp, FL. Over the years the number of crisis situations in existing churches in Florida has been significant. This past year has been a somewhat calmer year, but there still are ongoing situations. Among them are:

1) Dave Hubbartt, David Tellinghuisen, and I continue as classis-appointed trustees, overseeing the property of West Coast Church of the Cross (WCCC). We have renegotiated a lease agreement for 2019 with Casa de Adoración and Pastor Angel Gastou. David Tellinghuisen provides regular oversight of the property, working with Pastor Gastou to address any campus issues. The vast majority of needed repairs to the interior and exterior of the church building have been completed (including painting the exterior) and the property looks clean and is in good working order. A great deal of thanks goes to Pastor Angel Gastou of Casa de Adoración who did much of the work on the property.

2) Dave Hubbartt and I continue to work with attorney, Greg Light, regarding legal proceedings to securing the property Comunidad de Fe for the classis. Our request for a preliminary injunction was denied by the judge earlier in February 2018, so we will proceed to another court date to defend that Comunidad de Fe remains a member congregation of the RCA and that Pastor Alex Mesa and the church have not left the denomination with the privilege of taking ownership of the property with them. A minor, legal clarification hearing was conducted in December 2018, but the legal proceedings to secure the property of Comunidad de Fe continue slowly.

3) On November 30, 2018, Cross Community Church of Deerfield Beach, FL, listed the property for sale at \$10,000,000.00. This price far exceeds the perceived value of the property as was determined in the settlement agreement which is thought to be around \$1,500,000. Therefore, this action of the church is viewed as a stalling technique in coming to a settlement with the Illiana-Florida Classis. Greg Light is reaching out to Cross Community Church representatives to explore ways to open dialogue to bring about a reasonable solution and settlement to the matter.

✓ **Denominational Responsibilities**

After nine years of serving as the facilitator for COSE (Council of Synod Executives), I requested to be relieved of that responsibility. The facilitator job was divided into three separate tasks: one person to be the COSE facilitator at meetings, one person to be the COSE clerk to take minutes and arrange meeting agendas, and one person to attend GSC meetings twice yearly. I remain active in COSE as the Coordinator for Learning Events.

✓ **Churches Petitioning to Leave the RCA**

There are ongoing tensions, frustrations, and challenges over the issue of human sexuality and other issues within our denomination, and churches within the region. A Classis of Wisconsin Task Force reviewed the petitions they received from three churches: 1) Hingham Reformed Church in Hingham, WI, to transfer from the Reformed Church in America (RCA) to the Evangelical Free Church of America EFCA; 2) Gibbsville Reformed Church in Sheboygan Falls, WI, to transfer from the Reformed Church in America (RCA) to the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA); and 3) Faith Reformed Church in Cedar Grove, WI, to transfer from the Reformed Church in America (RCA) to the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). Each of the Consistories and congregations of these churches sincerely believe and presented their rationale why they could no longer function effectively in their present relationship within the RCA and how the effectiveness of each congregation might be enhanced if it were to affiliate with another denomination. At the Wisconsin Spring Classis meeting, each of these three requests were approved. The Wisconsin Classis offered a prayer for God's blessing for each of these churches. As difficult as these decisions were in the mixture of blessing and sadness, grief and loss, I thank God that

these decisions were rooted and grounded in grace and love, so that all people would be filled with the fullness of God.

✓ **Vision 202 Team**

Last June at the 2019 General Synod, the interim General Secretary, Don Poest, brought a proposal to General Synod asking for a team to be assembled that would consider the future of the denomination in light of deep divisions. The delegates of General Synod approved the recommendation, and 12 people were appointed to serve on the Vision 2020 Team as well as Don Poest and the General Secretary Eddy Aleman. Jim Herrington and Trisha Taylor, who have a long relationship with the RCA, and their colleague, Ryan Donovan, were hired as consultants to this team. Their work is to identify and explore possible scenarios, strategies, and consequences for three future options for the Reformed Church in America: 1) staying together; 2) radical reconstituting and reorganization; and 3) grace-filled separation. Don Poest identified something that has rung true for the team as they have done their work: *"The RCA is at a crossroads. Our denomination as we know it will never be the same – and we believe that gives us the opportunity to write the next hopeful chapter."*

Over the past few months, sub-committees have been formed within the Vision 2020 Team, and each were charged with researching the implications of each scenario on people in different regions as well as commissions and mission agencies in the RCA. In January 2019, a survey was created and distributed throughout the RCA and nearly 4,000 people responded to the survey. In order to continue to facilitate healthy conversations, the schedule for General Synod 2019 has been redesigned so about half of the time will be given for delegates to continue deep conversations and begin to process the scenarios presented.

The Vision 2020 team is asking congregations and individuals to continue to give feedback to the process. The team is also asking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and for prayer as they continue to discern. Here are some of their requests:

- ✓ Give thanks to God for already answering prayers. God has given us strength for this work, has helped us move beyond polarization to authentic dialogue, has opened our eyes to the impacts of these scenarios, and thus has met us in our work and in each other.
- ✓ Pray for stamina for our team. We are throwing ourselves wholeheartedly into this work, but we have many other commitments. Pray that God would sustain us and give us the energy to go about our work with joy, dedication, and humility.
- ✓ Pray for the sub-committees as they refine the scenarios. We still have a lot of questions to answer, concerns to address, and possibilities to flesh out. Ask God to give us the mind of Christ as we work.
- ✓ Envisioning the future takes creativity! Ask for Spirit-inspired imaginations in our team. What possibilities could be true that we haven't yet considered?
- ✓ Beyond synod itself, pray that God would root all of us in the RCA deeply in Jesus Christ. Our team is hyper-aware of the magnitude of the changes that are ahead (whether we move toward any of these scenarios or not) and the loss and grief that will accompany those changes. Pray that our denomination would be secure in its identity in Jesus in order to step into the future with courage.
- ✓ Spend time listening to God and seeking God's will for our future, and pray for our team's ability to hear what God is speaking.

✓ **Reignite Your Mission**

"For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands." II Timothy 1:6

I want to close my report by sharing some thought that inspired me as I read a post from Dann Spader, the founder of Sonlife Ministries. Dann tells the story of every four years the Summer Olympics begins with an event that captures the imagination of the world – the lighting of the Olympic flame. At the end of an international marathon, one final runner enters the Olympic stadium. After traveling by foot, by bicycle, by boat, or by air, sometimes over thousands of miles, the torch finally enters the stadium in the hands of the final runner and ignites the enormous Olympic flame. Think about it! Wouldn't it be exciting to be one of the bearers of that flame? Can you imagine what you would tell your children or grandkids if you were the one to carry the torch to the Olympics? Can you imagine holding that torch in your hands, knowing for a brief moment, you were part of a link in that historic chain?

Well, as followers and disciples of Jesus Christ, we carry a torch. The pomp and circumstance of the Olympic flame pales in comparison with the flame we carry. As Christians throughout the ages we have carried the torch of the Gospel despite centuries of persecutions and trials. We carry that torch today in a culture that is critical and callous about the church and those who claim to be Christians. The flame we carry is not a symbol. It is the light of God that is desperately needed in our neighborhoods and in our dark and dying world. There is no better way to discover a passion for life than to return to the place where Jesus first passed the torch to His disciples. Understanding what He said in that pivotal moment will enable us to clearly understand what our mission is in this life. Jesus' last words to His disciples were nothing more than a few short words: "Go and make disciples of all nations..." What Jesus was saying was to do for the rest of your life what He had done with His. Jesus was charging His disciples to make other disciples who make even more disciples, just as Jesus did. The Great Commission is every Christian's task. And the wonderful promise He gives is that He will be with us always. We can expect and claim His active manifest Presence in our midst.

Carrying the Torch,

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