

Classis of North Grand Rapids Meeting Minutes

Stated Session
Oakview Reformed Church
March 20, 2018

Opening:

Devotion led by the Rev. Jen Petersen. Reflection on Mark 4:35-41 and the story of the stormy sea and the disciples' fears. The group discussed the passages and Rev. Petersen closed with prayer.

Business Meeting Called to Order by Jen Petersen, President at 7:00.

Roll Call (completed by signature)

A – Excused Absence U – Unexcused Absence

Church	Clergy	Elder	Elder
Aberdeen Reformed	Ryan Landt	Dawn Riordan (A)	
Central Reformed	Steven Pierce (A)	Dawn Tillema	Jeff DeVree
Faith Harvest	David Mayer	Scott Rose	
The Community - Ada	William Norden	Bob Engelsman	
	Mara Joy Norden		
Fourth Reformed	Eric Schalk	Tom Boehm	
Knapp Street Reformed	Les Wiseman	Dave Decker	
Oakview Community Church	Gerald Vander Velde (MUC)		
Orchard Hill Reformed	Bob Karel	Michael Bart	Bill Hahn
	Kathy Bartels (MUC)		
	Laura Claus (MUC)		
Remembrance Reformed	Eric Cook	John Jacobitz	(U)
	Todd Schmidt	(U)	
	Dave Vander Woude		
Resurrection Reformed	Doug Kiel (A)	Bruce Holleboom (A)	
	Kristi Kiel (A)		
Richmond Reformed	Christopher Westerbeek	Ray Van Portfliet	
Rockford Reformed	Vacant	Jim Scholten	Dan Uthoff
Servant's Community	Mark Veldt (A)	Josh Gress	
Standale	Jessica Shults	Lin Cline	
Third Reformed	Jeff Petersen	Margo Taylor	Tam Schollaart (VP) (A)
Trinity Reformed	Ben Bruins	Kerri Vryhof	
	Sarah Bruins		
Specialized Ministers/Ministers Without Charge/Inactive			
Katherine Baker (A)	Nancy Boote	Nancy Claus	John Delger
Lisa Henderson (U)	Susan Huizenga (A)	Kate Kooyman	Steve Luchies
Diane Maodush-Pitzer (U)	Tim Meendering	Adam Navis	Branson Parler
Rebecca Stegeman Riekse	Robyn Saylor (U)	David Veldt (U)	Steve Wolters
Paul Bradford	Eric Branch (U)	Rachel Bush	Cheryl Molhoek (A)
Brad Olson (U)	Jennifer Petersen	Jonathan Tice (A)	Susan VanderWall (U)
Bill VanderWerp	Aaron Wetzel	Andre Daley	
Retired/Guests			
Tom and Mary Bos (A)	Bill Fennema (A)	Ralph Robrahn	
Matt Shults	Travis Buys	Olivia Stewart	Trey Tirpak

Marta VanderTop	Andrea Dekker	Helen Phillips	Jason Vermeulen
Paul Troost			
Associates In Ministry, Commissioned Pastor			
Willa Brown	George VanderHyde (U)		
Joel Bengelink (A)	George Werkema		

Welcome

Motion made, supported to amend the agenda to remove the Student Care recommendation regarding taking a student under care because the applicant withdrew his request. The motion was withdrawn by the maker.

Motion made, supported, and defeated to grant the privilege of the floor to guests.

Motion made, supported and defeated to extend discussion.

Motion made, supported and passed to amend the agenda to remove the Student Care recommendation regarding taking a student under care because the applicant withdrew his request.

Appoint Tellers

Tellers were appointed from Central and Faith Harvest.

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Motion made, supported, and passed to accept the minutes of the January 16, 2018 as amended to reflect the listening process as required by the RCA was completed.

President's State of Religion Report – Jennifer Petersen

Her report highlighted mile markers in the life of the Classis. The full report is appended to these minutes.

Committee and Council Reports

Executive Committee

Jen Petersen highlighted several points from the written Executive Committee report including the Franklin TN revised promissory note and terms.

President Petersen asked the Stated Clerk to lead this portion of the meeting and she left the auditorium during discussion.

- Classis Leader

The Classis Leader search committee recommends that the Classis hire the Rev. Jennifer Petersen as the Classis Leader.

Motion made, supported to approve offering the Rev. Jennifer Petersen the position of Classis Leader and authorize the Executive Committee to finalize the financial terms.

A substitute motion made, supported, and defeated to refer back to the Executive Committee to provide details of the job description and financial package prior and resubmit to the Classis for a vote.

Motion made, supported, and passed to close debate.

Motion passed by counted rising vote to approve offering the Rev. Jennifer Petersen the position of Classis Leader and authorize the Executive Committee to finalize the financial terms.

The President resumed leading the meeting.

- Ministerial Excellence Fund

Billy Norden presented the concept for the Ministerial Excellent Fund and reported on the findings of a survey on ministerial financial wellbeing. These results indicated that many of the respondents face many types of financial debt. The presentation and link to the assistance request application form will be sent to ministers on March 21, 2018.

Pastoral Relations Committee

Rev. Dave Vander Woude described his journey and call to ministry. He is the worship leader at Remembrance. He read and signed the Declaration. Eric Cook offered a prayer for Dave's ministry.

Overtures and Judicial Business

The Classis voted on the proposed amendments to the Book of Church Order with the following results:

1. Fuller Integration of the Commissioned Pastor into the Polity of the Reformed Church in America (MGS 2017, R 17-41, pp. 257-263)

7 Yes 42 No

2. Furloughing Missionaries (MGS 2017, R 17-42, p. 263)

47 Yes 2 No

3. Supersession of a Consistory (MGS 2017, R-17-43, pp. 264-266)

49 Yes 0 No

4. Minister of Word and Sacrament (MGS 2017, R 17-44, pp. 268-269)

44 Yes 5 No

5. Supervision of Consistory (MGS 2017, R 17-45, p. 270)

45 Yes 4 No

Specialized Ministry Committee

Helen Phillips reported the results of the Annual Specialized Minister Accountability documents: Our review finds that the responding ministers (with or without charge) continue to meet Classis requirements for ordination to Specialized Ministry.

SUMMARY OF REPORTING SPECIALIZED MINISTERS' PROFESSIONS

Formula of Agreement Pastors: 1

Non FOA Pastors serving other Denominations: 3

Chaplains: 6

Professors of Religion/Theology (Non-seminary): 2

RCA-Related Ministries: 3

Without Charge: 9

Non-responsive or Inactive: 2

Total: 26

Student Care Committee

Matt Shults participated in the Theology Interview conducted by Aaron Wetzel who closed the interview with a prayer for Matt's continued study and future ministry.

Miscellaneous

Announcements/Reminders

Summaries of the Consistorial Reports, Constitutional Inquires, and Salary and Benefits Declarations were distributed as part of the agenda package.

All congregations answered the Constitutional Inquires in the affirmative with the exception of one church answering "no" that it could be a better job of identifying and encouraging members for seminary training.

Particularia

The Stated Clerk thanked Oakview as the host church for the meeting.

Gerald Vander Velde reflected on his 60 years of ministry and read from I Corinthians

The Board of Trustees of the former Casnovia church is offering a printer/fax unit to anyone who wants it.

Resolutions

Motion made, supported, and passed to excuse the absences of Katherine Baker, Joel Bengelink, Tom and Mary Bos, Bill Fennema, Elder Bruce Holleboom, Susan Huizenga, Doug and Kristi Kiel, Cheryl Molhoek, Steve Pierce, Gwen Riordan, Tammy Schollaart, Jonathan Tice, and Mark Veldt.

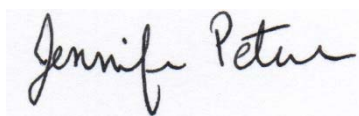
Closing

Motion made, supported, and passed to close the meeting.

Closing Prayer by Jen Petersen.

Next Classis Meetings

Classis Stated Session: September 18, 2018, Remembrance; Dinner 5:45 PM; session 6:45 PM



Jennifer Petersen, President



Robert J. Teitsma, Stated Clerk

Classis of North Grand Rapids

President's State of Religion Report

Tuesday, March 20, 2018

Rev. Jennifer Petersen

It has been quite a year for the Classis of North Grand Rapids. Last summer we celebrated as two of our students completed their training process and came before us as a Classis for their final Theology Exams. In the same month we said goodbye to Mike Gaffa as our Classis Leader after three years of *good work* among us. We assisted several Chaplains in attending the annual Chaplains Conference and we have formed a committee to assess and address issues of financial health both in our churches and in the lives of our Ministers. These are just a short list of the many areas of work at the Classis level. We'll look at some of the work at our Congregational level in just a moment.

But first – the dreaded numbers! For the first year in quite a long time our numbers reflect some signs of growth! Our total number of confessing members, in the Classis of North Grand Rapids increased by 24 individuals. While that isn't an overwhelming number, it represents the beginnings of a reversal in the downward trend of participation in our congregations. And it represents growth across the diversity of congregations in our Classis. Of our 16 churches, 9 of them experienced numerical growth in this area. Those 9 churches are small and big congregations, urban and suburban churches, theologically more conservative and theologically more progressive congregations, more and less liturgical, hymn singing and contemporary music singing churches. And the same is true for our 5 churches that experienced decline or whose membership remained the same. Our congregations also reported 120 new members by confession and 71 adult or infant baptisms. When we look at broader numbers, we see a bit of a mixed bag. If we add inactive members and baptized (but not yet confessing) members to the number of confessing members, we see that overall our classis still lost 207 members. But we had 135 more adherents in 2017 that we did the previous year. We can recognize that our numbers still show struggles, and that they also show signs of new energy and new life.

But numbers do not tell the whole story of our Classis and our Congregations. I have to say that it is truly and honor to read through your consistorial reports. Yes, someone does actually read those answers you write out. And it is clear to me that God is doing remarkable things in all of our congregations. You wrote about ministering to new populations of people, about addressing the spiritual needs of our youth and young adults, about partnering with neighborhood organizations and about new international connection to ministry. In response to a question about concerns facing your congregations, many of you listed concerns outside of yourself, like increased housing costs in Grand Rapids, meeting the spiritual needs of individuals in your community dealing with mental health issues or addictive patterns, supporting local schools, exploring racism in your congregations and communities and seeking to recognize Gods image in all people.

I am fully aware that we continue to have our challenges. Many of you wrote about financial concerns for your churches or about feeling a disparity between the needs in front of your and the resources available to you. As a Classis, we continue to struggle in the area of church planting and starting new ministries. Our Churches, our Classis and our Denomination continue to be divided over issues of human sexuality and

faithfulness to scripture with no clear path forward and, in the midst of our continual discussions, individuals get hurt. I am all too aware of the challenges before us and pray regularly for the witness of the Church (Capital C) to be one of God's redemptive love. I pray for our small corner of the Big Church, The Reformed Church in America and our Classis specifically, to find new ways to encourage one another in the work of proclaiming God's restorative work by our words and our deeds.

I long to see our Classis working cooperatively on some of the biggest issues facing people living in our communities. If you combine all of our members and adherents we represent 5, 322 people! Can you imagine the force that we could be for Spiritual renewal and growth in our area, for justice and reconciliation in our communities? But in order to do that, we need to start seeing each other as partners in a common calling. In January, at the request of the denomination, we engaged in conversations about unity. I wonder what it would take for us to continue exploring this, but to do so in action at least a much as in conversation? What would have to happen for us to partner with one another in ending homelessness or increasing literacy in our neighborhood schools or setting people free from the power of addictions or a myriad of other pressing issues? How would our conversations at Classis meetings need to change? How would the conversations around our consistory tables have to change?

For me, after almost 4 years in leadership in our Classis, these are the questions that I ponder the most. They're not rhetorical questions meant to make us feel like we're not doing enough. They are honest questions about how we can move into a future together that is shaped by God's desire to make all things new.