

# Classis of North Grand Rapids Meeting Minutes

Stated Session

March 21, 2023

Oakview Reformed Church

**Opening:** Devotion led by Ben Bruins including a reading of Psalm 130 and prayer. Sarah Van Zetten Bruins led the classis in singing the Doxology.

Dr. Craig Mattson (Craig E. Mattson, PhD, Arthur DeKruyter Chair in Faith and Communication, Department of Communication, Calvin University) led a workshop about two kinds of stories we can tell about our churches and organizations. The first is a “hero’s story.” It focuses on an individual encountering a problem, getting a mentor, forming a community, and achieving success. The second is a “neighborhood story.” It starts in a place that has hidden resources. A catalyst makes those resources visible and sharable. The neighborhood experiences “enoughness.”

Both stories are good to tell but it is problematic to rely only on a hero’s story because it is individualistic, blind to privilege, and doesn’t speak to those times and places in life when we don’t win such as in Ecclesiastes 2.

Business Meeting Called to Order by Ben Bruins, President at 7 PM.

## Roll Call (completed by signature)

A – Excused Absence    U – Unexcused Absence

Church	Clergy	Elder	Elder
Central Reformed	Steven Pierce	Willa Brown	Jeff DeVree (A)
	Matt Shults (MUC)	Tim Elzinga (Finance)	
Oakview Community Church	Vacant	Jerry DeRuiter (U)	John Dykema
Resurrection Reformed	Doug Kiel		
Richmond Reformed	Vacant	Edward R. Quakenbush	Nancy Werkema
Rockford Reformed	Tim Meendering (U)	Scott Jacobs	
Servant’s Community	James Earley	Elizabeth Rogers-Drouillard	
Standale	Vacant	Lin Cline	Sharon Palma (A)
The Community - Ada	Mara Joy Norden (A)	Katie Musick-Reynhout	
Third Reformed	Jeff Petersen	Ron Schollaart	
Trinity Reformed	Ben Bruins	Jan Koopman (A)	
	Sarah Bruins		
<b>Specialized Ministers/Ministers Without Charge/Inactive</b>			
Kathy Bartels	Nancy Boote	Jennifer Holmes Curran (A)	Eric Cook (U)
Laura Dilley (A)	Anne Elzinga (A)	Bob Karel (U)	Kristi Kiel (U)
Ryan Landt (U)	Steve Luchies (U)	Kristen Meyer (A)	Cheryl Molhoek
Billy Norden	Matt Rose (U)	Rebecca Stegeman Riekse	Eric Schalk (U)
Robyn Saylor (U)	Jessica Shults	Peter TeWinkle (U)	Dave Vander Woude
David Veldt			
Eric Bogerd (A)	Eric Branch (U)	Rachel Bush (U)	Nancy Claus
John Delger	Kate Kooyman (U)	David Mayer (A)	Jennifer Petersen

Jonathan Tice (A)	Susan VanderWall (U)	Bill VanderWerp	Christopher Westerbeek (U)
Aaron Wetzel	Steve Wolters (U)		
Andre Daley			
<b>Retired Ministers</b>			
Bill Fennema (A)	Lou Lotz (A)	David Mayer (A)	Ralph Robrahn
<b>Associates In Ministry, Commissioned Pastor</b>			
Willa Brown		George Werkema	
<b>Guests</b>			
Kearsten McCoy			

## Approval of the Agenda

Motion made, supported, and passed by consensus to approve the agenda as presented.

## Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Motion made, supported, and passed by consensus to accept the minutes of the January 17, 2023.

## Appoint Tellers

Tellers were appointed from The Community – Ada and Third.

## Committee and Council Reports

### Finance Committee

Finance chair Tim Elzinga described the current state of the classis's finances and anticipated negative cashflow of \$108,978 in 2023 and a negative cashflow of \$65,036 in 2024. If nothing changes, classis will continue to operate with a structural deficit of about \$40,000. The Finance Committee plans to recommend budgets that gradually increase classis assessments over a ten-year period until the structural deficit is closed.

Tim presented on the decision classis will make in September about switching to a covenant shares model of assessments or continuing with our current model. If we switch to a covenant shares model, some churches will see 10% increases for up to 6 years. The Finance Committee will provide each church with information about how they would be impacted after General Synod and Regional Synod finalize their numbers this summer.

### Executive Committee

**The Executive Committee recommended the following Stewardship Plan, adapted from the Stewardship Task Force proposal and grant applications for the remainder of calendar year 2023.**

Richmond Reformed Salary Assistance — \$50,000

Servant's Community Church Capital Improvement Projects — \$40,000

Student Care Committee for student psychological evaluations and tuition assistance — \$12,000

On-Mission Grants — \$50,000

Using the criteria proposed by the Stewardship Task Force, grants to be reviewed by the Executive Committee.

Clergy Renewal — \$25,000

Using the criteria proposed by the Stewardship Task Force, grants to be reviewed by the Pastoral Care Committee.

Antiracism Grants — \$10,000

Antiracism congregational initiatives and subsidizing Sankofa trips, grants to be reviewed by the Executive Committee

Recommended total additional reserve fund to be spent in 2023 is \$187,000

Billy Norden, chair of the stewardship task force made a motion to divide the question and consider requests for funding church grants separately from the rest of the Executive Committee recommendation. This motion was made, supported, and did not pass by a show of hands.

There was further discussion from the floor in favor of the principles behind Billy's motion that more grant-like process of evaluations and metrics be put into place by the Revitalization Committee for any churches requesting funds.

Jeffrey Peterson made a motion to amend the Executive Committee recommendation so that any funds granted to congregations be repaid in full if they depart the Reformed Church in America within 5 calendar years of when the funds were granted.

The amendment was seconded and approved.

James Early made a motion to amend the amended Executive Committee recommendation so that the grant to Servants Community Church would require the church to submit receipts to be reimbursed by the classis on up to \$50,000 of capital improvement expenses. The amendment was seconded and defeated.

The Executive Committee recommendation, with the amendment that any funds granted to a congregation be repaid in full if they depart the Reformed Church in America within 5 calendar years of when the funds were granted was approved.

### **Classis Expansion**

The Classis has been approached by The Branch, a Great Lakes City Classis (former South Grand Rapids Classis) congregation about transferring to North Grand Rapids. Any decision to transfer is solely the Regional Synod's to make with input from the dismissing and receiving Classes.

One of the first steps in the transfer process is for the congregation seeking to transfer classes to provide the regional synod written evidence that they would be received in the classis they desire to transfer into without reservation.

Ben Bruins read from the email the classis received from the Branch asking if we would be willing to receive them without reservation.

Ben invited Chris DeBlaay, pastor at the Branch, to introduce himself and provide a brief history of the church. Chris answered questions about the Branch from the floor. Ben answered questions about the transfer process.

A motion was made to instruct the clerk of the NGR Classis to inform our regional synod that we would receive The Branch without reservation and to instruct the executive committee to create a policy for receiving transfers. Seconded.

An amendment was made to instruct the executive committee to create a policy for receiving transfer congregations to recommend to the classis at the September meeting. The motion to amend was seconded and approved.

The amended motion to instruct the clerk of the NGR Classis to inform our regional synod that we would receive the Branch without reservation and to instruct the executive committee to create a policy for receiving transfers to recommend to the classis at the September meeting was approved.

A suggestion was made on the floor that executive committee consider distance of the churches as part of the policy, remembering the difficulty of a classis congregation in Franklin, Tennessee.

A suggestion was made that the executive committee articulate that our classis is committed to living with theological diversity regarding congregational convictions about human sexuality.

## **President's Report – Ben Bruins**

Ben highlighted the inclusion of the presidential report in the agenda email.

### **Overtures and Judicial Business**

OBJ presented a proposal for changes to the Rules of Order reflecting the changing size of the classis and providing greater organizational flexibility. The intent is for members to review the proposed changes and provide feedback to the classis clerk before August 2023. The Executive Committee will incorporate feedback and plan to do a first reading at the September 2023 meeting.

Jennifer Peterson requested that the Executive Committee email the classis a copy of the current rules of order along with the proposed rules of order.

### **Specialized Ministry Committee**

Motion made, supported, and passed to designate Eric Bogerd and John Delger as specialized ministers filling chaplaincy roles.

There was discussion on the floor for the committee to consider renaming the category of “not in good standing”.

### **Commissioned Pastor Team**

Motion made, supported, and passed to cede the Commissioned Pastor examination of Scott Rose to the Southwest Michigan Classis and to instruct our clerk to write the Southwest Michigan Classis that Scott Rose has met all of the study requirements of North Grand Rapids Classis.

Motion made, supported and passed to grant Kathy Bartels retirement status.

Kathy was thanked for her years of ministry and received a round of applause.

## **Petition to Withdraw – Rockford Reformed Church**

Motion made, supported, and passed to grant the withdrawal of the Rockford Reformed Church from the Reformed Church in America effective March 22, 2023.

A motion was made, supported, and passed to demit the ordinations of Eric Cook and Todd Schmidt at their request.

## **Miscellaneous**

### **Stated Clerk Announcements/Reminders**

- Consistorial Report summary for 2022 presented.
- Constitutional Inquiry summary for 2022 presented.
- Ministerial Changes report for 2022 presented.

## **Particularia**

The President thanked Oakview for hosting the classis meeting and providing a meal.

## **Resolutions**

Motion made, supported, and passed to excuse the absences of Eric Bogerd, Jeff DeVree, Laura Dilley, Anne Elzinga, Jennifer Holmes Curran, Bill Fennema, Jan Koopman, Lou Lotz, David Mayer, Kristen Meyer, Mara Norden, and Sharon Palma.

## **Closing**

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

Closing Prayer by Ben Bruins

## **Next Classis Meetings**

Executive Committee Meetings: Third Tuesday of the Month except January, March, and September. 11:30 AM, Third Reformed Church

Classis Stated Session:

September 19, 2023; Resurrection Reformed Church (Flint), Dinner 5:30 PM; Stated Session 6:30 PM.

January 16, 2024; Richmond Reformed Church, Dinner 5:30 PM; Stated Session 6:30 PM.

March 19, 2024; Servant's Community, Dinner 5:30 PM; Stated Session 6:30 PM

May 21, 2024; Standale Reformed Church, Student Exams if required, No Dinner; Special Session 6:30 PM

*Benjamin Bruins*

Benjamin Bruins, President

*Robert J. Teitsma*

Robert J. Teitsma, Stated Clerk

**CHANGE REPORT**  
**Classis of North Grand Rapids**  
**Reformed Church in America**  
**2022**

**Examination for Declaration of Licensure:**

Luke Harkema, May 2022

**Ordinations:**

Anne C. Elzinga, February 2022

Luke Harkema, May 2022

**Installations:**

Mara Joy Norden, January 2022 (installed to same position under new call)

James Earley, July 2022, Servant's Community

**Received from Other Classes:**

James Earley, Minnesota

Peter TeWinkle, New York

**Transfers to Other Classes:**

Luke Harkema, Delaware-Raritan

Katherine Baker, New Brunswick

Larry Doorn (retired), Holland

**Received from Other Classis/Denomination:**

None

**Transfers to Other Classis/Denomination:**

None

**Dissolutions:**

Christopher Westerbeek, February 2022

David Mayer, February 2022

Rev. Jessica Shults, July 2022

Rev. Matthew Shults, July 2022

Rev. Eric Schalk, September 2022

Rev. Les Wiseman, September 2022

Rev. Robert Karel, September 2022

Rev. Laura Dilley, September 2022

### **Change in Ministerial Status within the Classis:**

Rev. Nancy Claus from Specialized to Without Charge, January 2022

Rev. Steve Wolters from Specialized to Without Charge, January 2022

Rev. Christopher Westerbeek, from Parish to Without Charge, February 2022

Rev. John Delger from Specialized to Without Charge, March 2022

Rev. David Mayer from Parish to Without Charge, March 2022

Rev. Eric Schalk, from Parish to Specialized, September 2022

Rev. Les Wiseman, from Parish to Specialized, September 2022

Rev. Robert Karel, from Parish to Specialized, September 2022

Rev. Laura Dilley, from Parish to Specialized, September 2022

### **Without Charge:**

Rev. Nancy Claus

Rev. Steve Wolters

Rev. Christopher Westerbeek

Rev. John Delger

Rev. David Mayer from Parish to Without Charge, March 2022

### **Demitted:**

Adam Navis, September 2022

### **Retired:**

David Mayer, December 2022

### **Inactive:**

None

### **Deceased:**

None



## **2023 State of Religion Report Classis of North Grand Rapids**

Our classis has been transformed by the departure of five congregations. The departing congregations reported leaving to seek doctrinal purity regarding their interpretation of human sexuality and a polity they believe will be more functional for them. Four of these congregations transferred to the recently created Alliance of Reformed Churches; one transferred to the Wesleyan denomination.

The departure of these five congregations raises several questions for our classis.

1. Is our polity too cumbersome and outdated to effectively help a theologically diverse body live in covenantal relationship?
2. Given the loss of human and financial resources, is our classis still a viable assembly?
3. In our diminished state, how might we move forward as a covenantal community called to witness and participate in God's reign?

As we await General Synod and Regional Synod restructuring proposals, the remnant of our classis is committed to working together so that our assembly will endure in a meaningful form. We recognize the value of serving with long term colleagues and continuing congregational partnerships; we are excited to work with new members of classis and students under care. We reaffirm that classical support and accountability is an important part of our witness as Reformed Christians—it's a way we embody Reformed theology. We are not independent individuals or even independent congregations; we are part of the body of Christ!

The upshot of being a remnant is that those who remain in the classis choose to do so and new levels of trust and cooperation are growing. Classis members are beginning to envision new possibilities, and there is hope that our life together might be better—with deeper relationships, a collaborative sense of mission, and shared resources.

The reality remains that most of our congregations are struggling with budgets, post-pandemic worship attendance, and staffing ministries with volunteers. In our need, we trust that the God of the cross and resurrection will do a new thing among us.

As we trust in Christ, we are discovering the energy to:

1. reform our bylaws to fit our size and desire for flexibility
2. deploy our classis financial reserves wisely in this transitional moment
3. explore the reception of new churches into our classis
4. embody our pledge to work against racism in the church and in the world

As a classis, we face deep and persistent challenges. Nevertheless, our comfort remains that "We are not our own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ." Our future is secure in God's hands.

Benjamin Bruins

President of the Classis of North Grand Rapids

3/8/23

SW MI Classis,

I wanted to send you some information on Scott Rose on his development as a commissioned pastor. North Grand Rapids Classis has been working with Scott the last 3-4 years as he has prepared himself to be commissioned.

Scott has attended a certificate program at Western Theological Seminary and also done some side study with a couple of pastor's within the NGRC readying himself for ministry. We find Scott to be faithful and dedicated to his call. Scott has had many roadblocks along the way but has never given up, he just found another way.

Scott would like to be working with Hesed within your classis, so as the Commissioned Pastor Team of NGRC we would **recommendation that Scott's examination be transferred to SW MI and we acknowledge that he has successfully met NGRC's requirements of study and the BCO requirements to be commissioned.**

Thank you for your time, and we wish Scott the best as he begins his ministry in the kingdom of God.

Any questions, please feel free to contact us.

Yours,

Rev. Kathy Bartels

Kathybartels30@gmail.com

Coordinator of Commissioned Pastor Team of NGRC

2022 Responses to Constitutional Inquiry

9/21/2023

Church	Received	Sec 1 A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Central	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Oakview	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
Resurrection	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Richmond	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Servant's	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Standale	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
The Community	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Third	Y	Y	N***	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Trinity	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Church	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
Central	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Oakview	Y	N*	Y	Y	Y	Y	N**
Resurrection	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Richmond	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N**
Servant's	Y	N	N#	Y	Y	Y	Y
Standale	Y	Y	N##	Y	Y	Y	N**
The Community	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Third	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Trinity	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

\*We have had no children attending in 2022

\*\*No installed minister

\*\*\*The BCO requirement is that all points of doctrine in the Heidelberg are exposted upon in worship every four years. At Third we have not utilized the Heidelberg as a guide for teaching in worship and I can't say with integrity that all points of doctrine within it have been explicitly taught in the last four years. In the past I've encourage consistories to loosely understand that BCO requirement, but it seems as though the intent is more narrow and the question is a holdover from the older RCA liturgy which included a Q&A from Heidelberg in each service.

#The consistory felt that Servant's Community Church is growing and developing meaningful formation opportunities for young people. However, in engaging young people's gifts, skills, and vocational considerations, Servant's Community Church has room to grow and improve. We didn't feel "deficient" in this area, per se, but recognized that we could be doing more to encourage our young people in using their gifts for Christ's kingdom.

##This is something we're working on.

March 2, 2023

Dear Rob,

Greetings to you. I am writing to request that the classis transfer my ordination from the Reformed Church in America to the Alliance of Reformed Churches. This is not a light or easy decision for me, but one that God is clearly calling me to make for the sake of effective ministry and faithful service in his kingdom and in particular, at Remembrance Church, which has already joined the ARC.

I am grateful for my time in Classis leadership and your service to myself and Remembrance. I have provided the ARC with the necessary documentation they require. Please let me know if you require anything further from me.

Blessings,

Eric Cook



Classis of North Grand Rapids  
1460 Banbury Drive  
Grand Rapids MI 49505

[statedclerk@northgr.org](mailto:statedclerk@northgr.org)

March 5, 2023

The ad hoc committee appointed by the Executive Committee, Rev. Ben Bruins, president; Katie Musick-Reynhout, vice president; and Rev. Ralph Robrahn; conducted the withdrawal process with Rockford Reformed Church.

Rockford Reformed has complied with the requirements of the Book of Church Order as a congregation requesting withdrawal from the RCA.

It is the ad hoc committee's recommendation to the Executive Committee that the Classis vote to approve the withdrawal petition of Rockford Reformed Church effective March 21, 2023.

## **Specialized Committee Report**

**March 2023—Revised, CM 3/29/2023**

Meeting: February 22, 2023 via Zoom

Attending: Len DeBraber, Steve Luchies, Cheryl Molhoek (chair), Peter TeWinkle

Meeting opened with prayer.

1. Reviewed accountability forms of 34 Classis Ministers, including:
  - Specialized Ministers, including Nine Chaplains
  - Without Charge -- Eleven
2. Identified the need for guidelines and expectations to be put in place; the committee will work on this in the coming months and make recommendations to classis at a future meeting.
3. Identified the need to review and update the Accountability Form.

Next meeting: Tuesday, March 21 at 5:30 during classis dinner time.

# The Classis of North Grand Rapids 2023 Stewardship Proposal, Revised

## Additional Context

As of February 20, 2023, the classis of North Grand Rapids has \$857,700 in liquid assets.

Our 2023 Cash Flow—Income	
\$7,546.50	NGR Classis Assessments
\$3,657.15	NGR Salary Aid
\$11,203.65	Sub-total
Spending	
\$(1,000.00)	Meals
\$(7,324.00)	Treasurer
\$(13,820.00)	Clerk
\$(200.00)	Office Supplies
\$(950.00)	Miscellaneous
\$(2,750.00)	Insurance
\$(18,000)	Servant's salary aid
\$(2,800.00)	Student Care
\$(3,000.00)	Supervisors
\$(1,000.00)	Revitalization
<u>\$(21,142.85)</u>	<u>Sub-total</u>
\$(20,000.00)	City Hope 2023
\$(37,016.28)	GS Assessments to Cover
\$(12,321.00)	RSGL Assessments to Cover
<u>\$(69,337.28)</u>	<u>Additional 2023 commitments already made</u>
<u>\$(108,977.63)</u>	<u>2023 Grand Total</u>

Our projected cash flow for 2024 is (\$65,035.83).  
Actual reserves beyond 2024 = \$683,686.54

**Recommend** maintaining a reserve balance of \$120,000 for use in emergencies, which would leave \$563,686.54 of unallocated reserves.

The cost of maintaining our structural deficit (whereby assessments/covenant shares are reduced by pulling money from our reserve funds) is projected to be \$40,000 a year beginning in 2025.

If we use all of our reserved funds and no longer operate with a structural deficit, the nine congregations in classis will need to increase their assessments/covenant share by a combined **\$40,000/year**.

**Recommend** reducing the amount of our structural deficit in steps over the course of 10 years. Covering our actual expenses each year will enable us to responsibly deploy our reserve funds.

### **Additional Requests**

Richmond Reformed is requesting \$50,000 a year for three years (total of \$150,000) for salary assistance.

Servant's Community Church is requesting \$50,000 a year for three years (total of \$150,000) for facility improvement projects (in addition to yearly salary support of \$18,000/year).

The Student Care Committee is requesting \$11,000 a year for tuition assistance and psychological evaluations each year in addition to their \$2,000 annual budget.

At the January Classis Meeting the body indicated a desire for antiracism deeds to match the words of the policy we approved.

### **Proposed Reserve Fund Distributions for 2023**

Richmond Reformed Salary Assistance — \$50,000

*Richmond's 2023 budget is \$259,087; their 2022 income was \$169,110; their 2021 income was \$223,631.*

*Richmond has about \$399,094 in endowed funds they are working to gain access to through congregational vote and broadening the definition of "mission" to include work in the neighborhood as well as overseas. \$50,000 will help them cover a gap in the budget as they work to call a new pastor this year.*

Servant's Community Church — \$40,000

*Classis is already committed to supporting Servant's with \$18,000 of salary support. Servant's is projecting an operating deficit of \$56,000 which they will work to cover with additional fundraising. \$40,000 will help them accomplish most of their first year building maintenance goals.*

Student Care Committee — \$12,000

*Student Care will be able to provide psychological evaluations for both students under care and offer them tuition assistance for next year's classes.*

On-Mission Grants — \$50,000

*Using the criteria proposed by the Stewardship Task Force, grants to be reviewed by the Executive Committee.*

Clergy Renewal — \$25,000

*Using the criteria proposed by the Stewardship Task Force, grants to be reviewed by the Pastoral Care Committee.*

Antiracism Grants — \$10,000

*Antiracism congregational initiatives and subsidizing Sankofi trips, grants to be reviewed by the Executive Committee*

**Recommended** total additional reserve fund to be spent in 2023 is \$187,000.