

CLASSIS GRAND RAPIDS SOUTH PLANNING REPORT

January 2011

In January 2010, Classis approved a planning process to “work with church leaders and classical committees to develop a shared vision with a set of goals for the classis.” Over the past twelve months, the Classical Planning Team assisted by consultants from Volunteers in Service used these different assessment tools to accomplish its work.

1. Interviews with Classical Leaders and Committees
2. Readiness Assessments for Congregations
3. Congregational Asset Mapping
4. Group Conversations at September’s Classis Meeting

From the results of this material the Classical Planning Team identified five ministry areas with an existing realities, desired outcomes and key action steps. Those five ministry areas are:

1. Growing our Classis/Reversing the Decline
2. Promoting Pastoral Health
3. Promoting Ministry Partnerships
4. Improving Classis Communication
5. Defining the Ministry/Polity Balance in Classis

The following is a more detailed breakdown regarding these ministry areas.

1. GROWING OUR CLASSIS/REVERSING THE DECLINE

Existing Realities: We recognize the geographic and demographic diversities that exist within our Classis boundaries, as well as the economic and social variables we all encounter at this time. We recognize that these conditions create particular challenges and opportunities for all Classis churches. We are also aware that, for a variety of reasons, the number of members in Christian Reformed Classis Grand Rapids South churches has consistently declined in the past 20 years by about 15%.

Desired Outcome: We wish to support each of our churches in such a way that each Classis church has the resources and tools necessary to grow. Churches will grow when they move toward stronger ministry impact and health. Churches will also grow through outreach and evangelism.

Key Actions:

1. PRAY for the lost. The Classical Prayer Coordinator in cooperation with the Spiritual Growth and Prayer Committee will consider how to encourage this in our churches and our leaders. One possible idea: provide worship materials for each church to “pray for 5;” possibly find a few speakers who are passionate about this and offer them as pulpit supply to churches
2. Hire a part-time Classical Ministry Growth Coordinator, with the following responsibilities:

- a. Work with the Classical Communications Coordinator to celebrate evangelistic growth in classis churches through the sharing of stories/best practices
- b. Encourage churches to apply for Classis growth-related grants (see below)
- c. Work with the Existing Church Committee to:
 - i. Plan evangelistic training events
 - ii. Understand and communicate the changing demographics in our classis churches so we all know the reality of our situation
 - iii. Understand and communicate the changing demographics in our area, with an emphasis on areas for growth (both geographical and target groups)
 - iv. Help churches set growth goals
 - v. Help churches develop ministry partnerships
- d. Assist New Church Development Committee in exploring possibilities for church planting
- e. The job description, hiring, and supervision of the Classical Ministry Growth Coordinator will be the responsibility of the Classical Ministries Committee
3. Encourage declining churches to use the RCA ReStart/ReNew material and offer a grant to pay for coaching through this process. Grant developed and distributed by the Existing Church Committee.
4. Offer a grant for churches who would like to develop their outreach ministry with the assistance of a ministry coach. Grant developed and distributed by the Existing Church Committee.
5. Offer a grant for up to 5 classis churches/year for web design help, since most unchurched people are searching for a church via the internet. Grant developed and distributed by the Classical Communications Coordinator.

2. **PROMOTING PASTORAL HEALTH**

Existing Realities: For the past year Classis GR South has been in the discovery Process discerning classical ministries, current position, as well as desired outcomes promoting ministry growth and effectiveness in multiple areas.

Desired Outcome: Promoting Pastoral Health / Pastoral Health Initiatives.

Action Steps:

For Implementation in 2011:

1. Classis GR South creates a Pastoral Health Committee of which the Regional Pastor serves as a member.
2. The Pastoral Health Committee annually provide the following;
 - a. A list of counseling services/resources available for pastors/spouses.
 - b. Pastoral Evaluation Materials/Resources for each church/pastor relations committees. (Suggest yearly evaluations as well)
 - c. A list of Pastoral Health Resources.
 - d. A list of Sabbatical resources available for pastors.

3. Classis makes \$250 (yearly) available to all pastors for the purpose of a personal rest/retreat. Applications being submitted to the Pastoral Health Committee.

For implementation in 2012:

1. Pastoral Health Committee would contact each church annually to follow-up on concerns/questions/issues pertaining to pastoral health or materials distributed.
2. Classis establishes and provides a recommended Sabbatical policy for all classis churches/pastors.
3. Classis considers/implements a sabbatical grant (if needed) to encourage eligible pastors.

3. PROMOTING MINISTRY PARTNERSHIPS

Present Reality: The congregations of Classis GR South are all involved to some degree in various ministry partnerships.

Desired Outcome: We believe our ministry capacity and impact can be significantly increased through partnerships. We believe God has provided us a wide set of assets that can be shared outside our congregations with others desiring similar ministry impacts. We believe God is at work outside our congregations in our communities and that partnering with appropriate local organizations can increase our local impact. We believe partnering at a local congregational level provides significant outlet for congregational member ministry and joy.

Changes were made to the Key Action Steps as follows:

1. The Classical Ministry Growth Coordinator in conjunction with the Classical Ministries Committee shall gather and review a sampling of existing Classis ministry partnerships with other congregations and parachurch ministries in order to identify purpose, ministry impact, and congregational blessing.
2. The Classical Ministry Growth Coordinator shall develop and encourage the use of a standard approach to developing ministry partnerships, including both intra- and inter-classical partnerships.
3. A ministry "partnership" story shall be reported along with one or two other ministry stories at each Classis meeting or as part of a "ministry sharing" Classis meeting as scheduled. These shall be facilitated by the Classical Communication Coordinator in conjunction with the Classical Ministry Growth Coordinator.
4. The Classical Ministry Growth Coordinator shall evaluate a sampling of ministry partnerships in terms of the broader community impact, congregational blessings, and stewardship of ministry resources for awareness and learning.

4. IMPROVING CLASSIS COMMUNICATION

Existing Realities: Presently, though there is communication taking place among some pastors and communication among some churches, this is not occurring throughout classis. Church members, especially ministry leaders, are limited by the present communication

structure. Therefore, we miss opportunities for learning from each other, collaborating, sharing prayer requests, or ministering in the community together.

Desired Outcome: We desire to have a broad vision for Classis in terms of churches encouraging one another, sharing with each other, and collaborating together. We desire to communicate with each other as pastors to support and encourage one another. We desire to communicate with each other as ministry leaders in Classis so that we can value each other's stories, learn from each other's best practices, encourage one another through prayer, share resources, and collaborate to effectively serve the community.

Key Actions:

1. Hire a part time Communications Coordinator with the following responsibilities:
 - a. Promote the vision of classis amongst all the churches regarding coming together to serve the Lord.
 - b. Develop an active and effective communications network for fluid and current communication among churches and among pastors including social networking (such as Facebook, website, digital newsletters, etc.).
 - c. Work with various classical committees to develop leadership clusters for specialized ministry leaders (i.e. youth ministry, outreach ministry) both paid and volunteer, and encourage them with coaching resources, sharing training, and opportunities to share experiences, challenges and ministry resources.
 - d. Experiment with three ministry round tables/year (topical ministry meetings) to encourage ministry leaders to gather together and share experiences and challenges.
 - e. Communications Coordinator would report to Classical Ministries committee or Classical Ministries Growth Coordinator. The job description, hiring and supervision of the Classical Communications Coordinator will be the responsibility of the Classical Ministries Committee.
2. Schedule a fall classis meeting as a story telling celebration of what God is doing through the churches and ministries of Classis GR South. This meeting would be open to leaders/members of all the churches in GR South. Interim committee will be responsible to develop this classis meeting.

5. DEFINING THE MINISTRY/POLITY BALANCE IN CLASSIS

Existing Realities: The Church Order describes the existence of classis for both administrative/polity and ministry. The classis more recently has become the place where pastors and elders got together to manage the administrative tasks of the classis, with little emphasis given to the ministry aspect of the classis and of individual churches.

Desired Outcome: Contemporary ministry challenges seem to demand the reconsideration of some of the traditional functions of the classis. Our focus ought to be on finding a helpful mix of polity and mission in order to make the classis meeting a blessing to individual churches and a catalyst for ministry partnerships and collaboration.

Key Actions:

1. Classis Meetings
 - a. Create an intentional mix classis agenda with added ministry sharing and collaboration during classis meetings
 - b. Review Classis meeting content and scheduling and establish a two-year period of experimentation creating classis meetings.
 - c. Conclude after the two years which definition of the classis offers is most helpful.
 - d. Assign the current committees the task of evaluating their scope in light of the new classis attempt to find the right agenda “mix.”
 - e. The CMC will implement these steps through the Interim Committee.
2. Increase participation of lay people in classical ministry over the next two years by adding ten people per year. This will be encouraged by the CMC through the other committees.