2023 MINUTES

The Regional Synod of Albany

Reformed Church in America

Annual Assembly

Lynnwood Reformed Church

Schenectady, New York

May 8, 2023

Directory

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Albany Synod Staff

Rev. Abby Norton Levering	Ministries Coordinator
Rev. Robert Hoffman	Administrator/Stated Clerk
Rev. Dr. Sherri Meyer Veen	Minister for Renewal
Ms. Sandy Cornwell	School of Ministry Administrator
Rev. Lindsey DeKruif	Synod Program Coordinator
Ms. Elif Ipek	Finance Manager

Fowler Camp and Retreat Center Staff

Rev. Kent Busman	Executive Director
Ms. Josey Brady	Assistant Director
Ms. Lauren Cleworth	Administrator
Mr. Harv Zegstroo	Operations Manager

BOARD OF TRUSTEES AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Rev. Becky Town	President
Ms. Noreen Fargione	Vice President
Rev. Matthew van Maastricht	Past President
Rev. Robert Hoffman	Stated Clerk
Ms. Lynn Barnes	Personnel Committee
Mr. Mark Watson	Finance Committee
Rev. Nancy Ryan	Overtures and Judicial Business Committee
Ms. Deb Sanburn	Synod Ministries Board
Mr. Justan Foster	Fowler Board of Trustees
Rev. Paige Convis	Albany Classis
Mr. Gary Smith	Columbia Greene Classis
Mr. Jeff Dunnewold	Montgomery Classis
Rev. Sarah Palsma	Rochester Classis
Rev. Linda Gold	Schoharie Classis
Mr. Jim Pettis, Jr.	Schenectady Classis
Rev. Abby Norton Levering	Synod Ministries Coordinator
Rev. Kent Busman	Fowler Executive Director
Ms. Elif Ipek	Synod Finance Manager

BOARDS

Fowler Board of Trustees

Jamie Elwood	Schenectady Classis	2024
Jim Gunty	Property Committee	2024+
Beth Luck	Montgomery Classis	2024
Heather Kramer	At Large	2024
Janelle Richardson	Partner	2024+
Bob Ike	Rochester Classis	2025
Dawn Olsen	Columbia Greene Classis	2025+
Pat Kinne	Program Committee	2025+
Emmy Katz	At Large	2025+
Tim Combs	Partner	2025+
Jonathan Dykstra	Schoharie Classis	2026
Justan Foster	Albany Classis	2026+
Nicole Gentile	Development Committee	2026+
Jenna White	At Large	2026+
Aaron Ray	Partner	2026+
Kent Busman	Executive Director	
Lauren Cleworth	Administrator/Clerk	
Harv Zegstroo	Operations Manager	
Robert Hoffman	Synod Administrator	

Albany Synod Ministries Board

	Albany Classis	2024+
Deb Sanburn	Montgomery Classis	2024
Jerri Mattice	Schoharie Classis	2024+
Amy Burdett	Rochester Classis	2024
Lou Hannett	Columbia Greene Classis	2025+
Paige Convis	Albany Classis	2025+
Heather Kramer	Schenectady Classis	2025+
Dave Borland	Rochester Classis	2025
Martha Andrews	Columbia Greene Classis	2026
Jeff Mc Ilrath	Montgomery Classis	2026+
Kelly Clement	Schenectady Classis	2026
Steve Mattice	Schoharie Classis	2026
Abby Norton Levering	Ministries Coordinator	
Becky Town	Synod President	
Noreen Fargione	Synod Vice President	
Matthew van Maastricht	Synod Past President	
Kent Busman	Fowler Executive Director	

PERMANENT COMMITTEES

Finance Committee

Mark Watson	Schenectady Classis	2024+
Betsy Darrow	Albany Classis	2024
Jay Hine	Schoharie Classis	2025+
Scott Bensink	Rochester Classis	2025+
John Paarlberg	Albany Classis	2026
Robert Hoffman	Synod Administrator	
Elif Ipek	Finance Manager	
Abby Norton Levering	Ministries Coordinator	

Personnel Committee

Lynn Barnes	Schenectady Classis	2024+
Nancy Rasweiler	Columbia Greene Classis	2024+
Roger Krutz	Albany Classis	2025+
Will Ryan	Montgomery Classis	2025+
Charles Wiessner	Columbia Greene Classis	2026+
Robert Hoffman	Synod Administrator	
Abby Norton Levering	Ministries Coordinator	

Overtures and Judicial Business Committee

Matthew van Maastricht	Schenectady Classis	2024
Jeffrey Kelley	Schoharie Classis	2025
Nancy Ryan	Montgomery Classis	2026
Nominee		2027
Nominee		2028
Robert Hoffman	Synod Administrator	

Nominations Committee (stated clerks)

Nancy Landrigan	Albany Classis
Patti Varga	Columbia Greene Classis
Randy Karcher	Montgomery Classis
Anita Manuele	Rochester Classis
Lindsey DeKruif	Schenectady Classis
Richard Dykstra	Schoharie Classis
Robert Hoffman	Albany Synod

\+ Denotes Second Term

2023 Minutes
REGIONAL SYNOD OF ALBANY

The annual assembly of the Regional Synod of Albany was held on May 8, 2023 at the Lynnwood Reformed Church in Schenectady, New York. The Rev. Matthew van Maastricht, president, presided.

I. GATHERING

President van Maastricht called the meeting to order at 9:30am. Vice President, Rev. Becky Town led the delegates in the opening prayer.

II. FORMATION

Twenty two (22) ministers and Twenty one (21) elders, including the President and Vice President, signed in as delegates making a total of Forty three (43) voting delegates and officers in attendance.

Delegate Roster

Minister Delegates	**Elder Delegates**
Classis of Albany	
Dirk Gieser	
Jenn Legg	Monica Marsh
Bruce Cornwell	Roland Ferris
Dave Jones	Vi D'Anza
Classis of Columbia Greene	
Chuck Wiessner	Patti Varga
Dan Herrick	Bret Smith
	Savitri Mark
	Lou Hannett
Classis of Montgomery	
Ryan Cogswell	Randy Karcher
Betsy Westman	Ken Palmer
Matthew Draffen	Bob Shepard
Jim Peck	Lois Arndt
Classis of Rochester	
Eric Titus	Esther Nickerson
Chris Jacobsen	Dave Borland
Nick Dorland	Christopher Buckman
Thom Daubenspeck	Amy Burdett

Classis of Schenectady

Johan Bosman
Immanuel Van Tonder
Trey Tirpak
Janet Meyer Vincent
Susanna Combs
Bill Viscusi
Mac Sanders

Classis of Schoharie

Linda Gold
Karen Patterson
Rett Zabriskie
Rich Dykstra (excused)
Steve Mattice
Roger Wright
Gerald Cross

Officers

Matthew van Maastricht, President
Becky Town, Vice President
Robert Hoffman, Stated Clerk

The following staff, board or committee members, and guests were welcomed and granted privilege of the floor:

Synod Staff: Abby Norton Levering, Sherri Meyer Veen, Lindsey DeKruif and Robert Hoffman.

Fowler Staff: Kent Busman.

Albany Synod Board of Trustees and Executive Committee: Noreen Fargione, Lynn Barnes, James Pettis Jr., Mark Watson, Deb Sanburn

Guest: Greg Town, Adaptive Change Task Force; John Paarlberg, NYSCC representative; Garret Szantner, Pastor, Lynnwood Reformed Church; Dwayne Jackson, General Synod President; Judy Nelson, General Synod Vice-President; Peter Cook, NYSCC Executive Director; Bethany Popkes, First Reformed Church of Wynantskill; Nancy Titus, Pultneyville Reformed Church; Kay Grosch, Lynnwood Reformed Church.

The following delegates were excused from attending due to illness: Rich Dykstra.

Two minister and three elder delegates were not present.

MOTION: To welcome the guests and grant them privilege of the floor. (CARRIED)

III. AGENDA

Delegate Sign in and Refreshments
Call to Order
Greetings by host Pastor, Rev. Garret Szantner
Delegate Introductions
Welcome to Guests with privilege of the floor
Agenda Review
Standing Committee Appointments

Reading of the Minutes of May 2, 2022 (by title)
Summary of Major Actions (Executive Committee/ Boards of Trustees)
OUR MINISTRY SHARED

Synod Administrator's Report	Robert Hoffman
School of Ministry Report	Sandy Cornwell
Fellowship/First Call Program	Lindsey DeKruif
Faithwalking/ Churches Learning Change Report	Sherri Meyer-Veen
General Synod Council Report	Randy Karcher
Greetings From General Synod: Dwayne Jackson and Judy Nelson	
Update on the Restructure Task Force	Sherri Meyer-Veen
New York State Council of Churches Report	John Paarlberg
Camp Fowler Report	Kent Busman

President's Report — Matthew van Maastricht

Worship in the sanctuary at 11:00am
Lunch in Fellowship Hall

Synod Ministries Board's Report	Deb Sanborn
Synod Ministries Coordinator's Report	Abby Norton Levering
General Review Committee Report	Immanuel Van Tonder
Adaptive Change Task Force Report	Greg Town

REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

Nominations Committee	Robert Hoffman
Election of President	
Report on Classis Minutes Review	
Introduction of Vice President Nominees	
Election of Vice President	
Election of Stated Clerk	
Election of Board and Committee members	
Committee on Accounts	Chris Jacobsen
Overtures/ Judicial Business Committee	Nancy Ryan
Bylaws Change Recommendation	
Lansing Appeal update	
Albany Synod/ Fowler Covenant Agreement	Matthew van Maastricht
Resolutions Committee	Trey Tirpak, Nick Dorland, Monica Marsh

Unfinished Business
Commissioning of Officers — Matthew van Maastricht
Adjournment

MOTION: To approve the agenda with flexibility allowed. (CARRIED)

IV. MINUTES

The minutes of the May 2, 2022 assembly of the Regional Synod of Albany were reviewed by the synod's officers on May 26, 2022. Official copies were signed by the President and Clerk and sent to General Synod. Copies were distributed to the classes of the Regional Synod of Albany and posted on the synod's website. A summary of the minutes was included in the workbook for delegate review before the meeting.

MOTION: To approve the reading of the minutes of the May 2, 2022 assembly of the Regional Synod of Albany by title. (CARRIED)

The minutes of the May 2, 2022 meeting of the Regional Synod of Albany were read by title.

V. STANDING AND REVIEW COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS

Committee on Accounts (three minister and two elder delegates) will review the 2022 Financial Review, the 2024 proposed budget and the proposed 2024 assessments.

The Revs. Chris Jacobsen, Johan Bosman and Jim Peck and elders Randy Karcher and Patti Varga.

General Review Committee (three minister and three elder delegates) will review the President's Report, the Mission Council and Ministries Coordinator's Reports.

The Revs. Immanuel Van Tonder, Eric Titus, and Bruce Cornwell elders Amy Burdett, Susanna Combs, and Roger Wright

Resolutions Committee (two ministers and one elder delegate) will prepare appropriate resolutions for the synod.

The Revs. Nick Dorland and Trey Tirpak and elder Monica Marsh

Tellers (two ministers and two elder delegates) will oversee the tabulation of votes and assist in distribution of materials at the synod meeting.

Revs. Dave Jones and Ryan Cogswell and elders Gerry Cross and Chris Buckman.

VI. SUMMARY OF MAJOR ACTIONS

The following summaries are provided for information concerning the work of the synod's board of trustees and executive committee between sessions of the synod, and of the ongoing work of the Fowler board of trustees.

Regional Synod of Albany Executive Committee

The Albany Synod Executive Committee (ASEC) met four times following the May 2, 2022 annual assembly. All meetings were held by zoom and the dates were: May 26, 2022, November 10, 2022, March 9, 2023 and March 29, 2023.

The following is a summary of the major actions approved in the course of those meetings:

- Voted to hold the 2023 annual assembly at the Lynnwood Reformed Church, Schenectady Classis, on May 7-8.
- Approved the individuals assigned as signatories on all Synod bank accounts.
- Approved the classis resignations and appointments to the Synod Ministry Board.
- Referred recommendations from the annual assembly to appropriate boards or committees for action.

- Approved the 2023 Authorization Schedule as presented by the Synod Finance Committee.
- Appointed chairpersons of permanent committees of the Regional Synod of Albany: Lynn Barnes as Personnel Committee chairperson, Mark Watson as Finance Committee chairperson, and Nancy Ryan as Overtures and Judicial Business Committee chairperson.
- Approved Rev. Linda Gold as our synod representative to the RCA Nominations Commission.
- Appointed Randy Karcher as our synod representative to the General Synod Council.
- Appointed corresponding delegates (youth and woman) to represent Albany Synod at General Synod in 2022.
- Accepted the resignation of Rev. Alisha Riepma as Communications Coordinator.
- Approved salary increases and housing declarations for 2023 as recommended by the Personnel Committee.
- Approved the recommendation to pause the Fellowship Program at the conclusion of this current round and to evaluate the continuation of the program in 2024.
- Approved the Minister for Renewal position description and appointed Rev. Dr. Sherri Meyer Veen to that position.
- Approved the Synod Program Coordinator position description and appointed Rev. Lindsey De Kruif to that position.
- Approved the addition of Management Liability to our existing insurance policy with Emery and Webb.

Regional Synod of Albany Board of Trustees

The Albany Synod Board of Trustees (SBOT) met three times following the May 2, 2022 annual assembly. Zoom meetings were held on May 26, 2022, November 10, 2022 and March 9, 2023 The following is a summary of the major actions approved in these meetings:

- Approved the individuals named as signatories for the Albany Synod's investments.
- Approved recommendation of the Finance Committee to withdraw $50,000 from the investments to support the operational costs until the assessment payments are received.

Fowler Board of Trustees

The Lewis M. Fowler Camp & Retreat Center Board of Trustees (FBoT) held 4 meetings between May 2022 and April 2023: June 16 & 17, 2022 at Camp Fowler, September 28, 2022 (via Zoom), December 2 & 3, 2022 at Camp Fowler, and March 15, 2023 (via Zoom).

<u>Financial</u>
To approve the 2023 Budget. – action 22-14
To approve rate schedule to be set & announced before July 1 to be approved at June meeting. - action 23-2
To approve rental be guaranteed at rate at time of booking. – action 23-3

<u>Personnel</u>
To approve a Year-Round Cook position. – action 22-16

To approve search for a Program Director Fellow. – action 22-20
To approve Kent's housing allowance and healthcare premium reimbursement. – action 22-24

Governance
To keep the current Chair and Vice Chair. - action 22-10
To approve the Transition Task Force. – action 22-15
To approve a letter to ASEC requesting OJB include review of Fowler bylaws. – action 22-22

Program
To approve the 2023 Summer schedule. – action 22-13
To approve rate structure for Family Camp. – action 22-19
To approve Fowler as an open and affirming Camp. action 22-23

Property
To approve Solar proposal 11.7kW panels. action 22-21

Respectively submitted by Lauren Cleworth, Fowler Board of Trustees Clerk

VII. REPORTS OF OUR SHARED MINISTRIES

Synod Administrator's Report
The Rev. Robert Hoffman

The position of Synod Administrator grew out of the restructuring of Albany Synod in 2012 when the old Synod Executive position was divided into administrative responsibilities and program oversight and planning. I was hired as Synod Administrator in July of 2013 and will be celebrating ten years in that capacity this July. The work of the Synod Administrator is separate from that of the Stated Clerk even though there is some overlap.

My work as Synod Administrator includes several areas of oversight. They include:

- Support of the synod officers in leadership of the RSA Executive Committee, the Board of Trustees, and in preparation for the annual assembly of the RSA. This is one of the areas of overlap with what the Stated Clerk would also do.
- Supervise all synod support staff in cooperation with the Personal Committee and on behalf of the Executive Committee.
- Participate in collaborative endeavors with the Synod Ministries Coordinator.
- Serve as liaison to the Fowler Board of Trustees.
- Work with the Synod Executive Committee, the Board of Trustees, the Finance Committee and the Ministries Coordinator to develop strategies that ensure sufficient funding for the RSA to develop and promote the continuing ministries of the RSA.
- Provide for the maintenance and care of the RSA offices and building.
- Complete other duties as may be assigned by the Executive Committee, the Personnel Committee, and as agreed upon with other staff.

As you can see in the list above, my tasks are mostly administrative in management of the office and the oversight of the various committees. But there is quite a bit of connection with the program elements of the synod. One of my greatest joys is when the Synod Ministries Board or the Synod Executive Committee awards grants to congregations and I have the privilege of sending the award letter. In review of the application, I learn of the hope and dream of the congregation and then can watch it develop as I follow the life of the grant.

Sometimes the administrative work feels like the same routine and the same cycle, almost like the movie “GroundHog Day” but without the mundane feeling of endlessness experienced by Phil Conners. What keeps things new and fresh are the people with whom I work with in the Albany Synod and Camp Fowler. I am blessed to participate in retreat conversations. I get excited when I learn of new participants in the School of Ministry and how current commissioned preaching elders are now being nurtured. I am wholeheartedly supported by the clerks of our classes as we meet and work together and am eagerly welcomed when I attend classis meetings. I am honored to serve with many gifted people on the various committees and boards. And I am gracefully guided into new areas of technology by colleagues with lots more patience than I have desire to learn these new things.

While we continue to adapt according to our ministry needs and climate, I rejoice that the one thing that has not changed in the past decade is the desire of each person with whom I work to give of themselves for the glory of God and the proclamation of the gospel. We are challenged by how that does and should look but the sharing of insights and ideas through open and honest dialogue continues to guide us into the future God has prepared for us. I am privileged to be part of such a wonderful ministry as we have in the Synod of Albany.

Respectfully Submitted,
Rev. Robert Hoffman

President van Maastricht thanked Bob for his report and for the timely and thoughtful manner with which he approaches his work.

Albany Synod School of Ministry
Ms. Sandy Cornwell, Coordinator

The School of Ministry (SoM) offers six courses over the span of two years as basic education for those seeking the role of commissioned preaching elder. It is also open to all who wish to deepen their own personal theological experience or those in the discernment process. By the end of May,4 more students will have completed all six courses to become preaching elders. In all, 15 students have completed all their six required courses. About forty students have participated in various courses since the beginning of the school in 2019. Currently there are seven students in various stages of their course work. These classes may also serve as a pathway for those interested in becoming a commissioned pastor.

In September, Rev. Dr. Richard Otterness began facilitating the Preaching Elder Circle. These monthly Zoom gatherings are open to all commissioned preaching elders and offer ongoing support and study. Both new and seasoned preaching elders are welcome.

2022- 2023 courses
- September – Introduction to Preaching, Dr. Bill Levering, instructor.
- January – Systematic Theology, Rev. Matthew Van Maastricht, instructor
- April – Systematic Theology, Dr. Johan Bosman, instructor

2023-2024 courses:
- September - Old Testament Introduction and History
- January – RCA Standards
- April - New Testament Introduction and History

All SoM courses are taught using a videoconferencing format. The Introduction to Preaching class requires several in-person sessions held at a central location, This approach makes it possible for students from the farthest corners of Albany Synod to participate. The School of Ministry classes cost $300 due at the time of registration. Students are encouraged to seek scholarship assistance from their local church and classis.

Albany Synod School of Ministry Board
The School of Ministry is overseen by the Albany Synod Ministries Board. The School of Ministry Board includes Rev. Matthew J. van Maastricht, Rev. Abby Norton-Levering, Rev. Robert Hoffman, Eder Lois Fiegl, and Sandy Cornwell, Administrator.
Who should sign up for SoM classes?
- those in training to be preaching elders (PE)
- those in training to become Commissioned Pastors (CP)
- Anybody else who is interested in the subjects offered! Church leaders, elders, deacons, Christian educators, pastors, etc.

Potential PEs and CPs should be aware that their classes may require additional work in these subject areas beyond completing the SoM class. Classes also will conduct their own examinations of PE and CP candidates to explore their proficiency in the subject matter. Classes will be updated by the School of Ministry administrator of the student's performance and course completion. It is encouraged that classis examinations be given throughout the study process.

Interested in more information?
Contact: Sandy Cornwell, School of Ministry Administrator, crccsandy@gmail.com

The synod was reminded to encourage individuals to reach out to Sandy with any questions they may have about participating in the School of Ministry whether or not they wish to be commissioned as preaching elders.

Report to the Regional Synod of Albany
The Rev. Lindsey De Kruif, Synod Program Coordinator

Greetings in the Lord Jesus Christ!

The last time I offered a report to this body, I did so as the Coordinator of the Albany Synod Fellowship Program. Since then my responsibilities within the Synod have shifted as I have taken on work as the Synod Program Coordinator.

Last fall with an eye towards the future of the Albany Synod Fellowship Program and the First Call project, the team overseeing these programs (including Abby Norton-Levering, Bob Hoffman, and Sherri Meyer-Veen) reviewed them and made a recommendation to ASEC that the Albany Syond Fellowship program be discontinued for the foreseeable future upon the conclusion of the 2021-2023 round.

The program team felt strongly that since the program's inaugural year in 2017 that the components of the program have served well the participants in the program. Participants were given excellent support at the start of their ministries, through on-going coaching, participation in the Faithwalking process, and a number of other learning opportunities around leadership (including clergy tax preparation, healthy communications, and the annual Beginning and Beyond retreat). Congregations and their leaders have also been given great opportunity to learn together and grow in their capacity to minister to their communities.

Despite the positives of this program, it has faced the following challenges:

- Recruiting recent seminary graduates to participate
- Finding placements that suit the gifts and callings of potential fellows
- Maintaining buy-in from congregational leaders through participation in the learning community
- Retaining fellowship "graduates" to serve churches within the bounds of Albany Synod

A lot has been learned through this program for the Regional Synod staff and we see the benefit of investing in leaders, particularly those who are beginning in ministry. For this reason, it is the intention of the program team to continue to offer support in the form of coaching, the Faithwalking process, and workshops and retreats around supporting leadership capacity to ministers in their first call through the First Call Project. In my role as Synod Program Coordinator, I will continue to coordinate the First Call Project as need arises among our synod ministers.

With gratitude for participating in this experiment with us, I would like to acknowledge the alum of the Albany Synod Fellowship Program, both churches and ministers:

Class of 2017-2019	
Rev. Mark Mares	Ft. Plain Reformed Church
	Canajoharie Reformed Church
	Sprakers Reformed Church
	St. Johnsville Reformed Church
Rev. Jennifer Legg	Old Saratoga Reformed Church
	Bacon Hill Reformed Church
	Fort Miller Reformed Church
Rev. Marcy (Rudins) Ryan	Delmar Reformed Church
Class of 2019-2021	
Rev. Alisha Riempa	Prattsville Reformed Church
	Jay Gould Memorial Reformed Church (Roxbury)
Rev. Matthew Rogalski	Bethlehem Reformed Church
Class of 2021-2023	
Rev. Trey Tirpak	First Reformed Church (Albany)

In addition to those on the program team, a word of thanks should be given to both Jim Herrington of the Leader's Journey and Rev. Andy Bossardet for the work they did in developing the program and offering their gifts of coaching and mentorship to participants of the program.

My expanded work as the Synod Program Coordinator began at the end of 2022, and in this role, I have facilitated the organization of the Beginning and Beyond Retreat for ministers new to their ministries within Albany Synod, a Women in Ministry retreat, and the Pastors and Families retreat. I have also been working with the staff to find new ways to manage projects and events. I am also working on a centralized database for the Synod, which will allow staff to manage event registration and payment all in one place as well as more efficiently communicate with the members and churches within Albany Synod.

As I have served within Albany Synod for the last ten years, I have always appreciated the resources and the connections that the Regional Synod has provided to me. I am excited to support the work of the synod through coordinating resources and events in order that other ministers and members of Albany Synod churches may feel that same sense of support and connection.

Grace and Peace,

Rev. Lindsey De Kruif
Synod Program Coordinator

In addition to the printed report, Lindsey highlighted the current plans for the Fellowship Program and the transition with the First Call Program. She also spoke briefly about the transition into the position of Program Coordinator and how she will be available to answer

questions that arise. President van Maastricht thanked Lindsey for her good work for the synod and offered the synod's blessings in her transition into a new position.

RSA Minister For Renewal

The Rev. Dr. Sherri Meyer-Veen

What is a Minister for Renewal? Change is constant. The pace of change has increased driven by globalization, technological advances, social pressure, polarization, and a global pandemic, among many other factors. All churches and leaders are learning to adapt during this ever-changing reality, often through hardship, struggle, and exhaustion.

Noting the state of our Regional Synod classes and ministries, the continued requests on the Regional Synod for assistance, and the best use of the Synod staff to assist in what we see as the most pressing needs of the synod, the synod staff has reconfigured in a team approach in consultation with the Personnel committee and Albany Synod Executive Committee. This new approach expands the Faithwalking & Churches Learning Change Coordinator position to a more inclusive title that allows these learning communities and programs to continue to flourish, but also makes resources more broadly available to classes and congregations who may not be currently participating in Faithwalking or Churches Learning Change.

The Minister for Renewal job description includes resourcing churches, classes, and individuals to pursue processes that deepen discipleship and encourage renewal.

What has been happening? As this news has spread, many conversations have already begun, and resources have been offered for consistory trainings, visioning retreats, and potential classis collaborations or news ways of partnering. I have been in conversation with the Adaptive Change Task Force and contributed with others to growing conversations about possibilities for new learning communities and support groups to assist with some of the shared needs of Albany Synod congregations.

The Faithwalking and Churches Learning Change communities offer lots of opportunities for renewal individually and corporately, as you will read below, and they are just two of many possible paths towards renewal. Adaptive work is difficult and takes time. Adaptive work is hard to make time and space for, given the priorities in our operational workload. If you are looking for additional resources or processes to assist your congregation or classis as you seek ways to adapt your ministry, please reach out!

FAITHWALKING
making wholeness possible

Faithwalking Update 2023

What is Faithwalking? A personal transformation process….

Faithwalking is a learning community that helps individuals and congregations pursue emotional, mental, and spiritual health. Participants learn to align their lives with their values and become more whole in all dimensions of their lives through a series of courses with information, practice, and reflection. Through authentic community, facilitated small group interaction, and trained coaching, participants learn to follow the way of Jesus more fully and join God on mission in the world.

Faithwalking is becoming an international movement!! While Faithwalking was developed as a process, not a program, in Houston, Texas, it is spreading throughout the world! Faithwalking is based in Christianity but is not tied to any denomination as each faithwalker learns the process and applies it to their own life with God.

How did Faithwalking come to our region?

After participating in Faithwalking as a part of what was Ridder Church Renewal, leaders in the Regional Synods of Albany, New York, and Mid Atlantics partnered together to make Faithwalking available to anyone throughout the region in the creation of the NY/NJ Faithwalking Circle, which began in 2017.

What is happening in the Faithwalking Circle?

Our Faithwalking NY Circle has continued to offer Faithwalking Foundations course options. Each of the six Foundations courses is 10 weeks and meets through zoom for between 75-90 minutes weekly as a small group interaction with coaching to help you process through applying the material to your life. The circle also continues to offer retreats and courses from the original Faithwalking "core 4" by request and interest as timing and scheduling allows.

In comparison to the last few years, registration has been slow this year. Many previous circle participants have chosen to register for courses directly through Faithwalking central, which all are always welcome to do. As Faithwalking central has had an overall major increase of participants, circle leaders have also assisted with movement leadership outside of our circle. And, if you or your congregation have a group of people interested in a particular course offering, please reach out and help us help you in coordinating a way forward that works best for everyone!

Please note cost should not be a deterrent from participation. The Regional Synod as well as many classes may have scholarship funds available.

Podcasts and Workshops open to All: (Available Anytime! Excellent free resources!)

Faithwalking and "The Leaders Journey" (a leadership development and coaching organization developed by some of the founders of Faithwalking) offers an abundance of free podcasts at www.faithwalking.us/podcast/ and https://theleadersjourney.us/podcast/. The Faithwalking Community offers a number of free learning community support groups and has started to offer two online gatherings a year to support community connection of both past participants and introduce new participants to Faithwalking in a fun and informative way. The next one is **May 25**

at 10:30am or 7pm. Check the www.faithwalking.com website for more information and to join! It is free and a great way to learn more about Faithwalking.

Coaching: We continue our coaching circle that meets for monthly ongoing training and coaching support as we all grow our skills, coach others, and are coached ourselves. Coaching and learning to coach is one of the best ways to keep transformation alive in those who have gone through much of the coursework. ALL are invited to consider coaching. Contact Head Coach Nancy Ryan with any questions.

What is Churches Learning Change? And what's the difference between Faithwalking and CLC?

Churches Learning Change is a corporate transformation process that coincides with the personal transformation process of Faithwalking. The process of Faithwalking is a part of the Churches Learning Change journey, however, Churches Learning Change invites church teams to journey together, incorporating a systems and team focus into the process.

As a learning community, we are constantly learning, adapting, adding new resources, and adjusting our process to meet the needs of the participating teams.

In 2022, still noting the transition from pandemic to endemic and differing abilities of congregations to engage, the CLC regional team offered two in-person retreats at Honor's Haven in Ellenville that any team or individual could participate in for retreat, coaching, and some additional CLC content sessions.

In 2023, our regional team launched an in-person **Retreat & Coaching Cohort** that includes two in person retreats at Camp Fowler in May 11-13 and November 9-11; access to coaching and the new online CLC learning platform for teams to use between retreats; and continued Faithwalking courses for team members. At the writing of this report, this cohort is still forming. Please contact Sherri if you are interested in future possibilities, as well as an update on current opportunities.

What is Happening with the CLC movement?
CLC is happening throughout the US and Canada. A core staff helps support the movement. Our own Greg Town is a part of the CLC staff. Stories from those involved, frequently asked questions, more information about the core content, and lots more can now be found at www.churcheslearningchange.com.

This year, the CLC movement launched a new **Online Platform (Primer) with Coaching** to allow any congregation from anywhere to engage the CLC process, regardless of a regional cohort. This opens new possibilities for all congregations to learn together and work at their own pace. If you are interested, please contact Sherri or Greg.

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Joint NY/NJ Faithwalking Circle & CLC Regional Leadership Team:

Sherri Meyer-Veen (RSA staff)	Andy Kadzban (vol)
Greg Town (vol)	Mike Meyer-Veen (vol)
Nancy Ryan, Circle Head Coach (vol)	Jenn Legg (vol)
Abby Norton-Levering (vol/RSA Staff)	Stacey DeLaney (vol)

Reports for Minister for Renewal including Faithwalking and Churches Learning Change respectfully submitted,

Rev. Sherri Meyer-Veen, D.Min.
Minister for Renewal, Regional Synod of Albany
(518) 231-2151 text or voice
PastorSherriMV@gmail.com
www.albanysynod.org
www.faithwalking.com
www.churcheslearningchange.com

Highlighting her report, Sherri reminded that Churches Learning Change is a PROCESS and not a program. It is a process that works over time through participation and support with others who are also on a journey toward change. Faithwalking is all about Personal Transformation while Churches Learning Change is about systems being transformed. She updated on the current teams that are involved in both CLC and Faithwalking and informed of new modules that will begin soon.

She shared about her transition from CLC/Faithwalking Coordinator to also include that of being Minister for Renewal and how the expanding role will allow her to bring additional tools and resources to those who may not be involved in CLC or Faithwalking opportunities. President van Maastricht thanked Sherri for her good work for the synod and offered the synod's blessings in her transition into a new position.

GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL REPORT

Mr. Randy Karcher, Albany Synod Representative

Elder -VP, Pitcher Hill Community Church

Stated Clerk, Montgomery Classis

GSC meets physically during the span of the General Synod in June and twice yearly, via Zoom in the Spring and again physically in the Fall. On March 21-22, 2023 then GSE met via Zoom for six hours each day.

GSC granted a request from Muskegon Classis for assessment relief from a member church whose building was a total loss in a 2022 fire.
Reports from the Audit and Risk Management and Investment Advisory Committees were presented and reviewed. The denomination's investments are outperforming benchmarks and index target date funds in a very difficult market. Bonds in 2022 collapsed, making it the worst annual bond return in the past 97 years.
Jillisa Teitsma (CFO) reported that the Covenant Shares Review Committee was appointed with the Rev. Brian Engel of Montgomery Classis as a member. The 2023 budget was prepared assuming a draw on reserves of about $830,000. Planning for the 2024 budget has begun and will be finalized after the General Synod's approval of the 2024 assessment. A drop in revenue based on departures from the denomination is expected.
To date, 128 churches have transferred, 10 disbanded and 2 merged and another 75 have submitted their intention to leave the denomination for a total of 215 churches.
In the GSC's annual election, Elder Kimberly Van Es, Professor at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa was elected Moderator and the Rev. Dwayne Jackson, President of General Synod was elected Vice Moderator.

Greetings from General Synod
The Rev. Dwayne Jackson, President
The Rev. Judy Nelson, Vice-President

President van Maastricht welcomed General Synod President, Rev. Dwayne Jackson and Vice President, Rev. Judy Nelson and invited them to bring greetings to the Albany Synod.

Rev. Jackson offered some updates on the current work of the Restructure Task Force and responded to questions about the numbers of churches that have already left the RCA and how that impacts the denomination's financial outlook moving forward. He also commented that while this transition is happening, many areas of the church have experienced a growth in ministry and are strongly moving forward with ministry as they move away from conflict. Renewal and revitalization are also seen in ways that congregations are collaborating with one another in ministry endeavors. He also noted that there are new congregations coming into the RCA from outside the USA, and this is inspiring.

Rev. Nelson spoke briefly about her ministry work as a corporate chaplain and how that has helped her in understanding her role as Vice President of the General Synod and prays it will guide her in the year of her presidency.

The synod offered prayers for Rev. Jackson and Rev. Nelson for the leadership they bring to the denomination and for guidance as they oversee the upcoming General Synod meeting.

RCA Restructure Task Force Update
The Rev. Dr. Sherri Meyer Veen

Rev. Dr. Sherri Meyer Veen is the Albany Synod representative on the Restructure Task Force. She urged PRAYERS for the process the task force is working through and the meetings they are having. She invited delegates to VOICE THEIR CONCERNS AND QUESTIONS with her and the team. She noted how good things happen when individuals prayerfully express their concerns and questions with the task force.

The task force is wrapping up their FIRST year of team building, defining process, identifying values, and naming outcomes, vision, and the things that hold them together. The task force team is listening and adapting according to what they are hearing through the many gatherings they have held across the regions of the denomination. The current statement, or outcome, set forth is: **"Growing Disciples who participate in the reign of God throughout the world."**

She informed that the General Synod delegates will receive the First Draft of the task force's report as a framework looking forward and will offer their feedback throughout the synod meetings. Following that, there will be another denomination wide round of meetings throughout Year 2 before the final report and recommendation will be presented.

The President van Maastricht thanked Sherri for her good work on our behalf and reminded the delegates to keep the task force in their prayers and to honestly share the questions and concerns they discern with Sherri and the task force.

NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL OF CHURCHES REPORT
The Rev. John Paarlberg, Albany Synod Representative

https://www.nyscoc.org/

The New York State Council of Churches,founded in the late 19th Century, represents 7,500 congregations across the State of New York. We are comprised of nine partner denominations including American Baptist Churches USA, Empire Baptist Missionary Convention (National Baptist Convention), The Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church USA, The Reformed Church in America, The Religious Society of Friends, United Church of Christ, and The United Methodist Church.

The New York State Council of Churches:

Certifies and supports chaplains in state institutions including the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, Office of Children and Family Services, and Office of Mental Health as they seek to offer love and hope to so many who feel hopeless and have had little experience of being loved unconditionally We sponsor an annual conference for chaplains and provide other continuing education

opportunities. We urge fully ordained pastors, including those who may be serving as parish ministers, to consider applying for certification.

Equips faith leaders to advocate for laws and policies, consistent with our denominational partner's social principles, which address structural racism, economic inequality, and environmental degradation. Our statewide Ecumenical and Interfaith Advocacy Day was held in March and focused on especially on two public policy issues: immigration and housing. The Council has also presented a series of on-line public policy seminars on criminal justice reform, climate and environmental justice, housing, economic justice, immigration, democracy and Christian nationalism, health care, and others. Most of these seminars have been recorded and can be viewed on the NY State Council of Churches website, https://www.nyscoc.org/

Promotes mission consistent development of church property. The Council offers grants and assessments to congregations seeking to develop their property for affordable housing. Our predevelopment process is carefully detailed at WWW.IAHCNY.org. The New York State Council of Churches (NYSCOC) has also partnered with Crauderueff and Associates (C&A) to offer no-cost clean energy technical assistance to faith-based organizations and affordable housing providers. Supported by a NYSERDA pre-development grant program, we serve as consultants to help faith communities explore their clean energy options and make a plan to converting their building to clean energy. Also, through Community Solar Subscriptions, any homeowner or renter can access the benefits of solar energy and save 5% - 10% on their monthly electric bills. For each new subscriber that a congregation signs up, it will receive a $100 donation from Crauderueff & Associates.

Is committed to ecumenical and interfaith work and works to build relationships across secular and religious lines as central to our mission. We continue to advocate for religious freedom and human rights in India, Israel/Palestine and Afghanistan. Of late, we have also reached out to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in response to the attack on Ukraine. Our ecumenical work is complemented by our participation in the World and National Councils of Churches, the International Religious Freedom Roundtable, the India Working Group, and the Federation of Indian American Christian Organizations of North America.

We thank our denominational partners for their support. Our offices are at Westminster Presbyterian Church, 85 Chestnut Street, 12210. Office email is nyscocalbany@gmail.com phone is 518-436-9319. The Reverend Peter Cook is Executive Director and can be reached at pcook@nyscoc.org or 508 380-8289.

Respectfully Submitted,
John D. Paarlberg, Albany Synod Representative
NY State Council of Churches Executive Committee

In addition to his printed report, John informed that Albany Synod has had partnership with NYSCC since 1893! The shared ecumenical work has continued to provide a common voice to both state and society as well as providing resources for local congregations.

John introduced Rev. Peter Cook, Executive Director of NYSCC, who brought greetings on behalf of the Council of Churches. Peter reminded us of the Advocacy Days which provides opportunities to voice concerns about: Public Policy Matters, Property Uses, Assistance in Solarization, Affordable Housing

Resources, and the like. He also informed of the need for Chaplains in the NYS Prison System and in Child and Family Services.

President van Maastricht thanked Peter for joining Albany Synod in our meeting and for providing leadership and resources for our congregations.

REPORT FROM CAMP FOWLER
The Rev. Kent Busman, Executive Director

Our theme this summer is entitled *A Place at the Table.* It's about hospitality. It's about being ready to welcome another: to thin out the soup, to pull up another chair, to have a plate ready for Elijah just in case he shows up in the guise of a 4th grade girl or adolescent boy.

It's something that we do well at Fowler, making room. This summer we are hoping to welcome 550 youth to our camp.. Jen Abate, our year round cook, will help us prepare the feast. Harv, Lauren, and Josey will make sure that everyone is cared for: the camper from Schoharie, Albany, Zeeland, Highland Park, Palmyra, and Delmar. We've been practicing this hospitality all winter: for the first time in 3 years we've had a full season of groups coming to retreat with us.

During a week of Camp, campers, volunteers, chaplains and staff will get the chance to explore and ponder this theme together:

On Mondays we are going to hear about the feeding of the 5,000. One of the classic stories, eh? Jesus sits them down in groups on the green grass to share a meal and somehow there is enough to have an ORT report afterwards. It's partially the story of a God who can play tricks with fish and bread and partially a story of God looking at each of us and asking, "what have you got to share?"

We are sharing a camp experience that hasn't seen a raise in registration fees in 4 years, made possible by families who are able to share some of their excess through our tiered pricing. We are sharing a camp that has room for girls from the Perfect 10 girls club in Hudson and Community Hospice and Listening Hearts spirituality retreats through the generosity of others. We cannot wait for God to magically make Fowler solvent; we must put on the body of Christ to be God's hands and feet in the here and now. When we hear Jesus whisper: "what <u>do</u> you have?" we want to respond: 'it's not much, but it might do.'

Tuesdays will find us talking about what we like to call "God the Mad Farmer:" A God who is crazy enough to throw seeds willy-nilly just in case something takes hold. Rocks, birds, thistles, and yes, full sheaves, are all part of God's grace. We are going to welcome kids who have grown on nothing but rocks, who have been picked clean by vultures and who are surrounded by thorns. And we are not going to give up on them. Maybe a God who is crazy enough to love the whole world is crazy enough to love these kids too. God may just be crazy enough to speak

through a 19 year old staff or a 40 year old volunteer or through time watching the sun set, or paddling in a canoe, or hearing songs echoing through the trees.

Wednesdays will be hard; a day of confession. Who have we turned away from God's table? The gay kid? The poor kid? The 'different' kid? But just like in the parable of the Feast, we hear God saying: "Go and find them that the table may be full." We have churches who choose not to support Fowler (I spoke on this last year) and so we have to say, "who then will come?" Four retreats and a full week of our brothers and sisters from Al-Hidaya Mosque in Latham will be joining our table. The UCC gave us $5,000 for staffing and $1,000 for trail repair for this summer. As a full partner they will be joining us. Our neighbors in Speculator are stopping by camp more often. Hikers, runners, pastors, skiers, and quilters are booking our retreat centers. Who else can we invite that thought they weren't welcome?

On Thursdays we will ponder the Lord's Supper: Communion, the Eucharist. Why is there a table in every church these kids might wander into? Rather than the bread and wine transforming into us as we eat it, we are transformed into it, the body of Christ. We want them to look for that and remember that–as our Catechism says– "they belong, body and soul, to our faithful savior Jesus Christ." Fowler isn't about changing people into what we think they should be, its ministry is about giving each person an experience so that they all can go home seeing our world with new eyes. That's why **you** should bring a group on retreat to Camp Fowler. That's why **you** should spend two nights in silence in a prayer cabin. That's why **you** should scour the streets around **your** church and get kids to camp.

Finally, Friday will be a vision of hope. Peter, of all people, is told to feed Christ's sheep. And through him, we are reminded to keep a seat open at the table to resist the heresy that Christianity is about "us" when it's always been about "them."

I'm happy to answer any questions you may have about the buildings or our Board meetings or whatever else may be on your mind. I just thought, after 36 years, you might like to hear the Good News we are hoping to proclaim to children of all ages this year.

Walk in balance,

Rev. Kent Busman
Executive Director
Fowler Camp and Retreat Center
Written during Eastertide, 2023

In presenting his report, Kent noted it was written from the perspective of one attending a week at summer camp in the hope that the Albany Synod delegates who have not attended Camp in a while would experience it a little bit - even if only on paper.

He also shared some of the ongoing process of moving beyond COVID and into the more usual ministry of being in person for retreats and summer camp. Part of this is the basis for this year's summer theme: **"A Place At The Table"** where all are welcome and where hospitality is extended to each one who attends.

President van Maastricht thanked Kent for his leadership in Fowler's ministry over the years and through the difficult transition of COVID and into the future.

President's Report
The Rev. Matthew van Maastricht

President van Maastricht, invited Vice President, Rev. Becky Town, to preside as he presented his report.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and Jesus the Christ, the Great Shepherd of the sheep.

It has been my distinct honor to serve as your President for the past year. And especially, for so readily embracing this midwesterner as one of your own. Growing up in Michigan, I served within the Classis of Wisconsin for six years before coming here, and going from Wisconsin to Schenectady makes everyone's eyebrows furrow. But I am so grateful for the trust you've put in me for this season.

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There are two things that provide valuable images for me in thinking about the life of faith and of the church. One of these is of vastly more importance, as I think you will see.

The first of these has been the story of Jacob wrestling with the angel. Jacob is sending a gift to try to appease his brother Esau, the one whom he cheated out of pretty much everything in his life. So he reaches the banks of the Jabbok river, and he sends the gift ahead hoping that it will placate Esau when he sees Jacob. So he sends everything he has out ahead of him, and he will come at the end. And you know the story. Jacob spends the night on the banks of the river Jabbok. And we are told that a man shows up and wrestles with him. It always brings up a lot of questions. But here they are wrestling through the night. And as it comes to just before dawn, he strike's Jacob's hip, and, for some reason, needed to be released before the dawn, and Jacob refused to let him go until he wrestled a blessing out of this encounter. And from this encounter he acquires two new things: a new name, and a new limp. If we pause in this moment of grappling, dawn breaking but not yet arrived, hip thrown out of joint, trying to wrestle a blessing out. Pause this here in your mind's eye. This is, I think, a great description of liminality. In that thin space of twilight before sunrise.

The second image comes from the motion-picture masterpiece that is *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*. Indiana Jones goes on a quest to find the holy grail. I'm sorry if you haven't seen this, but there's spoilers here. The usual run-ins with Nazis occur and following his father's grail diary, he finds the space where the holy grail is to be hidden. In order to get to the grail

chamber, he has to make it through three tests. The Nazi soldiers fail at the first test, when they lose their heads. Literally. So Indiana makes it past the head slicing machine. He has to Q-Bert the name Jehovah, complete with remembering that in Latin it's spelled with an I, and a generation of people learned that we shouldn't learn Latin from movies. He comes to the final test, the leap of faith and he is stopped in his tracks when he is met with an impassable chasm. He tries to figure out how to get across. "No one can make that jump," he says to himself quietly. And we see him put his hand on his chest, close his eyes, and lift up his foot, and holds it there for just a moment, before stepping out, and he finds himself on a hidden footbridge which cannot be seen but was very real. If we pause at this moment, foot lifted, eyes closed. This, I think, is another excellent image of liminality. The space between moments.

Liminality is something that has been on my mind a lot, as I try to make sense out of the reality which we all experience. We are in a broad-view liminal space, between the entrance of God into flesh, and the return which will bring about the fullness of the kingdom of God. But within this, the church right now, in our context, finds itself in a liminal space. Liminal coming from the Latin word Limen, which means threshold. A liminal space is the moment of transition. Neither inside nor outside. Liminal spaces are inherently uncomfortable. I think of a child standing with the door open, standing at the threshold, and the parents yell, "in or out!" In bringing change to a system, you want a long-ish process leading up to the change, but when the moment of actual change comes, and when the commitment has been made, you want to make the moment of actual change to be as brief as possible. Because the time of turning the corner is a time in which the entire system can come apart as everyone responds to this differently.

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I recently read an excerpt from a larger Barna study on pastoral resilience, and the data in that excerpt were both shocking and sadly not surprising.

In 2015, Barna did a report on The State of Pastors.

Then, 72% said that they "feel very satisfied with their vocation as a pastor." In 2022 that number dropped to 67% and in 2022 down to 52%

In 2015, 53% of respondents said they "feel very satisfied with their ministry at their current church." That went down to 47% in 2020, and 38% in 2022

In 2015, 66% of respondents said that they "feel more confident about their calling compared to when they first entered ministry. By 2020, that number dropped to 35%. Almost a 50 percent drop in five years.

Are these numbers alarming to anyone else?

In January of 2021, 29% of pastors surveyed said they'd given real serious consideration to quitting being in full-time ministry within the last year. By March of 2022, that number had gone up to 42%

Of that 42% These were the top reasons given

"the immense stress of the job"
"I feel lonely and isolated
"current political divisions"

“I am unhappy with the effect this role has had on my family”

The last two years have been, for me, a constant season of grief where I see friends, and good pastors, very good pastors, far better pastors than I, making what is for them the right decision and leaving the pastorate. Their reasons are all their own, but the refrain is that the ministry is having a detrimental impact on their life and faith. This is not even to count those who are in a private turmoil who are not able, for whatever reason, to take the step out of the pastorate but desperately want to. These are not people who went into the pastorate on a whim, nor are these people for whom the pastorate was just a job. These are people who took seriously the promise to pledge their life to this work, these are people who gave of themselves in so very many ways to others, to their churches. But there is a point at which you can no longer squeeze water out of a well that’s been long since drained.

I know full well that the church is made up of more than just pastors, but these numbers and stories aren’t only about pastors, they are about all of us, they are about the church. This is but a single data-point about the state of the church, but this does not look very good when we, essentially, cannibalize ourselves.

Now, I will say I’m not generally known for my cheery optimism, and anyone who knows me will readily confirm that. I’m not a “glass is half empty” kind of guy. I’m a “the glass is an illusion and there’s actually nothing” kind of guy. But what I lack in optimism, I think that I make up for in hope. Because while I have very little optimism, I have great hope. Hope which is not wishful thinking, but rather a hope rooted in the promises of Jesus Christ that not even the gates of hell will prevail against the church, of which we are a tiny part.

Part of the reason for this crisis in pastoral confidence and well-being is the fact that we didn’t enter a liminal space, the space surrounded us. We did not consciously make the decision to enter a space which is in between, a space which is always in the process of turning a corner, but never quite. We never asked to be in this uncomfortable space where it seems impossible to confidently place your footing anywhere. Like Jacob, we simply expected to spend the night camped out on the riverbank, and then someone shows up and an unexpected wrestling match ensues. This liminality came upon us as if it was like a fog rolling in during the night.

And we all respond to this differently. Some of us insist that we just need to go back to some imagined golden time when things felt like they were better. And if we can just bring that back, things will be okay. Except we can’t, and it won’t. Some just blame the situations surrounding this liminal time. Sports on Sunday, over-scheduled families, the spiritual anemia that comes from the frenetic pace of life. And while these may all very well be contributing factors, blaming the cool air over the warm ground is not going to make the fog any better. Still others blame the pastor. If only the pastor would do this better or that better, then we wouldn’t have these problems. And still several others of our churches are without ministerial service long-term.

Liminal spaces are inherently uncomfortable and not enjoyable. And so we try to find something on which we can hang rationale and seek (usually in vain) to find a quick exit out of the liminal space.

We are all Jacob wrestling with the angel on the banks of the Jabbok trying to wrestle a blessing out of the strife before daybreak. We are still in the midst of the wrestling, right before daybreak. Looking ahead to a future which we cannot as yet touch.

This extended liminality is hard on pastors, it’s hard on members, it's hard on churches.

Especially when folk are trying hard to find a quick off ramp out of liminality and when folks are doing that, they are often pulling in a myriad of directions, and this is what causes such strain to a point of rupture.

This liminal space is both terrible, and the place in which we are called to live. In a large way, we live in a liminal space between the Word taking on flesh and the arrival of the fullness of the Kingdom of God. But in a narrower way, we live in a liminal space in the life of the church. The Church of Jesus Christ, that is, the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church will be fine. We confess this in the Belgic Confession. But the churches I serve? Or the churches you are a part of? Or our classes? Or the Reformed Church in America? I don't know. I don't know because none of us will see the exit of the liminal space. We are moving toward a future that none of us will ever see. In a way, we are like the ancient people wandering in the desert for forty years, always in pilgrimage to a location they will never see.

But just like Advent is not just sitting around waiting, but is filled with expectation, anticipation, so also is our existence in this liminal space not to just wait it out, not to assume that the tides will turn, and that we will recapture something of our former glory.

Hope often requires courage, courage to walk by faith and not by sight. And this season requires no less from us. One doesn't have to look too far into the future to see that we will have to redraw classis bounds. It will also require courage from classes to have hard conversations with churches about what the future might look like. It will require courage from churches to be able to engage in the process of leaning into liminality and engaging in difficult conversations not knowing where they may lead. It takes courage to try to figure out how we are going to adequately provide the ministry of Word and sacrament to all the vacant churches, both in preaching and in administration of the sacraments.

It is increasingly the case that churches cannot support a minister on their own. For some it has been the case for generations. For others, this is a newer development. And we have to get out of the idea that churches need to have their "own" pastor. There are already a number of multiple parishes in our synod, and we have to be prepared for more. We need to think about collegiate churches, union churches, federated churches. All of these require a great deal of re-thinking how we imagine the church to be.

And while the matters of the local church are between the church and their classis, the synod does, I think, have a role to play in supporting classes in these difficult tasks and conversations. The synod can help provide resources to classes who are doing this difficult work with their churches.

The Adaptive Change task force has proposals they are working on and you will hear from them. These are, I think, the kinds of things that we have to think about, that we have to consider, this kind of out of the box thinking helps us as we make the road while we are walking it.

I don't know if these are the absolute right things, I don't know where it will lead. But this is part of the nature of liminality. It requires us moving into a future that is not yet, from a past that is no longer, and an in-between space of what often feels like limbo. But we are called forward, we are called to make a path by walking it. We are not headed into unprecedented times, but we are headed into times that we have not experienced in any kind of memory. We need to take hints from the past in order to find our way into the future. This does not mean just re-living the past, but rather, to learn from the past, and the mistakes of the past, to try to move into a new

future. This will most certainly include grief and pain. But I think the question we are called to ask ourselves is whether or not we are the pilgrim people of God. We grow attached to things and ways of being, and these aren't inherently bad by any means. And—and—we are the pilgrim people of God.

Our calling in this season is to lean into the liminality. Lean into the discomfort. And when we do this, we are invited to find stability in Jesus Christ and find stability in the body of Christ.

I think that the regional synod is perhaps the most important entity in trying to help the churches to lean into this liminal space. The word synod, of course, means together on the way. Most of the time the regional or particular synod is seen as a superfluous entity. I think many in Albany Synod see the value of this entity, but there's another reason that it's important.

In a letter, dated August 23, 1968,to Bill Bouwer, the Stated Clerk of the Particular Synod of Chicago, Elton Eenigenburg, the chair of the Committee on Revision of the Constitution wrote of the regional (particular) synod as the "organic link between the classes and the general synod," and he continues, "the particular synod, often regarded as a kind of non-entity because it seems to exercise so little of the authority which is the ordinary instrument of both the classes and the general synod. However, I think it is the particular synod which keeps the Reformed Church from falling away into the kind of parochialism which would be the case if the classes did not have a point of reference beyond themselves in the general region in which they do their work, and a bureaucracy, on the other hand, which would eventuate if the general synod were able to carry on this work without constant reference to the several large regions of the church which are determined by the existence of particular synods."

This is the reason why this middle assembly is important. Because the denomination is not able to help us to lean into liminality in a meaningful way. Because to do this requires connection, it requires contextual awareness and it requires flexibility and, most of all, trust. This is not a cheap appeal to unity, but rather, an appeal to unity because we require one another in order to lean into this liminality. While I hope we have a significant commonality of witness, this is not to downplay the differences, and yes, divisions, within our Synod. Many of our congregations do not have adequate resources to faithfully lean into liminality, and the story is similar for many of our classes. This is why the regional or particular synod exists, and this is why it remains important for the future.

Beloved Synod of Albany, let us seek to lean boldly into this liminal space. Relying on one another, and most of all on Christ. Taking big leaps of faith and bold steps into a future as yet unknown as we seek to "minister to the total life of all people by preaching, teaching, and proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and by all Christian good works."[1]

Let us never forget what this is all about, it is about bearing witness with our lives to Jesus Christ who,

> "is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross."[2]

To whom be glory now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Respectfully Submitted,
The Rev. Matthew J. van Maastricht
Pastor at Altamont and Guilderland Center, New York
Great Lent, 2023

[1] *Book of Church Order* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Church Press, 2022), Preamble, 1.
[2] Colossians 1:15-20 NRSV

Becky thanked Matthew for his insightful and inspiring report and informed that the General Review Committee will bring their advice about the report later in the day.

VIII. Worship

The worship service was led by Rev. Garret Szantner, pastor of the Lynnwood Reformed Church. Musical accompaniment was provided by the worship band of the Lynnwood Reformed Church. Rev. Szantner preached using a text from John 9. Communion was celebrated with synod delegates serving.

IX. Lunch

President van Maastricht called for a lunch recess and prayer for the blessing on the meal was offered by Rev. Szantner.

X. RECONVENING PRAYER

President van Maastricht called the meeting back to order following lunch and extended the synod's gratitude to the members of the Lynnwood Reformed Church for the lunch and their wonderful hospitality.

Vice President, Becky Town offered a prayer to reconvene the synod.

REPORTS OF OUR SHARED MINISTRIES (continued)

Albany Synod Ministries Board
Ms. Deb Sanburn, chairperson

Despite the continuing challenges of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the SMB continued to meet on zoom throughout 2022, to carry out the work assigned to them.

The SMB is in a markedly better financial position than it was a few years ago. In 2022, congregational giving ticked upwards, and giving by individuals increased sharply (from $5600

in 2021, to $20,050 in 2022). We are excited by the vote of confidence in Albany Synod–our work and our people–that this giving expresses.

Clarity about the responsibilities, mission and structure of the SMB

Over the past couple years, the SMB has been in ongoing discussion about the roles and responsibilities of the members of the SMB. In March 2022, the SMB adopted a new board member description and shared it with the classes. This description is intended to set clear expectations for prospective and current SMB members regarding their role and responsibilities on the board. Read the whole SMB Board Member Description here.

At that same March meeting, the SMB finalized and adopted a new mission statement:

> ***The SMB empowers classes and congregations for revitalization, discipleship, and mission, through clear communication and relevant resourcing. We are in this together...for good.***

We expect this short, clear mission statement will form the basis of effective communications and consistent messaging. We plan to utilize it to determine whether we should take on new ideas or opportunities. We hope it will inspire board members and others to get on board and help with our work.

Also as a result of our ongoing conversation about the functionality of the SMB, we decided to petition the OJB committee to change the synod bylaws in several ways. The most significant change would be a reduction in the size of the SMB: classes would name only one delegate, instead of two. The other members of the SMB would be three at-large delegates and the synod officers. We believe this change would reduce the pressure on classes to fill these slots, and increase the opportunity for those called and motivated to do ministry at the synod level to join the board.

Teams, Programs and Circles Under the SMB's Purview

Mediation Team: The Albany Synod Mediation Team is made up of volunteers who have been trained in the methods of the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center. In 2022, they offered two "Healthy Communications" workshops–one on zoom, open to the whole synod and attended by 20 individuals, and one for an individual congregation that requested help. The Mediation Team is a resource to individuals, churches and classes that need help addressing conflict and negotiating difficult conversations. Contact Abby Norton-Levering to request assistance from the team.

Albany Synod School of Ministry: See the report of the SoM Coordinator, Sandy Cornwell, for more information about our series of courses for commissioned Preaching Elders-in-training. The SMB underwrites all costs of the SoM which are not covered by course fees. Preaching

Elders who have finished the SoM coursework and are serving in ministry are invited to join the SoM's **Preaching Elder Circle,** which is facilitated by the Rev. Dick Otterness. This monthly zoom discussion includes continuing education and opportunities for mutual support and accountability. PEs may join the circle at any time by reaching out to Dick at rhotterness@gmail.com for the login information.

The Albany Synod Christian Educators' Circle meets monthly on zoom. The circle is currently coordinated by Kelly Clement, kellyc@ccrc-cpny.org. They welcome new members! Pastors, youth group leaders, childrens' church teachers–all who work with children and youth in Albany Synod churches are invited.

Events and Trainings in 2022

The annual **Beginning and Beyond retreat,** for clergy serving in the first three years of a ministry, was held online in January 2022. The focus of the retreat was on supporting individuals and congregations with grief. It was planned by a team of volunteers and the speaker for the event was Winner Visser, a grief counselor from Ontario Canada.

The SMB sponsored an in-person **Pastors+Families Retreat** at Camp Fowler in April. It ended a bit early because of a late-season freak snowstorm, but nevertheless, the precious opportunity to reconnect with friends both young and old was greatly valued by its participants.

The SMB also sponsored an **online training for elders and deacons** in March, which was attended by over thirty people. Topics included "Consistory 101" "Goal-setting for Consistories" "Developing Group Norms" and "What's an Elder, What's a Deacon?"

Funding Available from the SMB

The SMB designated $3000 in 2022 (and again in 2023) to be disbursed confidentially to pastors and preaching elders, to support their access to counseling, coaching or spiritual direction. Reach out to Abby Norton-Levering (Synod Ministries Coordinator) or Bob Hoffman (Synod Administrator) for more info or to request funds.

The SMB also offers grants of up to $1000 to churches. Grants are available in the areas of revitalization, discipleship and mission. Find the grant application form on albanysynod.org. In 2022, the SMB paid the following grants:

$1,000 to Kinderhook Reformed Church to help fund their pastor's mini-sabbatical
$1,000 to First Coxsackie for Free Food Fridays (2nd year installment)
$1,000 to Christ Community Church in Clifton Park, to underwrite an event they hosted in October with Samaritan Counseling Center, entitled "How to Thrive Again," addressing post-pandemic stress and trauma

Stay Connected!

The best way to keep up on events and resources is by reading the Albany Synod e-newsletter. Sign up to receive the newsletter at albanysynod.org. Like our page on Facebook! You can also find contact information for synod staff at our website. Or talk to your classis' SMB representative to share your ideas or get involved!

I can't help but be encouraged with the work of the SMB. We have a group of people who long to do God's work and bless his people. Thanks to Abby and Bob for their leadership and example to us all. We are blessed.

Deb highlighted several items from the report including the new mission statement and many of the ways the SMB works to provide resources in fulfillment of the mission statement.

Matthew thanked Deb for her report and noted the General Review Committee will offer their advice on it later in the day.

Synod Ministries Coordinator Report
The Rev. Abby Norton Levering

At the start of March, I attended a gathering hosted generously by the Niskayuna Reformed Church. In attendance were Eddy Aleman (the RCA's General Secretary), several other denominational staff members, and some members of the RCA's Restructure Task Force, as well as over a hundred other Albany Synod people. The Rev. Sherri Meyer-Veen did triple duty that day, as member of the Restructure TF, Albany Synod staff person, and host, in her role as co-pastor of the Niskayuna Reformed Church. **It brought me to tears to see so many of my synod friends conversing, hugging, and singing together in one place again,** after a multi-year hiatus on these sorts of in-person gatherings because of Covid.

We experienced presentations about the Task Force's work, and profitable table conversations, but for me, the most memorable part of the event was the short worship service at the start. A motley band of volunteers led us in one of my favorite hymns, "Speak, O Lord"--the Getty and Townend classic that I secretly consider to be the Albany Synod theme song. **We sang, "Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds. Help us grasp the heights of Your plans for us."**

What a prayer for our times. The news of the world's troubles crowds us on all sides, and those whom the Lord loves and blesses–the poor, the meek, the hungry, the prophets, the peacemakers–suffer, while the rich and powerful glory in their ill-gotten gains. We need the guiding light of Christ more than ever.

The Work of Discernment–in the RCA and in Albany Synod

The Restructure Task Force reported that they were using Ruth Haley Barton's book, "Pursuing God's Will Together," as a guide for their group process. Last fall, a dozen elders and ministers from across Albany Synod also read the book in 2022, out of a desire to support the Task Force and to learn more about the process of discernment. Sherri Meyer-Veen–member of the TF and Albany Synod staff member–led the conversations when we met on zoom to discuss our learnings and insights. **One of my own take-aways from the Barton book was how a discernment process usually needs to be slow and intentional, if we are to allow enough space and silence to hear the whispers of the Spirit of God.** Renew our minds? This will take time. Grasp the heights of God's plans for us? –Impossible, out of reach, except by the grace of God, and the Spirit's willingness to show up in us and among us.

I am so very grateful to have wonderful colleagues and companions with whom to carry on this work of discernment, as well as the work of joining God on mission that inevitably flows from a genuine discernment process. I thank God for the countless volunteer leaders that staff our committees and task forces, as well as those who participate in our circles, programs, learning communities, and activities.

Synod Staff News and Changes

Bob Hoffman and I have been collaborating in ministry for nearly ten years now. It has been a deeply fruitful partnership. Sherri Meyer-Veen, Lindsey DeKruif, Sandy Cornwell, and Elif Ipek are not new to the synod, either. What a privilege to take on the work of discernment with them as thoughtful partners and co-workers in the Lord! **Our team of experienced, committed, hardworking, creative staff is well-positioned to lead into the coming years.**

Over the past year, faced with some staff vacancies, we–the synod staffers, together with the RSA personnel committee–pondered together a few questions: how has the world changed for judicatories? What work needs to be continued? Do we have to do it the same way? What new work do we need to attend to? Where has technology evolved to help us "do more with less"? How might our position descriptions change to the necessary work done? A fuller description of our process and its outcomes can be found in the report from the personnel committee.

As a result of these conversations, my responsibilities have shifted, somewhat: I've picked up some significant communications responsibilities, and I'm delighted to share more of the church renewal and resourcing work with Sherri. Lindsey's redefined role fills an important gap in our structure–she's improving our internal organization, and streamlining our event planning. **These shifts and expansions in our position descriptions haven't always been easy, but I believe they will deepen our capacity and effectiveness over time.**

My report, as always, stands alongside the report of the Synod Ministries Board and the reports of my synod staff colleagues. Much of what I do is intertwined with their work. When I first took this position, it was new, and we as a synod were discerning what exactly a Synod Ministries Coordinator would do, and be. It's been a joy to experience that understanding develop and change over the past decade. I am truly blessed to coordinate the many ministries of

individuals, congregations, classes, committees, task forces, and learning communities! It is a profoundly collaborative work–not without its pitfalls, and I certainly make mistakes as I seek to do this job as well as I can. Nevertheless, I continue to be amazed at the life and joy still abundant in Albany Synod.

Adaptive Change: Pandemic and Beyond

One particularly fruitful section of my energy has been spent with the RSA Adaptive Change Task Force, as they sought to discern some new ways to support churches in bringing necessary change to their unique contexts. I reread my annual reports from the past few years as I prepared to write my 2023 report. Here is 2022, and here is 2021, if you'd like to revisit my pandemic-era reports. **I saw a trend: the need grows each year for assistance to congregations and leaders who are exploring collaborative ministry, as well as for aid to congregations that don't won't likely ever call another full-time minister.** The Task Force wrestled a long time with what recommendations to bring to Albany Synod, and I am satisfied that both their proposals are worth the expenditure of our time and resources.

Usually in this annual report, I say more about what needs and trends I'm seeing as I travel about and work with the churches and classes of our synod. This year, between the report of the Adaptive Change TF and the SMB report (particularly around their work of refining their mission statement) I don't feel I need to say as much about these things.

Denominational Milieu

One of my responsibilities has to participate in the gathering of regional synod leaders from around the RCA, often referred to as COSE (Council of Synod Executives). This has been a fascinating venue for ministry over the past year. We struggled to function–to even find time to meet, as many of them were very, very busy addressing the challenges of congregations and classes leaving the RCA. Now some long-time members of COSE have retired or taken other jobs. I question whether COSE will continue to be an important part of my work. I wonder what process we will use to discern a way forward. **Perhaps we will re-form into a new entity, or perhaps we will see other points of connection emerge in our reorganizing denomination**–other reasons and means for meeting, sharing resources and information, and connecting.

Meanwhile, the Albany Synod officers spearheaded a gathering of the three eastern RCA synods, in February 2023, at the Warwick Center. This event surprised many participants because it was so lively, so energizing, and so fun! It remains to be seen what the impacts of the tri-synod gathering will be in coming years, but I am hopeful that we will find new ways to collaborate among the three synods in the future.

While our denomination has faced schism and shrinking, Albany Synod has remained largely united in our commitment to one another, even if we are not in lock-step agreement on all our issues. When I first started in this job, I predicted that our synod would lose 25-30% of our

churches to schism, decline and closure over the coming decade. In reality, we have only lost about 5%. **This is a testimony to our determination, our mutual engagement and our desire to grasp the heights of God's new plans for us.** We have persevered, despite enormous challenges, because God continues to beckon us into the future. We remain in this together…for good!
Your Synod Ministries Coordinator,
Abby Norton-Levering

Abby thanked the synod for these past ten years of serving as Ministries Coordinator and commented about how blessed she has been throughout those years to be working with good colleagues and the support of the whole synod - classes, congregations, pastors, and individual members. She observed there have been many changes during those ten years as we have continued to adapt to the needs realized among us.

General Review Committee Report
The Rev. Immanuel Van Tonder, reporting

The role of the General Review Committee is to advise the synod concerning any recommendations in the reports received. We met via Zoom to craft a response. Although there are no recommendations in the reports, there is much for the synod to reflect upon. We commend the President, the Rev. Matthew van Maastricht, the Synod Ministries Board Chairperson, Ms. Deb Sanburn, and the Synod Ministries Coordinator, the Rev. Abby Norton-Levering, for their fine work and reporting. As the committee discussed the reports, we became aware of the honest, creative ways they are navigating our extremely challenging times.

We reviewed the reports with three questions in mind:

- What stands out to you as something to be highlighted?
- What is essential for the delegates to take back to their classis and congregation?
- Finally, what follow-up work can be identified?

Highlights of the Reports

The President's Report by the Rev. Matthew van Maastricht discusses the concept of liminality in the life of faith and the church. Liminality is described as a transitional, in-between space that is often uncomfortable. The report highlights two images that capture the essence of liminality: Jacob wrestling with an angel and Indiana Jones taking a leap of faith.

The report addresses the challenges pastors and the church face in the current era, with shocking statistics showing a decline in pastoral satisfaction. These challenges are attributed to

the liminal space and a season of grief that the church finds itself in as it transitions between the past and an uncertain future.

The report emphasizes the importance of hope, courage, and embracing the liminal space to adapt to change. It suggests that churches and classis should engage in difficult conversations and consider new ways of organizing themselves to serve their communities better. The role of the regional synod and the Adaptive Change task force are highlighted as crucial entities in helping churches navigate this transitional period.

Ms. Deb Sanburn, the chairperson of the Albany Synod Ministries Board (SMB), reported they continued to work via Zoom throughout 2022, despite Covid-19 challenges. The SMB is now in a better financial position, with increased giving from congregations and individuals. In March 2022, the SMB discussed a new board structure and mission statement to empower classes and congregations for revitalization, discipleship, and mission.

The SMB petitioned the OJB committee after receiving recommendations from an appointed committee to change the synod bylaws, including reducing the SMB's size for better functionality. All the changes will be voted on at the synod meeting under the OJB report. Various teams, programs, and circles under the SMB's purview, such as the Mediation Team and Albany Synod School of Ministry and Christian Educators' Circle, continued their activities. Events and training in 2022 included the annual Beginning and Beyond retreat, Pastors & Families Retreat, and online training for elders and deacons.

The SMB designated funding for pastors and preaching elders and offers grants of up to $1000 to churches for revitalization, discipleship, and mission. In addition, people are encouraged to sign up for the Albany Synod e-newsletter, like their Facebook page, and visit their website for contact information.

The Rev. Abby Norton Levering, the Synod Ministries Coordinator, reported that the gathering at Niskayuna Reformed Church was attended by various RCA staff, the Restructure Task Force, and over a hundred Albany Synod members. The event focused on the Task Force's work and time for worship. The Restructure Task Force used Ruth Haley Barton's book to guide their discernment process, emphasizing the need for time and intentionality.

The Synod staff worked together to address staff vacancies and evolving responsibilities. They redefined roles to improve internal organization, communication, and event planning. The Synod Ministries Coordinator's role has evolved over the past decade to coordinate various ministries and focus on collaborative work.

The Adaptive Change Task Force has been working to support churches in adapting to change. The need for collaborative ministry and aid for congregations unable to call a full-time minister is growing. The Task Force's proposals are deemed worthwhile investments of time and resources.

The Council of Synod Executives (COSE) has faced challenges in the larger denominational context, and its future role is still being determined. However, the eastern RCA synods had a

successful gathering in February 2023, which may lead to future collaboration. Despite challenges, the Albany Synod remains largely united and determined to face the future together.

We appreciate the sense of commitment by a host of people working diligently in Christ's vineyard.

Follow-up for synod, classis, and congregations

The president's report referred to the challenges that pastors and congregations are experiencing in this time of liminality. These challenges need to be addressed through the network of church structures, but it is also the responsibility of individuals to make wise choices and do self-care.

We remind pastors and congregations that various support systems, programs, and opportunities are already available, as mentioned in the SMB report.

This lack of ministry satisfaction that some pastors experience is crucial for the delegates to take back to their classis and congregations. Congregations should proactively plan how to support the pastors best, so their spiritual and personal lives are strong, healthy, and satisfying.

We applaud the SMB for generously making grants available to empower and support pastors, preaching elders, and congregations:

· SMB designated $3000 to be disbursed confidentially to pastors and preaching elders to support their access to counseling, coaching, or spiritual direction.

· Congregations are reminded about the SMB grants of up to $1000 for revitalization, discipleship, and mission.

We are grateful that in-person retreats can now be held. We encourage congregations and pastors to participate in the opportunities available.

In light of the changing roles and responsibilities at the Synod office, the Committee proposes that the office sends out an updated roles and responsibilities list to classis and congregations.

The General Review Committee became aware of the high workload in the synod office. The synod needs to prioritize the well-being of its employees and take steps to prevent burnout. We presume that the personnel committee will keep a finger on the pulse.

In the context of the drastic changes in congregations, the synod can consider re-aligning classis boundaries or even considering affinity classis. We are looking forward to the Adaptive Change Task Force lead.

The synod does not have to do the work in a "top-down" fashion but can consider facilitating networks where there can be a free flow of support, skills, and energy.

Lumenality in the Liminality

Shining the light on liminality helped the committee acknowledge our own challenges and feel the raw emotions of this season. Seeing how much is already being done in the synod is genuinely illuminating.

The secure grounding amid the liminality is not in having all the answers to our questions or having failproof plans, but in the deep, restful peace in the Living Lord that is always present.

Recommendation: The General Review Committee recommends that the President's Report be sent out to classis and congregations for reflection in their context.

President van Maastricht thanked Immanuel and the General Review Committee for their work of review on the three reports. He reminded the delegates of the committee's "follow-up charge" to bring all the information back to their classes and congregations.

Matthew noted the recommendation offered by the General Review Committee was now before the body and called for the vote.

The recommendation **that the President's Report be sent out to classis and congregations for reflection in their context was APPROVED.**

The Stated Clerk noted he will forward the President's Report to the classis clerks for their distribution to the congregations.

ADAPTIVE CHANGE TASK FORCE REPORT
The Rev. Greg Town, Convener

Matthew welcomed Greg and invited him to update the synod on the work of the ACTF. Greg shared the original mandate given the task force by the synod executive committee: to explore and recommend avenues of engaging members of local congregations in adaptive change.

He also shared how the task force struggled through the end of the pandemic and its changes to be able to offer their report. He noted the challenges of parceling out what is clear and visible and known (which we call Technical) and what is uncertain, confusing, and complex (what is called Adaptive) and then beginning to live into something new, needed and necessary.

The task force centered their work in two specific areas and presented their two proposals to the synod executive committee. The proposals were reviewed by ASEC and then shared with the classes for their insight and response. The task force reviewed all the feedback received and will now submit the final proposals to ASEC at their next meeting. The proposals are shared with the delegates for their information.

Proposal for a RSA Rest and Resources Program (R&R)
To: Albany Synod Executive Committee
From: Adaptive Change Task Force

Objective

The RSA Adaptive Change TF proposes that the RSA create a Rest and Resources (R&R) Program for small membership congregations without installed pastors. If implemented, this program will provide the congregations that opt-in to the program:

- Financial relief
- Pulpit supply support and organization
- An invitation to re-vision their identity and mission at this time in their church's life
- A space for shame-free connection and learning with other congregations in similar situations
- Resources for the work of discerning next steps in the life-cycle of their church

Reasons:
Albany Synod does not supervise local congregations–that is the work of classes. Nevertheless, RSA has some points of connection where we could improve our support for our small-membership churches and the classes. RSA already provides training for Preaching Elders through the Albany Synod School of Ministry, as well as monthly online gathering for commissioned Preaching Elders for mutual accountability and on-going learning. In addition, RSA, alongside the classes, maintains a master list of classis-approved providers of pulpit supply (commissioned Preaching Elders, retired ministers, specialized ministers, etc.)

Albany Synod assesses the classes of the synod to fund our work via a per-member assessment system. We also fund a significant portion of our budget with gifts from churches, classes, and individuals. Though small-membership congregations pay a small amount in assessments, they remain one of Albany Synod's greatest resources. Many are vibrant, authentic communities where people care for one another and their neighbors. They seek to follow Christ as best they can, often in creative ways. The healthiest of them are re-evaluating and changing their mental models of ministry to fit their current context. Others increasingly struggle to carry on the ministries to which they've committed. They often find themselves tired and barely holding on, wondering how long they can continue in their calling of ministry within their community. These congregations, even with well-intentioned elders and deacons in leadership, often lack the skills and energy to create safe and challenging spaces for the leadership and the congregation to assess their current reality and discern God's future for them. The idea of doing things differently (or to cease being a congregation all together) becomes easily daunting.

A regular task among all the classes of the RSA has become journeying alongside small

membership congregations to discern how best to support, learn from, value, and encourage them. This program lives into the RSA motto “In this together for good” as it offers a regular pastoral presence with participating congregations, in addition to classis supervision, in order to help support opportunities for congregations to discuss the changes they are inhabiting and get access to resources they might need.

Components of the Rest & Resources Program:

A. Congregations wishing to apply for the R&R Program must meet at least one of the following standards:
   a. less than 20 active members
   b. less than 20 people in worship on a consistent basis
   c. Under long-term supervision of the classis, i.e. - there is no installed pastor, and no reasonable expectation that there will be an installed pastor in the foreseeable future
   d. consistory is under supersession

B. Applications to the program may be made on a rolling basis. Acceptance will depend upon a) whether the church’s classis approves the application, and b) whether the R&R Program has capacity to add members.
   * Flexibility is key with the R&R program. In one case, a R&R church may have a different visiting PSP each month. In another case, a R&R church may have a relationship and a contract with a PSP that leads worship regularly, and the synod assumes responsibility for paying that PSP once a month. The intention is a program that helps churches where they are currently, and doesn’t interfere or force them into something.

C. This program would come at no cost to the congregations enrolling in the program.

D. When a congregation joins, they and RSA would agree to the following:
   a. **Albany Synod would stop assessing the classis for R&R Churches (not classis or GS assessments)** and ask only for freely-given financial support from participating congregations.
   b. **Albany Synod would provide support to the classes to petition the General Synod for assessment relief for these congregations.** (A rationale for this is that relief has been provided to new church starts prior to their organization.)
   c. **Albany Synod would provide pulpit supply once a month (as scheduling and availability of PSP allows), free of charge, to all R&R churches.**

   This would ensure increased regularity, stability, and quality in worship leadership. Albany Synod would organize a team of pastors, retired ministers, and preaching elders who agree to participate in the program. Albany Synod would pay these pulpit supply providers an above-market rate honorarium and cover their travel expenses. Special consideration will be given for regular provision of the sacraments.
   d. **Albany Synod and those in the R&R program would compile and share resources to support and encourage one another**. While it remains the responsibility of each consistory to provide worship for the remaining weeks

of the month when pulpit supply isn't provided by a R&R preacher, resources can be collected to help consistories make other plans for worship (such as a hymn-sing, a prayer service, a Sunday service project, or a community meal).

e. **Albany Synod would offer (but <u>not</u> require) learning opportunities, coaching, and facilitation for crucial conversations** via Synod staff, mediation team members, or other appropriate resource people or organizations. Albany Synod might coordinate and offer optional opportunities (events, retreats, gatherings) for training, reflection, and sharing among participant congregations. This could include learning opportunities about different models of worship, leadership development, various pathways toward closure and leaving a legacy, etc.

E. **RSA staff would organize regular gatherings of pulpit supply providers (PSPs).** This component of the program would:
   a. allow for better communication and coordination among PSPs,
   b. provide a forum for PSPs to share updates regarding their experiences at R&R churches,
   c. create opportunities for PSPs to develop clear and consistent messaging to R&R churches.

F. **When a R&R PSP leads worship at a R&R church, they would be encouraged to submit an electronic report on their experience.** Responses may go to the consistory of the church, the classis clerk, any classis appointed supervisor(s), and/or synod staff. This will create a mechanism for PSPs to alert others to particular concerns, as well as help get church leaders connected to needed resources. PSPs will also be able to access reports submitted by other PSPs, so they can have a better sense of the needs and hopes of the congregations they'll be visiting.

G. **Board responsibilities would include**, but is not limited to:
   a. Further develop and fine-tune the R&R program.
   b. Research the financial implications of the R&R program for the RSA.
   c. Assist in getting the R&R program off the ground and running (recruiting, promoting, organizing, presenting the program at the RSA annual meeting, etc.).
   d. Oversee the program and evaluate its functionality and usefulness on an annual basis, or more often.
   e. Provide an annual report to the RSA meeting.

Hopeful outcomes:

The R&R Program would allow the participating churches greater freedom to focus on:

- Expressing their faith in Jesus (worship/prayer/bible study/service/etc.).
- Exhibiting love for the saints, within their own congregation and with partnering congregations.
- Taking time to rest and, with the help of resources offered, to reimagine and try new ways of being/doing church.

We perceive a few other possible advantages to the R&R Program:

- It would recognize and honor small-membership churches as they are right now, and the ministries they maintain, thereby inspiring other small-membership churches.
- It could hold up additional models for how classes might recalibrate their relationships with and supervision of these congregations.
- It would offer classes an additional vantage point into the work and ministry of each congregation, as most supervisors and other classis members cannot attend Sunday morning worship in every supervised church.
- It could allow the synod and classes to recognize and bless these congregations before they fade away or request to be disbanded.

Estimated Costs to RSA: It's difficult to estimate how much this program will actually cost, because there are many unknown variables, such as: how many churches will apply to the program? How many of them will choose to still support the synod financially, even if they are no longer assessed by the synod? Nevertheless, we imagine the synod ought to be prepared for the following possible costs:

- $200 per pulpit supply (10 per month = $2,000; $24,000 year).
- Staff costs to recruit and coordinate pulpit supply providers and churches.
- Loss of assessment dollars. (200 members @ $42/per = $8,400 year).

Funding Possibilities:
Given the current plan to put the Albany Synod Fellowship Program on hold, RSA could redirect some of the income from invested funds to the R&R Program. It might also be the case that participant congregations will increase their voluntary giving to RSA when their required assessments are eliminated.

Collaborative Ministry Learning Community Proposal
To: Albany Synod Executive Committee
From: Adaptive Change Task Force

Objective:

That the Regional Synod of Albany supports the development of a Collaborative Ministry Learning Community (CMLC). Ministers and church leaders will be invited to participate in the CMLC because they are or have been engaged in, or are seriously considering, creative joint ministry via sustained relationships with other congregations.

The CMLC would find, explore, and if necessary, create processes and resources that:

- aid Albany Synod congregations and classes in creatively reimagining collaborative ministries (because we are IN THIS TOGETHER…FOR GOOD),
- name best practices for collaborative ministries, to promote sustainability and flourishing for all involved,
- support the clergy, preaching elders, and consistories that lead these

congregations through a variety of resources, coaching, training and development of authentic community.

Reasons

Our dominant mental model of ministry in Albany Synod remains: one church + installed pastor(s) = successful ministry.

In our upstate NY context, many of our congregations are small and aging, and yet still maintaining important ministries in under-resourced communities. Some of them are exploring alternatives to this dominant mental model, which is increasingly unworkable and out of reach for many churches in the RSA. They are thinking and experimenting creatively about their options for pastoral leadership in the future.

The most common alternative mental model already employed in Albany Synod is yoked ministry (typically one pastor serving two congregations). Yoked ministry brings a particular set of challenges to be navigated by pastors, church leaders and congregations. Certain pastors, and certain congregations, are more suited for yoking than others. We who are part of Albany Synod have much to learn about forming and sustaining vibrant collaborative ministries. This need feels most urgent to the Adaptive Change TF, since many of our congregations in Albany Synod are considering yoked ministries for the first time, as they come to understand that they either cannot afford or do not need a full-time minister.

If these congregations don't do the hard work of examining and changing their mental models of church, they will bring unrealistic expectations to the new shared ministry. This is a critical moment in the life cycle of these congregations: if they navigate this transition well and wisely, they and their pastor may thrive; if they allow anxiety and fear to run the show, they'll almost certainly be disappointed and frustrated. Pastors also need space to reflect upon their mental models and patterns of ministry, and to learn from their experiences, or they will likely struggle to maintain good boundaries and burn out.

We in Albany Synod would do well to learn all we can about how to build on and improve the workability and health of multi-parish ministries, and to experiment with what might work best in our context. We ought also to explore other models of collaborative ministry, such as:

- multiple congregations/buildings/consistories served by a team of pastors/preaching elders/Christian Educators/others,
- collegiate ministry - multiple congregations/buildings with a single consistory
- multiple congregations sharing the same building,
- merger with another RCA congregation, or a union, federation, or association with another non-RCA church – this can take many forms and it can happen well and intentionally, or it can leave a wake of lingering challenges,
- bi-vocational ministry - a church shares their minister with a community

organization or business,
- designating certain churches as “chapels” that are given to the care of other congregations.

Still other creative leadership models will surely emerge, as the world changes around us. In Albany Synod, we hold to the basic principle that information alone does not transform–we also need opportunities to put that information into practice, and then to reflect upon our experiences together with others we trust.

Therefore, we propose that:

The Synod of Albany invite pastors and church leaders who have or are currently doing or seriously exploring collaborative ministry to create a learning community, in order to support, encourage, and discern with them:

- What do they (pastors AND congregations) need to thrive in ministry? How can they avoid or combat burnout?
- What do they need to learn?
- What tools might assist them? What resource people might teach them and coach them?
- What resources are available from other faith traditions?
- How can we create a safe yet challenging environment within which they can experiment, reflect, and learn together with others, in community?
- How can we support congregations in evolving their mental models of ministry?
- What models of collaborative ministry are worth exploring by our synod churches?

This **Collaborative Ministry Learning Community (CMLC)** will gather on zoom and in person over the period of 18 months, to learn, read, discuss, practice and reflect together. We will invite them to share their findings with the rest of Albany Synod by the end of 2024. Their sharing could take many forms and will be determined by those who participate, but could include:

- A handbook to assist consistories in discerning which models of shared ministry would work best in their context.
- A set of best practices for congregations that are embarking upon a new shared ministry, to set out clear expectations and to create workable situations.
- A plan to continue and expand the CMLC, and include additional congregations and pastors who are not yet serving in collaborative ministry, but want to start.
- Recommendations for fine-tuning helpful resources (such as participation in CLC/FW, coaching, consulting, mediation, healthy boundaries training).
- Continuing education to develop skills for collaborative ministry.
- Recommendations for appropriate financial support of shared ministry, such

as:

- pay increases for clergy who serve more than one congregation
- scholarships for pastors who need training or additional education for a second job (i.e. social work degree, nursing degree, non-profit management degree)
- Loan forgiveness for clergy who are called to challenging collaborative ministries
- Synod HR support to groups of churches who want to try sharing a pastor (i.e. how the synod employed fellows on behalf of churches)

Rough Budget for the CMLC:

Two Fowler retreats; other assorted meeting expenses: $10,000
Honoraria to participants in the CMLC: ~10 participants x $5,000 each = $50,000
Contract with a CMLC program coordinator: $10,000
Resources and resource people: $10,000
Total cost to Albany Synod: $80,000

Comments on funding:

- It is very likely that RSA will receive some funding for the CMLC from the Reformed Church in America.
- We may also find other partners who will want to join and support this endeavor, perhaps some of our classes, other grant sources, or private donors.
- The CMLC program coordinator may be a member of the CMLC who has time and energy to give to this project or an existing RSA staff person.

XI. PROGRAM

At this time, the synod delegates broke off in four groups to have Open Space conversation about the following topics:

The Current Reality in Our Smallest Congregations

Collaborative Ministry Among Churches

Camp Fowler Updates and Changes

Classis Capacity to do Classis Work

After the breakout sessions, the delegates heard a brief summary from each group about the conversations shared and items learned.

President van Maastricht thanked the delegates for their cooperation in participating in this program and for the good things brought out from it. He returned to the agenda item:

XII. REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

Rev. Robert Hoffman, Stated Clerk

Election of Officers
For the office of President, as specified in the RSA By Laws, Rev. Rebecca Town, Vice President, is the sole nominee.

MOTION: To forgo use of paper ballots and elect Rebecca Town to the office of President of the Regional Synod of Albany by having the clerk cast one ballot in her favor. (CARRIED)

The synod greeted Rev. Becky Town as the newly elected President of the Regional Synod of Albany. She offered her thanks and looks forward to working on the synod's behalf in the year to come.

For the office of Vice President, the following nominees were presented: Ms. Noeen Fargione and Ms. Lois Fiegl. There were no nominees from the floor.

Ms. Noreen Faregione was elected on the first electing ballot.

The synod greeted Noreen as the newly elected Vice President and welcomed her to this new role. Noreen thanked the synod for giving her the opportunity to serve in this new way.

For the office of Stated Clerk, Rev. Robert Hoffman is the sole nominee.

MOTION: To forgo use of paper ballots and elect Robert Hoffman to the office of Stated Clerk of the Regional Synod of Albany by having the clerk cast one ballot in his favor. (CARRIED)

The Nominations Committee of the Regional Synod of Albany is made up of the stated clerks of each classis. In addition to securing candidates for the officers of the synod, they have responsibility to present nominees for vacancies that appear on the Synod's Boards and Permanent Committees, Executive Committee. They also serve as the review committee for the Classis Minutes.

The clerks exchanged the Classis Minutes and reviewed them with one another. All the minutes were found in good order.

The Nominations Committee presents the following nominees to the respective boards and committees of the synod:

Executive Committee (one three year term)

Albany Representative: Rev. Paige Convis	2026
Columbia Greene Representative: Gary Smith	2026

Synod Ministries Board (three year terms – maximum of two consecutive terms)

Jeff Mc Ilrath	Montgomery	2026+
Steve Mattice	Schoharie	2026
Martha Andrews	Columbia Greene	2026
Kelly Clement	Schenectady	2026

Fowler Board of Trustees (three year terms – maximum of two consecutive terms)

Justan Foster	Albany	2026+
Jonathan Dykstra	Schoharie	2026

Personnel Committee (three year terms – maximum of two consecutive terms)

Chuck Wiessner	Columbia Greene	2026+

Finance Committee (three year terms – maximum of two consecutive terms)

John Paarlberg	Albany	2026

Overtures and Judicial Business (one five year term)

Nominee	classis	2027
Nominee	classis	2028

MOTION: To elect the individuals nominated to the boards and committees of AlbanySynod and to the Fowler Board of Trustees. CARRIED

COMMITTEE ON ACCOUNTS
The Rev. Chris Jacobsen, Chairperson

The Committee on Accounts, consisting of Rev. Chris Jacobsen, Rev. Johan Bosman, Randy Karcher, Rev. Jim Peck, and Patti Varga met on March 28, 2023 by zoom.

Meeting with the Committee on Accounts were members of the Albany Synod Finance Committee and Mr. Phil Beckett, CPA, P.C. and Albany Synod staff members Robert Hoffman and Abby Norton Levering.

Rev. Chris Jacobsen presented the report on behalf of the committee.

Audit Review

(Those who wish to review the whole Financial Review Report may request that it be sent to them by contacting Robert Hoffman at rev.robert.hoffman@gmail.com)

Rev. Jacobsen noted that the report presented by Mr. Phil Beckett was very positive and affirming that the finances of the Regional Synod of Albany are in good order. The committee presents the following recommendation:

R-1: That the financial reports of the Regional Synod of Albany for the year ending December 31, 2022, as presented by the accounting firm of Phil Beckett CPA, P.C. be approved. THE RECOMMENDATION WAS APPROVED.

Regional Synod of Albany Proposed 2024 Budget

The Committee on Accounts reviewed the proposed 2024 budget with the Albany Synod Finance Committee. The Committee on Accounts learned that the drafting of the budget begins with the end of year review of all the synod's accounts and then a preliminary draft budget is

reviewed by the Finance Committee in February and the Executive Committee in March. The final budget is prepared after feedback is received from each committee.

2024 Proposed RSA Budget
Income

Description	2022Actual	2023Approved	2024 Proposed	
Assessments	$255,959.96	$237,720.00	$237,585	
Cong Giving	25,322.60	25,000.00	25,000	
Indiv Giving	20,050.00	4,000.00	4,000	
Interest	122.48	0.00	0	
SMB Events	- 30.00	3,500.00	3,500	
School of Min	8,200.00	7,200.00	7,200	
COSE	0.00	0.00	. 0	
Investments	50,000.00	101,432.00	117,695	
Misc	0.00	0.00	0	
Total	**$359,625.04**	**$378,852.00**	**$394,980**	

Expenses

Salary				
Administrator	$ 31,299.62	$ 32,610.00	$ 33,914	
Ad Assistant	0.00	0.00	0	
Mediation	0.00	0.00	0	
Finance Mgr	7,994.20	11,570.00	12,033	
Min Coord	81,788.92	85,200.00	88,608	
Stated Clerk	7,377.24	7,672.00	7,979	
Comm Coord	15,230.88	0.00	0	
SoM Administrator	6,288.52	6,550.00	6,812	
ASFP Coord	7,034.66	16,000.00	16,640	(Program Coordinator)
FW/CLC Coord	42,396.32	61,350.00	63,804	(Minister for Renewal)
Total Salary	**$199,410.36**	**$220,952.00**	**$229,790**	
Banking				
Deferred Comp	$ 18,875.01	$ 20,500.00	$ 22,250	
FICA/offset	12,040.63	14,500.00	15,000	
Payroll	3,377.47	3,500.00	4,000	
Total Banking	**$ 34,293.11**	**$ 38,500.00**	**$ 41,250**	
Benefits				
SMC (Cell Phone)	$ 360.00	$ 500.00	$ 550	
SMC (HSA)				
SMC (Disc)	6,100.00	5,350.00	5,565	
SMC (Cont Ed)	1,375.00	1,750.00	1,750	
SMC (Exps)	5,272.31	5,000.00	5,575	

Admin (Exps)	651.75	1,500.00	1,500
Staff (Exps)	100.00	1,500.00	2,500
Prof Develop	0.00	1,000.00	1,000
Insurance	23,959.82	22,000.00	24,000
Total Benefits	**$ 37,818.88**	**$ 38,600.00**	**$ 42,440**
Office			
Equipment	$ 1,895.00	2,500.00	2,500
Supplies	35.62	750.00	500
Printing	1,866.49	2,250.00	2,300
Telephone	3,492.18	4,250.00	2,500
Internet/Web	1,366.46	1,700.00	2,000
Postage	0.00	500.00	400
Total Office	**$ 8,655.75**	**$ 11,950.00**	**$ 10,200**
Audit	**$ 3,745.00**	**$ 4,000.00**	**$ 4,000**
Building			
Contracts	$ 4,433.24	5,500.00	5,500
Utilities	3,271.80	4,000.00	4,250
Insurance/Taxes	3,154.69	5,500.00	5,500
Supplies/Misc	161.29	1,000.00	750
Maintenance	0.00	1,500.00	1,000
Total Building	**$ 11,021.02**	**$ 17,500,00**	**17,000**
Meetings			
Committees	$ 134.79	1,500.00	1,000
RS Assembly	8,030.20	6,000.00	6,000
Staff	9.99	750.00	750
COSE	956.88	3,000.00	3,000
Misc	95.00	500.00	1,500
Clerk Office	0.00	1,500.00	1,500
NYSCC	1,550.00	1,600.00	1,650
Total Meetings	**$ 10,776.86**	**$ 14,850.00**	**$ 15,400**
SMB Expenses	**$**		
Events	$		
Resources	256.00		
Discipleship	1,300.00		
Meetings			
Clergy Care/Ed			
Beg/Beyond	750.00		
Cong Health	1,500.00		
Mediation			

Fowler Partner	2,000.00		
Total SMB	**$ 5,806.00**	**$ 25,000.00**	**$ 25,000**
School of Minis	**$ 9,700.00**	**$ 7,500.00**	**$ 10,000**
Total	**$308,299.58**	**$378,852.00**	**$394,980**

The committee presents the following recommendation:

R-2 That the 2024 Albany Synod budget of $394,980 be approved.
THE RECOMMENDATION WAS APPROVED.

2024 Regional Synod of Albany Assessment

Rev. Jacobsen noted that while the Committee on Accounts knows that the RCA is moving into assessing by Covenant Shares, the committee sees benefit in using the per member assessment for this year while the Albany Synod Finance Committee can work with the RCA in developing a clearer process for applying Covenant Shares assessments while being consistent with the RCA policy of the 10% fluctuation of the current assessed amount. Therefore, the committee presents the following recommendation.

R-3 That the assessed portion of the 2024 Albany Synod budget (237,585) be supported by an assessment of $44.50 per active confessing member. THE RECOMMENDATION WAS APPROVED.

President van Maastricht thanked Rev. Jacobsen and the Committee on Accounts for their thorough work and clear report.

OVERTURES AND JUDICIAL BUSINESS COMMITTEE REPORT
The Rev. Nancy Ryan, chairperson

The following items are being presented by the OJB committee. One item, a rewrite of the Albany Synod Bylaws, requires a vote by the delegates. The other item is presented for information.

Bylaws Amendments: The OJB Committee was charged by the ASEC to review and make necessary changes to the Bylaws of the Regional Synod of Albany. The committee met on three different occasions to accomplish this task, and invited input from the various boards and committees of the synod. The sections being deleted are noted with the ~~strike through~~ and the items being added are in **bold.** Rev. Ryan walked through all the changes and briefly summarized the reasons for recommending them.

BYLAWS

of the

REGIONAL SYNOD OF ALBANY

Reformed Church in America, Inc.

Preamble

The Regional Synod of Albany is an assembly of the Reformed Church in America and embraces the classes of Albany, Columbia-Greene, Montgomery, Rochester, Schenectady, and Schoharie.

The Regional Synod of Albany is subject to the regulations of the *Book of Church Order* of the Reformed Church in America.

The responsibilities of the regional synod are defined in the *Book of Church Order* (Chapter 1, Part III, Article 2) to be:

Sec. 1. The regional synod shall exercise a general superintendence over the interests and concerns of the classes within its bounds.

Sec. 2. The regional synod shall exercise an appellate supervisory power over the acts, proceedings, and decisions of its several classes.

Sec. 3. The regional synod shall form, combine, and disband classes, and may transfer churches from one classis to another within its bounds.

Sec. 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 of Albany is incorporated as the Regional Synod of Albany, Reformed Church in America, Inc., pursuant to Section 15 of the Religious Corporations Law of the State of New York.

Article 1. Membership

Sec. 1. The regional synod shall consist of four ministers and four elders designated by each of the classes within the bounds of synod, and also the president and vice president of the synod.

Sec. 2. Delegates to the regional synod shall be appointed by the classis they represent, and their names shall be submitted annually to the stated clerk of synod by January 15. If a delegate is unable to attend a regional synod meeting, the classis shall appoint a substitute delegate and immediately notify the synod stated clerk.

Sec. 3. Delegates shall be seated from those classes that have paid the entire prior year's assessments and the current year's first quarter assessment to the treasurer by the annual meeting. Only seated delegates may vote.

Sec. 4. Members of the Regional Synod of Albany Executive Committee shall be corresponding delegates to the Albany Synod Assembly.

Article 2. Meetings

Sec. 1. The regional synod shall meet annually in May at such place and time as shall be determined at an annual meeting. The site of the annual meeting shall be based on the alphabetical listing of classes. The designated classis shall determine the procedure it wishes to use in selecting the church ~~in which the synod will meet~~ **which will host the synod meeting** for that year. The classis clerk shall notify the synod stated clerk of the selected church at the annual meeting, one year prior to the next annual meeting.

Sec. 2. Special meetings of the regional synod shall be called by the president upon written application by four ministers and four elders or as directed by the Executive Committee. Twenty-one days notice shall be given to the delegates of synod for such a meeting and this notice shall state the particular business for which the meeting is called. With consent of synod, a special meeting may transact other business, which would be legal at a regular meeting.

Sec. 3. A majority of the minister delegates and a majority of the elder delegates shall constitute a quorum at any synod meeting.

Sec. 4. The rules of order of the regional synod shall be those set forth in the most recent edition of *Robert's Rules of Order* except as is otherwise specified in the *Special Rules of Order of the Regional Synod of Albany.*

Sec. 5. The time and place of any annual or special meeting may be changed by the Executive Committee if found necessary or desirable. The committee shall notify delegates at least twenty-one days in advance of the meeting.

Sec. 6. Electronic Meetings

a. Introduction

Electronic meetings are held when a committee or board must engage in business (including the processing of motions, and collaborative, creative work) that is time sensitive and must not wait until a traditional meeting, when a traditional meeting is not possible, or for which the cost of a traditional meeting is not justified, given the purpose of the meeting, when electronic alternatives are available.

These guidelines cover two basic forms of electronic meeting, irrespective of the technologies employed: synchronous and asynchronous. The following brief definition will suffice: "Synchronous meetings occur when participants are in different places at the same time. Asynchronous meetings occur with the participants in different places at different time."[1]

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[1] *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Robert's Rules,* Nancy Sylvester, p. 238

Examples of technologies

Synchronous	**Asynchronous**
Conference Call	E-mail
Interactive Video Teleconference	Blog with Comment Feature

b. Procedures and Rules

i. Permitted Circumstances

Electronic meetings are permitted for meetings of boards and committees appointed by the assembly or its Executive Committee.

Electronic meetings are permitted only if every member of the board/committee has access to the technology allowing participation in the meeting. For example, if a committee wishes to meet by e-mail, they may do so only if every member of the committee has e-mail access. If even one member lacks e-mail access, then the committee is not permitted to use this method of hosting an electronic meeting.

ii. Call to Meeting

Only the chair of a board or committee may call an electronic meeting. The chair shall call an electronic meeting when requested to do so by two members.

iii. Quorum

A quorum for an electronic meeting of a board or a committee shall be a majority of members of the board or committee. In synchronous meetings, the chair shall declare whether there is a quorum at the beginning of the meeting. In asynchronous meetings, the chair cannot declare a quorum until the voting has yielded a quorum.

iv. Notice and Scope

The chair of the board or committee shall issue a call to electronic meeting to all the members within 3 days of an in-person meeting. For asynchronous meetings, the call to meeting commences the meeting, and shall indicate the date and time when the asynchronous meeting will close. The chair shall state the purpose of the meeting in the call to meeting. The chair shall rule out of order any original main motions not encompassed in the purpose stated in the call to meeting.

v. Participation

In electronic meetings, the same rules of privilege apply as in traditional meetings: the body may grant the privilege of the floor to a guest, who then must refrain from voting or speaking to an issue once debate closes. As in traditional meetings, a body that meets electronically is not required to grant the privilege of the floor to a guest and may choose to go into executive session.
Within the context of electronic meetings, a “guest” is a participant in the electronically delivered conversation who is not a member of the board or committee. For example, in an electronic meeting conducted by e-mail, a committee might permit a non-member to contribute, by e-mail, to the discussion.
The chair shall have the right to call the meeting with an indication whether the meeting is open or closed. A motion to open or close the meeting is in order at any time during the meeting prior to voting.

vi. Collaborative Work and Discussion in Electronic Meetings

It is anticipated that boards and committees will wish to meet electronically, not to process motions or formulate recommendations, but to discuss ideas, draft documents, or engage in other kinds of shared creative labor that arise out of the group’s commission. The results of that work likely will become the object of a motion put before the committee or board, in which case the rules for motions in synchronous or asynchronous meetings (below) must be followed. Prior to that, however, no special rules other than the ones named above need be followed, although it is the right of the body to adopt such rules if needed.

vii. Motions in Synchronous Meetings

The same rules of order for the processing of motions apply in synchronous meetings as in traditional meetings.
However, the chair shall give special attention to the characteristics of the technology in use for the synchronous electronic meeting, particularly those that might have an impact on the full participation of the members of the group. To that end, the chair, in calling the meeting to order, shall ask each attending member in turn to check-in with the chair by means of the technology adopted for that meeting, in order to ascertain that the member may participate and to give opportunity for technical adjustments before business commences. Furthermore, the chair shall determine prior to any vote or call for unanimous consent, whether any members are no longer present due to a disruption in their communication links.
The chair shall make a diligent effort to include all participating members in the discussion. To facilitate this, the chair may request all members in a

voice conference to mute their connections when not speaking. This reduces noise in the conference and allows the chair more effectively to keep the meeting orderly and ascertain that all members have the opportunity to contribute.

viii. Motions in Asynchronous Meetings

Acts in electronic asynchronous meetings must be handled by vote on motions, and not by unanimous consent.
Any member may make a motion, provided that the motion is in order.
The clerk, on behalf of the committee, may place a motion before the body.
The motion is moved when the first “yes” vote for that motion is received by the chair.
For motions offered by a member or placed before the body by the clerk, receipt of a subsequent “yes” vote is needed for support.
When a motion is placed before the body, the chair or the clerk on behalf of the chair shall state the motion and its term (the date and time when voting on this motion shall conclude).
Voting continues until all the members have voted, or until the motion’s term, whichever comes first.
The chair shall announce the result of the vote at the conclusion of the motion’s term.

ix. Following the Meeting

After the meeting has concluded, the chair shall ensure that a report of the meeting is sent to the clerk of the Regional Synod of Albany. The report shall contain all motions and their dispositions.

c. Meetings of the synod

Electronic meetings of the synod are permitted for either a stated or special session. Such meetings may only take place in a synchronous format. All electronic meetings of the synod shall conform to the Bylaws of the Regional Synod of Albany, the Special Rules of Order of the Regional Synod of Albany, and the RCA *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part III,

1. Technology Access

   The Albany Synod Executive Committee shall ensure that all delegates have proper technology so as to participate in a synchronous meeting. If any delegates lack appropriate technology, ASEC shall work with the appropriate classis(es) in order to secure such appropriate technology for their use.

2. Call to Meeting

If a meeting of the synod is to be held in an electronic format, such a meeting is to be requested by the Albany Synod Executive Committee no less than forty-two days before. The Call to Meeting for a special meeting in an electronic format shall conform to Article 2, Section 2 of the Bylaws of the Regional Synod of Albany.

Meetings in electronic format shall be approved by a majority of the classes. Notice of approval by the classis of an electronic meeting format shall be made to the Stated Clerk within twenty-one days of receiving the call to meeting.

3. Quorum

   A quorum for an electronic meeting of the synod shall be the same as the quorum identified in Article 2, section 3 of the Bylaws of the Regional Synod of Albany

4. Notice and Scope

   For the synod, an announcement of a change from an in-person meeting to an electronic meeting must be no less than twenty-one days in advance of the meeting.The agenda for electronic meetings of the synod shall be as limited as possible.

5. Participation

   In electronic meetings, the same rules of privilege apply as in traditional meetings: the body may grant the privilege of the floor to a guest, who then must refrain from voting or speaking to an issue once debate closes. As in traditional meetings, a body that meets electronically is not required to grant the privilege of the floor to a guest and may choose to go into executive session.

   For meetings of the synod, all delegates shall have the ability to speak into the meeting and to hear the proceedings of the meeting synchronously. Video presence is recommended, but not required.

6. Motions
   The same rules of order for the processing of motions apply in synchronous meetings as in traditional meetings.

   However, the chair shall give special attention to the characteristics of the technology in use for the synchronous electronic meeting, particularly those that might have an impact on the full participation of the members of the group. To that end, the chair, in calling the meeting to order, shall ask each attending member in turn to check-in with the chair by means of the technology adopted for that meeting, in order to ascertain that the member may participate and to give opportunity for technical adjustments before business commences. Furthermore,

the chair shall determine prior to any vote or call for unanimous consent, whether any members are no longer present due to a disruption in their communication links.

The chair shall make a diligent effort to include all participating members in the discussion. To facilitate this, the chair may request all members in a voice/video conference to mute their connections when not speaking. This reduces noise in the conference and allows the chair more effectively to keep the meeting orderly and ascertain that all members have the opportunity to contribute.

7. Voting

   All voting shall be taken by a method prescribed and defined by the President and shall be tallied by those appointed to serve as Tellers. Voting by email shall be prohibited.

8. Following the Meeting

   The Stated Clerk shall keep minutes of the meeting and will be subject to approval at the next annual meeting of the synod.

Article 3. Officers

Sec. 1. The officers of the regional synod shall be the president, vice president, and stated clerk.

Sec. 2. The terms of office for the president and vice president shall be from the close of an annual meeting to the close of the next. The term of office for the stated clerk shall be for two years from the close of the annual meeting in the odd numbered years.

Sec. 3. Election of president and vice president

a. Procedures for Election

The president and vice president shall be elected by ballot at the annual meeting. Seated delegates may vote. Tellers shall distribute, collect, and count the ballots.

b. Election of President

The first ballot cast shall be an electing ballot. The vice president shall be the sole nominee. An affirmative vote of a majority of seated delegates (hereinafter “majority”) shall be required for election on an electing ballot. If the vote is not affirmative or the vice president declines the nomination, the election for president shall follow the process prescribed below for the election of the vice president.

c. Election of Vice President

The nominees recommended by the synod's nominations committee shall be on the first electing ballot. Other nominees may be nominated, seconded and voted by a majority of the synod delegates and placed on the electing ballot. Only seated delegates may be added to the electing ballot.

If no nominee receives a majority on the first electing ballot, a second electing ballot will be taken. Voting will be limited to the two persons receiving the largest number of votes on the first electing ballot. In case of a tie vote on the second electing ballot, balloting will continue until there is an election.

d. Should the president vacate the office, the vice president shall be named president. In the event the vice president should vacate the office, a new vice president shall be appointed by the executive committee from the current regional synod delegates, giving full consideration to those who had the highest number of votes on the electing ballot in the previous session.

Sec. 4. Stated Clerk

a. The stated clerk shall be elected at the annual meeting in the odd numbered years. The stated clerk must be an elder or minister of Word and Sacrament. The stated clerk shall be eligible for re-election. Nominations shall be submitted by the Nominations Committee and election shall be by ballot.

b. The stated clerk may receive fees for his/her services as determined by the regional synod, together with reimbursement for such expenses as may be incurred in the performance of his/her duties.

Article 4. Duties of Officers

Sec. 1. The president shall:

a. Preside over all meetings of the regional synod and of the Executive Committee.

b. State and explain the business to be transacted, enforce the *Special Rules of Order,* and maintain decorum and dignity, becoming an assembly of the church of Christ.

c. Present the president's report at the annual meeting.

d. Appoint all standing committees subject to the approval of the regional synod.

e. Serve as the regional synod's delegate to the General Synod during the presidential term.

f. Appoint delegates to serve as tellers at the annual meeting.

g. Appoint temporary clerks as needed.

Sec. 2. The vice president shall:

a. Perform the duties of the president at the request of or in the absence of the president.

Sec. 3. The stated clerk shall:

a. Record the acts and proceedings of the regional synod. The minutes, having been examined and approved by the officers of the synod, shall be printed and the official copy shall be signed by the president and stated clerk.

b. Distribute regional synod minutes to ministers and consistories in the synod, to synod delegates, to members of the Executive Committee, Synod Ministries Board and mission staff.

c. Notify the Executive Committee and the Regional Synod of Albany Board of Trustees of the times and places of their meetings, record the acts and proceedings of the committee and board, and distribute the minutes to their members.

d. Preserve documents and records of permanent value.

e. Distribute the *Bylaws and Special Rules of Order of the Regional Synod of Albany*.

f. Send meeting materials to all delegates at least fourteen days prior to annual or special synod meetings.

~~g. Notify the stated clerk of each classis at least fourteen days prior to the annual meeting that the classis clerk shall present the minutes of classis for examination and shall submit an annual report on ministerial changes within the classis.~~

~~h.~~**g.** Make all arrangements with the host church for the annual meeting.

~~i.~~**h.** Prepare a digest of actions of the Executive Committee since the last synod and present it at the annual meeting.

~~j~~**i.** Have present at the annual meeting the minutes of the previous annual meeting, the *Book of Church Order, RCA*, the minutes of the last meeting of General Synod, and sufficient copies of the *Bylaws and Special Rules of Order* for the use of delegates present.

~~k.~~**j.** Notify all persons elected or appointed by the regional synod within ten days of their election or appointment.

~~l.~~**k.** Forward overtures to General Synod ~~no later than ten days after the annual meeting~~ **in accordance with the Special Rules of General Synod.**

~~m~~.**l.** Forward nominations to General Synod committees, to ecumenical organizations, and other agencies no later than ten days after the annual meeting.

~~n~~.**m.** Forward copies of the minutes of annual and special regional synod meetings to the denomination as prescribed by the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part III, Article 5, Section 4.

~~o~~.**n.** Submit to the president of General Synod, the annual Report of the President of the Regional Synod of Albany.

~~p~~.**o.** Serve as the chairperson of the Nominations Committee.

~~q~~.**p.** Meet with the Overtures and Judicial Business Committee.

Article 5. Executive Committee

Sec. 1. Membership and Meetings

a. The Executive Committee shall have the following voting members: RSA president, RSA vice president, RSA past president, the liaison of the Synod Ministries Board, the liaison from the Fowler Board of Trustees, the chairpersons of the permanent committees, and three elders and three ministers to be drawn from among the six classes.

b. The three elders and three ministers serving as voting members of the Executive Committee shall be nominated by their classes. The stated clerk shall request these nominations according to an equitable rotation schedule. A term for these members is three years.

c. The Executive Committee shall have the following non-voting members: the Synod Ministries Coordinator**,** the Fowler Executive Director and the RSA Stated Clerk.

d. If a Board liaison or a chairperson of a permanent committee is neither an elder nor a minister, then that chairperson shall serve on the Executive Committee as a non-voting member.

e. If the current past president is unable to serve on the Executive Committee, the president shall appoint the previous past president to serve the unexpired term.

f. The RSA Stated Clerk shall serve as clerk of the Executive Committee.

g. A quorum shall consist of a majority of the voting members serving on the Executive Committee.

h. The Regional Synod shall elect the members of the Executive Committee.

i. The Executive Committee shall meet three times per year, and additionally at the call of the president.

Sec. 2. Responsibilities

The Executive Committee shall:

a. Act as agent for the regional synod in between sessions.

b. Define responsibilities of~~-~~ **and** employ ~~and supervise~~ such staff as may be required to carry out the administration and ministry of the regional synod.

c. Appoint a search committee to recommend candidates for program staff positions.

d. Appoint a financial manager to administer funds, disburse monies, maintain complete records of such transactions, prepare monthly and annual financial reports and present these records for audit.

e. Review and submit for approval the annual budget of the regional synod.

f. Provide for the interpretation, promotion, and funding of the regional synod budget.

g. Fill vacancies on permanent committees.

h. Appoint ad hoc committees and agents as necessary to carry out the administration and ministry of the regional synod.

I. Appoint alternate members to the Overtures and Judicial Business Committee to replace members recusing themselves by conflict of interest.

j. Receive, review and report on items referred from the Fowler Board of Trustees in matters of:

i. Purchase, disposal and or mortgage of real property.

ii. Adherence to the stated investment guidelines.

iii. Incurring of any indebtedness.

Article 6. Permanent Committees

Sec. 1. Committee on Overtures and Judicial Business

a. Membership and Meetings

The committee shall:

i. Consist of five members; three of whom shall be ministers and two of whom shall be ~~elders~~ **members of a local church within the Regional Synod of Albany.** One member shall be an attorney. Members are eligible for one five-year term with one member elected each year at the annual meeting. In case of the need for recusal, alternate members will be appointed by the Executive Committee from a list of alternates provided by the Nominations Committee. The stated clerk shall attend committee meetings.

ii. Nominate its chairperson annually prior to the March Executive Committee meeting from those committee members who have served at least one year. The Executive Committee shall appoint the chairperson. The chairperson shall be a member of the Executive Committee.

iii. Meet at least once a year and additionally as needed to accomplish its responsibilities.

b. Responsibilities

The committee shall:

i. Report to the regional synod at its annual meeting.

ii.Receive complaints and appeals from classes and carry out responsibilities as defined in the *Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures*, BCO, Chapter 2, Part II.

iii. Receive and review overtures from classes and make recommendations regarding those overtures to the regional synod. Classis overtures must be received ~~sixty~~ fourteen days prior to the annual meeting.

iv. Submit for regional synod approval all proposed overtures to the General Synod.

v. Review the *Bylaws and Special Rules of Order of the Regional Synod of Albany, Reformed Church in America, Inc*. and the *Bylaws of the Board of Trustees, Lewis M. Fowler Camp and Retreat Center, Regional Synod of Albany, Reformed Church in America, Inc*., and recommend revisions to the regional synod.

Sec. 2. Synod Ministries Board

a. ~~Mission~~ **Purpose**

i. The ~~mission~~ **purpose** of the Synod Ministries Board is to coordinate and exercise oversight of resources and program support of the Regional Synod of Albany.

ii. The Board's coordination efforts shall be primarily with the Classes comprising the Regional Synod of Albany.

iii. The Board shall maintain and biennially review their operation's manual.

b. Membership and Meetings

i. The Synod Ministries Board shall have the following voting members: RSA president, RSA vice president, RSA past president, and ~~two~~ **one** delegate~~s~~ from each of the six classes (by appointment)**, and three at large members nominated by the Nominations Committee in consultation with the Synod Ministries Board.**

ii. The ~~twelve~~ **six** delegates serving by appointment as voting members of the Synod Ministries Board shall be nominated by their classes. ~~No more than one of the delegates from each classis may be a Minister of Word and Sacrament.~~ The stated clerk shall request these nominations according to an equitable rotation schedule. A term for these members is three years. A member may serve an additional term, subject to nomination by her or his classis and electing vote by the Synod.

iii. No more than five (5) of the classis appointed and at large members may be a minister of Word and sacrament.

~~iii~~. **iv.** The Synod Ministries Board shall have the following non-voting members: the Synod Ministries Coordinator **and** the Fowler Executive Director~~, and~~ **or another person designated by** the Fowler Board of Trustees ~~liaison~~.

~~iv.~~ **v.** The Synod Ministries Board shall nominate its ~~moderator~~ **chair** from among its ~~elders and minister~~ **voting** members.

~~v~~. **vi.** The Synod Ministries Board shall elect its clerk from among its members~~, and its liaison to the Synod Executive Committee~~.

~~vi~~. **vii.** A list of Board members shall be published **annually** to the regional synod ~~annually~~.

~~vii~~. **viii.** The Synod Ministries Board shall meet three times a year and additionally at the call of its **chair** ~~moderator~~.

~~viii.~~**ix.** Regular meetings of the Board shall take place, if possible, prior to the corresponding meeting of the Synod Executive Committee.

c. Accountability

The Synod Ministries Board shall be accountable to the regional synod through the Synod Executive Committee. The Board shall annually report its overall mission activity and its use of funds and staff to the Synod at its annual meeting through the General Review Committee.

Sec 3. Nominations Committee

a. Membership and Meetings

The committee shall:

i. Consist of the classis stated clerk from each classis or its designated representative and the synod stated clerk, ex officio, who shall be the chairperson.

ii. Meet at least once a year and additionally as needed to accomplish its responsibilities.

b. Responsibilities

The committee shall:

i. Nominate members for the permanent committees of the regional synod **and the at large members of the Synod Ministries Board**.

ii. Nominate the synod stated clerk.

iii. Nominate people to serve as requested by the Reformed Church in America, its agencies, and institutions.

iv. Nominate at least two willing candidates for the office of vice president. The list of nominees may be drawn from two sources: 1) from the list of delegates to the next regional synod meeting; 2) from any proposed nominees put forward by the classes. Such proposed nominees need not be delegates to the next regional synod meeting but must be eligible to be a delegate (namely, an elder or a minister within the bounds of that classis). A classis may put forward up to two proposed nominees who must be approved by a vote of that classis. The nominations committee must receive these proposed nominees no later than March 21.

v. Nominate a list of Minister and Elder alternates to serve on the Overtures and Judicial Business Committee in case of the need for recusal of current Overtures and Judicial Business Committee members.

vi. Carefully examine the minutes of the classes for the past year, calling the attention of the regional synod to any act of omission or violation of the *Book of Church Order, RCA.*

Sec 4. Personnel Committee

a. Membership and Meetings

The committee shall:

i. Consist of five members whose terms continue for three years, a part of the whole number to be elected annually, with membership limited to two consecutive terms.

ii. Nominate its chairperson annually prior to the March Executive Committee meeting. The Executive Committee shall appoint the chairperson. The chairperson shall be a member of the Executive Committee.

~~iii. Nominate its vice-chairperson annually prior to the March Executive Committee meeting. The Executive Committee shall appoint the vice-chairperson.~~

~~iv~~.**iii.** Meet at least once a year and additionally as needed to accomplish its responsibilities.

b. Responsibilities

i. Advisory

The committee shall:

a. Assess staff needs of the regional synod and recommend staff positions to the Executive Committee.

b. Develop and revise position guides for all staff.

c. Develop and maintain a system of staff supervision and evaluation.

d. Recommend employee compensation and benefits.

e. Revise and update employee handbook.

f. Provide recommendations for professional development.

ii. Operational

The committee shall:

~~a. Approve the hiring of support staff.~~

~~b~~. **a.** Approve staff performance reviews.

~~c~~. **b.** Resolve staff concerns.

~~d.~~ **c.** Provide information to the Executive Committee in the event of a staff appeal of a Personnel Committee decision.

Sec. 5. Finance Committee

a. Membership and Meetings

The committee shall:

i. Consist of five members whose terms continue for three years, a part of the whole number to be elected annually, with membership limited to two consecutive terms.

ii. Nominate its chairperson annually prior to the March Executive Committee meeting. The Executive Committee shall appoint the chairperson. The chairperson shall be a member of the Executive Committee. The synod financial manager and synod administrator shall serve as staff to the Finance Committee.

~~iii. Nominate its vice-chairperson annually prior to the March Executive Committee meeting. The Executive Committee shall appoint the vice-chairperson.~~

~~iv.~~ **iii.** Meet at least once a year and additionally as needed to accomplish its responsibilities.

b. Responsibilities

i. Advisory

The committee shall:

a. Develop and recommend the budget.

~~b. Recommend stipends for the stated clerk and financial manager.~~

~~c~~. **b.** Recommend insurance coverage for the Regional Synod.

~~d~~. **c.** Recommend changes in the regional synod investment policies.

ii. Operational

The committee shall:

a. Review reports of the synod financial manager.

b. Arrange for and review the annual audits of the financial records of the synod.

c. Oversee the implementation of the Executive Committee financial decisions.

d. Provide guidance and direction for regional synod fund-raising.

e. Invest monies consistent with the policies established by the Executive Committee.

The committee recommends approval of the changes.

MOTION: **To approve the recommended changes to the Bylaws of the Regional Synod of Albany. THE RECOMMENDATION WAS APPROVED.**

Rev. Ryan offered the following update on the most recent Appeal from Ms. Joanne Lansing.

Lansing Appeal Update: In August 2022, the Albany Synod received an Appeal from Ms. Joanne Lansing against the action of the Classis of Albany to dismiss her complaint against the Consistory of the Knox Reformed Church and Sandra Quay. The OJB Committee reviewed all the matters pertinent to the case and after careful consideration determined, "...that the appeal is clearly without merit and have therefore dismissed it in accordance with BCO 2.III.2.6." This finding was sent to all parties on November 10, 2022 and again on January 10, 2023. The OJB Committee received a communication from Ms. Lansing on February 17, 2023 requesting that the committee reconsider their decision. That request was denied by action of the committee and the decision was communicated to Ms. Lansing on February 23, 2023.

President van Maastricht thanked Nancy and the committee for their good work in these important matters.

Fowler and Synod Covenant Agreement

President van Maastricht presented the following background on the conversations leading up to the recommendation that the Regional Synod of Albany enter into a Covenant Agreement with the Fowler Camp and Retreat Center as a new way of defining our relationship together.

Background
Conversation about changing the relationship between Fowler and the synod from something outlined by the existing Bylaws to more of a covenant relationship began in Trustee meetings throughout 2022. There have been a number of conversations and meetings leading up to the presentation of this Covenant Agreement.

At their December 2022 meeting the Fowler Trustees authorized Kent Busman to share their conversations with the synod officers and inquire about the process needed to facilitate a change.

Kent Busman, Matthew van Maastricht, and Becky Town met in January 2023 and reviewed the existing relationship and documents as well as the Covenant Agreement option.

The officers asked the synod's OJB Committee to review the draft agreement.

The OJB Committee met in late January to review the Bylaws and the Covenant Agreement.

An additional meeting was held on February 15, 2023 with FBoT members, OJB members, and synod officers and staff participating to discuss a possible transition from the current Bylaw relationships to that of a Covenant Agreement.

The OJB Committee reported to ASEC on March 9, 2023 that this philosophical change will raise certain concerns for some in the synod and Fowler associations, but the actual relationship we have and the ministries being shared would not change and could actually be strengthened through the Covenant Agreement as roles and responsibilities would be more specifically identified and defined.

At their March 15, 2022 meeting, the Fowler Board of Trustees formally requested the Albany Synod Executive Committee review the current Bylaw relationship between Fowler and Albany Synod and make necessary changes to reflect the change to the Covenant Agreement relationship.

At their special meeting on March 29, ASEC approved the recommendation that both ASEC and FBoT jointly present the Covenant Agreement to the synod on May 8.

Recommendation

The Albany Synod Executive Committee recommends the approval of the Covenant Agreement between the Regional Synod of Albany and the Fowler Camp and Retreat Center.

Covenant Agreement

Lewis M. Fowler Camp and Retreat Center (Camp Fowler) and the Regional Synod of Albany (RSA) enter into a covenant agreement, making a solemn promise to each other to fulfill the mission of Camp Fowler.

The purpose of the Lewis M. Fowler Camp and Retreat Center is to glorify God, to foster growth in Jesus Christ as Lord, to experience life in a Christian community and to encourage people to live as disciples of Christ. This is to be lived out by extending Christ-like hospitality to all guests and giving special emphasis to the values of community, simplicity, and caring for the world.

I. **Parties**
   a. RSA is a Synod of the Reformed Church in America and
   b. Camp Fowler is organized in the State of New York and governed according to its laws, its Board of Trustees ("Board") and pursuant to its Articles of Incorporation and by-laws.

II. **Relationship Between the Parties**
   a. The Agreement affirms a present and historic relationship between the RSA and Camp Fowler.
   b. As part of that relationship, each Classis in the RSA appoints one (1) member to serve on the Fowler Board of Trustees.
   c. The Board directs the operations, programs, and development activities for Camp Fowler and works to fulfill Camp Fowler's obligations pursuant to its by-laws and this Agreement.
   d. Camp Fowler agrees to hold its property in trust for the RSA.
   e. Camp Fowler agrees that its real property may be sold upon collaboration and consultation with the RSA.

III. Duties and Responsibilities of Camp Fowler to the RSA
   a. The Board and its staff will maintain the real property, fixtures, equipment, and tangible assets of Camp Fowler in good working order and repair and make improvements as finances allow and needs require.
   b. If, at any time, Camp Fowler is formally dissolved, declares bankruptcy, or has a receiver appointed, its real and personal assets remaining after provision for payment of valid debts and liabilities shall revert to the RSA or its successor.
   c. The Board agrees to operate Camp Fowler according to its by-laws. Camp Fowler will provide to the RSA an annual financial report along with periodic

updates as necessary, appropriate, and reasonable pursuant to request by the RSA.

d. Camp Fowler, through its Board and staff, agrees to provide programming and leadership to uphold the historic and present focus of the Reformed tradition.
e. Camp Fowler shall include a representative of the RSA as an ex officio member with voice only on the Board of Trustees, or its successor and provide regular opportunities to report at these meetings regarding the mission and ministry of the RSA.
f. Camp Fowler agrees to give RSA first consideration in booking and will work with RSA to help facilitate rentals that are mutually agreed upon.
g. A representative of Camp Fowler shall attend Regional Synod meetings and make reports as needed or reasonably requested.

IV. **Duties and Responsibilities of the RSA to Camp Fowler**

a. The RSA provides Camp Fowler an affiliation with the Reformed Church in America and recognizes Camp Fowler as an entity related to the RSA through this covenant. The RSA encourages the full use of Camp Fowler by RCA individuals and congregations. The RSA recognizes Camp Fowler as one of its Reformed entities providing a variety of programs including ecumenical programs.
b. The RSA agrees to give Camp Fowler first consideration as a site for its programs each year and will also encourage congregations and individuals to give Camp Fowler first consideration for their programs, retreats, and events.
c. The RSA agrees to collaborate with Camp Fowler in planning and sponsoring at least two (2) events each year designed to meet the needs and support the mission of the Church.
d. The RSA shall include a representative of Camp Fowler as an ex officio member with voice only on the Executive Committee, or its successor and provide regular opportunities to report at these meetings regarding the mission and ministry of Camp Fowler. .
e. The RSA agrees to provide office space for Fowler at the Regional Synod of Albany office for as long as it is mutually agreed upon.
f. The RSA agrees to provide an opportunity for Camp Fowler representation and participation at Regional Synod meetings.

V. **Review and Renewal of Covenant Agreement**

a. In order for this covenant to be fully realized, Camp Fowler and the RSA must faithfully review and discuss the elements of the covenant in concert with the mission of Camp Fowler. Renewal is healthy and on an annual basis, this covenant will be discussed, affirmed and reaffirmed by both parties.
b. The Fowler Board of Trustees and the Synod Executive Committee will communicate this agreement each year to new and existing members.

VI. **Successors, Heirs, and Assignments**

a. This Agreement shall apply to, be binding upon and enforceable against and inure to the benefit of the parties hereto and their respective heirs, successors and permitted assigns by mutual written agreement to the same extent as if specified at length throughout this Agreement

In Witness Whereof, the parties sign this Agreement affirming the commitment to fulfill the mission of Camp Fowler.

The Regional Synod of Albany **Fowler Camp and Retreat Center**

By_____ **By_____**

Date_____ **Date_____**

Following discussion where only a few questions were asked for additional information, the following motion was presented.

MOTION: To approve the Covenant Agreement between the Regional Synod of Albany and the Fowler Camp and Retreat Center.

RESOLUTIONS
Prepared by Rev. Nick Dorland, Rev. Trey Tirpak, and Ms. Monica Marsh.

WHEREAS, we have had the opportunity to fellowship, to celebrate ministries, and to give thanks for the work of God within the bounds of the Synod of Albany; and,

WHEREAS, we have been blessed by the gracious hospitality and by the delicious meals served by the people of Lynnwood Reformed Church; and,

WHEREAS, we have been blessed by the worship leadership of the Rev. Garret Szantner and the Worship Team from the Albany Synod lifting our voice in familiar as well as new refrains; and,

WHEREAS, we were fed by the word of Jesus who draws near to the lowly, and also fed at the table of the Lord's Supper,

> **THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED this 8th day of May 2023, that the Regional Synod of Albany offer its thanks and praise for all those who demonstrated hospitality by making preparations, providing leadership, and by other ways which contributed to our spiritual and physical nourishment.**

Synod Staff Resolution

WHEREAS, the Synod has continued to be blessed by the work of the Rev. Robert Hoffman, while also noting his upcoming retirement from him congregation and his willingness to continue doing the work of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, the Synod has been blessed by the work of Elif Ipek as the Synod Finance Manager; and,

WHEREAS, the Synod has continued to be blessed by the work of Sandy Cornwell and her work as the School of Ministry Coordinator building up lay leaders through the Preaching Elder program continuing to walk alongside them even after their training, as well as all the teachers and students of the program; and,

WHEREAS, the Synod has continued to be blessed by the work of the Rev. Lindsey De Kruif and her work with the the Albany Synod Fellowship Program and the First Call Program, as well as her expanded role of Synod Program Coordinator; and

WHEREAS, the Synod has continued to be blessed by the work of the Rev. Sherri-Meyer-Veen and her work with coordinating Faithwalking and Churches Learning Change in our constant state of change; and,

WHEREAS, the Synod has continued to be blessed by the work of the Rev. Abby Norton Levering and her work as the Synod Ministries Coordinator,

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED this 8th day of May 2023, that the Regional Synod of Albany offers its sincere and heartfelt thanks and praise for the staff and the respective work they do so faithfully and well.

Reports from Committees

WHEREAS, the Synod has been blessed by the thoughtful leadership of the Rev. Matthew van Maastricht, particularly noting, in his President's Report, how he eloquently articulated the ministry world of liminality that congregations seem to inhabit; and,

WHEREAS, the Synod has continued to be blessed by the work of the Synod Ministries Board, particularly noting their new vision statement; and,

WHEREAS, the Synod has continued to be blessed by the work of the General Review Committee, particularly noting their facilitation of the open spaces conversations; and,

WHEREAS, the Synod has continued to be blessed by the work of the Committee on Accounts, particularly noting their diligence and energy around the finances of the Synod; and,

WHEREAS, the Synod has continued to be blessed by the work of the Nominations Committee, particularly noting that God is at work leading and guiding familiar and new faces to do the work of the Synod; and,

WHEREAS, the Synod has continued to be blessed by the work of the Overtures and Judicial Business Committee, particularly noting the work they have done on a bylaws change recommendation and an appeal; and,

WHEREAS, the Synod has continued to be blessed by the work of the Adaptive Change Task Force, particularly noting their two thoughtful resolutions,

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED this 8th day of May 2023, that the Regional Synod of Albany offer its sincere and heartfelt thanks and praise for all those who faithfully work through its bodies and committees.

Ministry Partners

WHEREAS, the Synod received a report from the NYS Council of Churches about the work they do including: economic justice, racial justice, social justice, human rights, care of creation, and policy and legal change efforts; and,

WHEREAS, the Rev. Peter Cook, Executive Director of the NYS Council of Churches, encouraged us to ask the question, 'why?' especially thinking about the facts of medical and housing costs and how we need to advocate for change; and,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED this 8th day of May 2023, that the Regional Synod of Albany thanks the NYS Council of Churches, the Rev. Peter Cook, and all other denominational and faith traditions affiliated therein, as we ask these difficult questions and better learn to advocate for our communities.

WHEREAS, Camp Fowler has begun to host retreats again of people from many different walks of life;

WHEREAS, the Rev. Kent Busman reminded us that Camp is a place where you will meet people 'who aren't like you,' and encouraged and challenged all of us to go to camp, send our youth to camp, and to remember the hospitality of Jesus who welcomed all.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED this 8th day of May 2023, that the Regional Synod of Albany gives thanks for the work of the Rev. Kent Busman and Camp Fowler; and, the synod prays that God would show up in special ways at Camp so those attending learn that "they have a place at the table."

Reformed Church in America

WHEREAS, we received a thorough General Synod Council report relaying the current realities of the RCA;

WHEREAS, we heard from our General Synod President Rev. Dwayne Jackson about the encouraging work and ministries in the denomination despite the reality of loss and change in the transferring of churches out of the denomination;

WHEREAS, good questions were asked and further information shared about our current reality in the
RCA as well as greetings from Vice President Rev. Judy Nelson who braved travel all the way from Holland MI;

WHEREAS, we were informed of the diligent and arduous work of the restructuring team, and were encouraged to bring any frustrations, questions, or good ideas to the team as they continue to work over the next few years, particularly noting the dedicated work of the Rev. Sherri Meyer-Veen;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED this 8th day of May 2023, that the Regional Synod of Albany extend its deep gratitude to all those who are striving to follow the ways God is at work in the Reformed Church in America.

WHEREAS, the Reverend Classis of Schoharie has invited the Regional Synod of Albany to gather and have its annual meeting at Fonda Reformed Church on Monday May 6th, 2024,

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Regional Synod of Albany, gathered at Lynnwood Reformed Church, on the 8th of May, 2023, accepts the invitation of Schoharie Classis with thanks, and looks forward to gathering at Fonda Reformed Church on Monday May 6th, 2024.

MOTION: To approve and accept these resolutions with all thanks and praise to God. (CARRIED)

XIII.UNFINISHED BUSINESS

President van Maastricht introduced the Rev. Linda Gold who serves as the Albany Synod representative the the Commission for Nominations of the RCA. Linda greeted the synod and invited, encouraged, and recommended that delegates who are interested in serving on any of the RCA commissions take the time to complete the RCA Profile Form. The completed forms are used by the Commission for Nominations to fill vacancies on the various commissions. Linda noted that profile forms are applicable for three years and then should be re-submitted for use by the Nominations Commission.

XIV. Commissioning of Officers

The following newly elected officers of the Regional Synod of Albany were commissioned to their respective offices by Rev. Matthew van Maastricht, now Past President of the Regional Synod of Albany.

Rev. Becky Town	President
Ms. Noreen Fargione	Vice President
Rev. Robert Hoffman	Stated Clerk

XV. Adjournment

MOTION: To adjourn the annual assembly of the Regional Synod of Albany with the benediction following the commission of the new officers

Respectfully Submitted,

Rev. Robert Hoffman, Stated Clerk

Rev. Matthew van Maasstricht, President