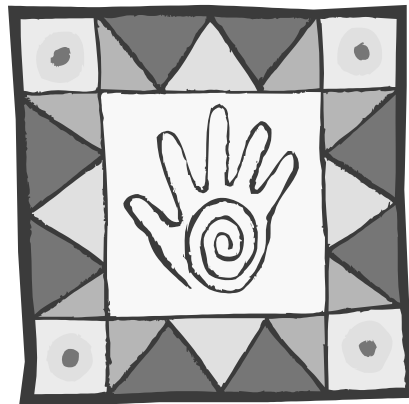


# CLASSIS LAKE ERIE STRATEGIC PLAN

JANUARY 2002



**NEW CONGREGATIONS CELEBRATING WITH OLD CONGREGATIONS, NEW  
MINISTRIES COMING ALONGSIDE LONG ESTABLISHED FAITHFUL MINISTRIES,  
PERSONS OF LONG FAITH WORSHIPING JOYFULLY ALONGSIDE PERSONS OF  
NEW FAITH. LIVES CHANGED BY THE POWER OF GOD, THE HUNGRY FED,  
THE SICK HEALED, THE SORROWING COMFORTED, THE DESPAIRING GIVEN  
HOPE.**

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## INTRODUCTION

Classis Lake Erie of the Christian Reformed Church is a collection of twenty-two congregations and almost five thousand baptized members scattered across eastern Lower Michigan and Ohio. The Classis links these congregations with each other and with the agencies and assemblies of the Christian Reformed denomination. The pattern of organization that governs the Classis is steeped in a tradition stretching back to the 1618-19 Synod of Dort in the Netherlands and is outlined in the Christian Reformed *Church Order*.

*We are a  
changing  
denomination.*

Since the early nineties and perhaps before, the Classis has found itself confronting trends and forces that challenge its traditional structures and ways of operating. Among these trends are the following:

- Changes in the religious culture**, including increased movement of members among denominations and congregations, the rise of megachurches, and greater emphasis on excellence in programs and worship.

- Changes in demographic patterns** of the Classis region and in the core population of the local churches of Classis Lake Erie themselves. These changes include movement of the white population from the central city to the suburbs and to the countryside beyond the suburbs, overall decline in the population and wealth of urban centers, and substantial growth in black and Hispanic populations.

- Changes in the denomination** to which the Classis belongs, including changes in funding, revenues, and a greater emphasis on Classical initiatives in missions.

These changes and others have both challenged the congregations of Classis Lake Erie to new growth and made them vulnerable to decline. They are opportunities and threats. The congregations of the Classis have responded in various ways to these challenges, as they consider how best to be the church in the twenty-first century. Classis, one step removed from the actual ministries of the congregations and of the various specialized ministries under its jurisdiction, has also begun to reconsider its role for the future.

## **DISCOVERING OUR MISSION**

### **Classis History**

Classis Lake Erie came into existence in 1960. The fifteen organized congregations and one campus ministry that formed the new Classis out of congregations that had been members of Classis Grand Rapids East, Classis Kalamazoo, and even, for one church, Classis Chicago South, fell into three distinct groups.

Four churches, all in Ohio, were either approaching or had already passed their centennial (Cincinnati, Cleveland Eastside, Cleveland West Park, and Willard). Seven churches, all in Michigan, were formed in the years between World War I and World War II, especially in the decade of the thirties (four from that decade, counting Ann Arbor Campus Chapel; the others are Detroit, Dearborn, Flint, Imlay City, Lansing, and Saginaw). The remaining five were congregations organized in the middle and late Fifties (Ann Arbor, Cleveland Maple Heights, Columbus, Jackson, and Roseville). Out of this mixture of congregations came into existence not only the formal apparatus of a Classis but a Classical identity.

These were expansive times and interesting times in the Classis Lake Erie region. Within the decade after the organization of the Classis six new congregations were added (Akron, Dayton, Inkster, Toledo, Troy, and Washington, PA). Total membership increased by 28% and the number of families by 19%.

Growth and change were everywhere in those days. It was the time of the civil rights movement. Campuses were filling up with the children of the post-World War II period, and this generation was far more affluent, assertive, and prone to political activism than had been previous generations. The ferment on the campuses spawned new campus ministries. Between 1966 and 1970, four campus ministries were added to the existing Campus Chapel (1966: Michigan State; 1970: Kent State, Ohio State, Wayne State). Toward the end of the Sixties, the Vietnam war began to focus the attention and anger of the new generation.

Classis Lake Erie reflected the times. Located a little outside the Christian Reformed mainstream, marked by the presence of several large, activist campuses, Classis Lake Erie filled with young professionals who had left the heartland of the Christian Reformed Church for new lives. The churches and pastors of the Classis established a mood and an identity based in challenge to the status quo. Not every church nor every pastor participated in the same

way or the same extent in the shaping of Classis Lake Erie, but soon the Classis had an identity, a set of common concerns.

Among the common concerns of the Classis were and are:

- **Concern for inclusiveness**, manifested in the longstanding support of the Classis for opening positions of power and influence to women and minorities.
- **Concern for social justice**, manifested in support for local, diaconal ministries and for broader, denominational efforts to alleviate hunger and bring justice to the poor and oppressed.
- **Concern for the relationship of the church with the colleges** and universities of our region, recognizing that institutions of higher learning are the cauldron of the culture of tomorrow.
- **Willingness to experiment with new forms of worship** and ministry, including founding congregations in non-traditional (for the CRC) settings and encouraging a variety of institutional chaplaincies.
- **Concern that meetings of Classis remain free and open** to the discussion of issues, and not caught up in procedural matters

Thirty-five years after the Classis was formed, the churches of Classis Lake Erie find themselves in a new ministry context. The region has suffered through economic difficulties, stagnation in population growth, and seemingly intractable social problems.

*We have changed demographically.*

From 1975 to the present, Classis Lake Erie has added two congregations (Lansing Covenant and Troy Han-Bit) and now includes three promising church plants (Lansing Hmong Community, Ann Arbor Lighthouse, and Wixom); during the same period it has lost five congregations (Cleveland Maple Heights, Dayton, Farmington Hills, Inkster, and Washington, PA; Detroit Community CRC, later Nardin Park CRC/RCA was never an organized CRC congregation but did number 28 families in 1975; Cincinnati New Community begun in 1991 joined Cincinnati CRC to form Crosspoint).

Since 1975 Classis Lake Erie has remained relatively constant in number of families, (counting only officially organized congregations to keep the statistics uniform), (-105, -9%), but has

lost 1197 persons from the number of total members, a loss of 23%. Not all of this decrease is due to membership loss; the total membership statistic has also been affected by changes in denominational assessments. During this period birthrates have declined, denominational loyalties have waned, and the post-World War II generation has aged.

Chaplaincies have also been hurt: at present only three institutional chaplains and three campus ministries remain. At one point in the late seventies, Classis Lake Erie had nine institutional chaplains working within its borders; two were prison chaplains, the others, medical.

*Our early mission  
was to church  
individuals.*

One way to understand the new context in which our congregations now find themselves is to ask to whom the mission of the church is directed. In earlier generations the unstated assumption was that the mission was first to those persons in a community who had ethnic or traditional connections to the Christian Reformed Church. A mission cast in this form created a certain kind of church. These churches were frequently small, but with memberships scattered widely across large urban areas. The glue that held them together was ethnic and social; the latter often concentrated on school connections. These churches grew when other people with the same ethnic and traditional identity moved into the area; they declined when these same people moved out.

Such churches have strengths. They are often very stable. Their membership is loyal. They can argue about all sorts of things without those arguments leading to a splitting of the fellowship. If, however, mission is defined in terms of reaching those in our communities who have not found the Way, the Truth, and the Life, then these churches are not very effective. Their strong identity tends to exclude those who do not share that identity.

In Classis Lake Erie several trends have made this fact plain to us. Fewer people with Christian Reformed connections are moving into our cities. More people from our churches are being transferred to other regions of the country. Even those who come to our cities with previous Christian Reformed experience and those who have been members of our congregations have less loyalty to the denomination. They do not automatically become or remain members of our congregations. These trends create boom

and bust cycles: when several new families with Christian Reformed connections move in, the result of a new company opening its offices or the expansion of an existing company, the congregation prospers; when, on the contrary, a company closes its offices and several families are transferred out, the congregation suffers. Over the past couple of decades we have had more of the latter than of the former in Classis Lake Erie.

These trends are not unique to Classis Lake Erie. They are found across the denomination and across the American religious scene. They are exacerbated in Classis Lake Erie by the existence of so many small, suburban churches. As recent experience shows, we are especially vulnerable.

Where vulnerability is, opportunity is also. We have the opportunity to consider our mission anew in the light not only of contemporary trends but also in the light of the gospel. Embracing the strong past of our Classis, with its laudable emphasis on inclusiveness, justice, and innovation, we look forward to seizing our mission in new ways and new contexts, believing that the Spirit is continuing to reveal to us the fullness of the gospel. As the Spirit continues to shape our Classis for the mission to which we are called, we look with eager anticipation to the future.

In what follows we have attempted to state our present understanding of our Classical mission. The first section attempts an *Understanding of the Mission of the Church*; the second, a brief description of the *Roles and Values of Classis*, as these emerge from our understanding of the mission of the Church, our own history, and the challenges of our time; the third, a statement of what we believe to be the central *Mission* of Classis; the fourth, a brief sketch of our *Vision* for the Classis, the fifth, a listing of the *Ministry Priorities* of the Classis; and the sixth and last section, a description of a revised *Administrative Structure*.

## UNDERSTANDING THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

One goal of this document is to clarify the mission to which the Church has been called and to which, as part of the church, our classis has been called. Understanding that mission is crucial. By defining it carefully, in the light of what we have learned from the Lord, we enable ourselves to make better decisions, to provide encouragement and support for our congregations and ministries, and to hold each other accountable for our tasks. The following is a statement in broad terms of the mission of the Church; in the comments that follow this broad statement is applied to our own time and place.

**Christ calls and sends the Church, which is shaped by the Gospel and given life by the Spirit, to be a community of witness to the present and coming Reign of God and by its witness to call all people to himself.**

*Christ calls  
and sends the  
Church.*

That **Christ calls and sends the Church** means that first and foremost we belong to Jesus Christ, who is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and end. It is in Christ that we find our unity and our identity. It is by the blood of Christ that we are cleansed. It is as the Body of Christ that we give expression to the new life that is within us. It is as disciples of Christ that we are sent into the world to call the world to him. The Church is, thus, "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic," as we are taught by the Nicene Creed.

*I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me . . . [The good shepherd] calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.*  
John 10:14, 3b-4

*What is your only comfort in life and death?  
That I am not my own, but belong--body and soul, in life and death--to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.*  
Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 1

*What do you believe concerning the "holy catholic church"?*  
*I believe that the Son of God through his Spirit and Word, out of the entire human race, from the beginning of the world to its end,*

*gathers, protects, and preserves for himself a community chosen for eternal life and united in true faith. And of this community I am and always will be a living member.*

Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 54

*The Church is one.*

Because the Church is **one**, we guard against all forms of divisiveness, all unholy competition among congregations and ministries, against, in short, all the sins of schism. Classis Lake Erie, by uniting our congregations, expresses our desire to be one with the whole Church of Jesus Christ.

*Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit--just as you were called to one hope when you were called--one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

Ephesians 4:3-6

*We grieve that the church which shares one Spirit, one faith, one hope, and spans all time, place, and language has become a broken communion in a broken world.*

Our World Belongs to God 43

*The Church is holy.*

Because the Church is **holy**, we strive to live in the righteousness to which we have been called, standing apart from the spirits of the age and the idolatries of our time.

*To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ--their Lord and ours.*

I Corinthians 1:2

*But just as the One who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do, for it is written: "Be holy because I am holy."*

I Peter 1:15-16

*You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into wonderful light.*

I Peter 2:9

*To follow this Lord is to serve him everywhere without fitting in, as light in the darkness, as salt in a spoiling world. We serve Christ by thankfully receiving our life as a gift from his hand.*

Contemporary Testimony 45 & 46a

*The Church is universal.*

Because the Church is **catholic**, we embrace the worldwide mission of the Church in its rich variety, resisting the temptation to think that the truth is ours alone and opening ourselves to what God has to teach us through others (being Reformed means always reforming).

*There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working but the same God works all of them in all people.*  
I Corinthians 12:4-6

*The body is a unity, though it is made up of many parts; and though its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were given one Spirit to drink.*  
I Corinthians 12:12-23

*The Church is apostolic.*

Because the Church is **apostolic**, we are called to go and make disciples among all nations, including the whole territory of Classis Lake Erie, with its large cities, its small towns, its rich countryside, its many college campuses, its hospitals filled with suffering people, its prisons filled with the lost and despairing--with all its people, the sisters and brothers to whom we are called.

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

*The church is shaped by the gospel.*

**Shaped by the gospel** means that we of Classis Lake Erie hold to be of central importance the Reformation emphasis on the power of the Word of God as read in the Scriptures, preached in our communities, and enacted in the sacraments. We believe that where the Word of God is faithfully studied, preached, and obeyed, people are freed, transformed, and given new life.

This emphasis also defines the scope of church: church is found wherever two or three are gathered in the name of the Lord. The Word may be a simple sharing of gospel truths among friends; the table of the Lord, a kitchen table in someone's apartment; the discipline of the Church, holding each other accountable as friends and fellow Christians. Church is found in hospital rooms as well as sanctuaries, in dorm lounges as well as officially organized congregations.

Therefore, we value and hold to be of first importance obedience to the Word of God. We strive together to be communities where the gospel is faithfully preached and taught, where the sacraments form and express our identity in Christ, and where we encourage and hold each other accountable for our Christian lives.

*Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am also.*  
Matthew 18:20

*For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile--the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call upon him, for "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news"*  
Romans 10:12-15

*Our new life in Christ is celebrated and nourished in the fellowship of congregations where God's name is praised, the Word proclaimed, God's way taught; where sins are confessed, prayers and gifts are offered, and sacraments are celebrated.*  
Contemporary Testimony 39

***Given life by the Spirit*** means that the spiritual life and truth we possess are not achievements of our own but are gifts of God. Therefore, we come to all aspects of our mission prayerfully, seeking the will of the Lord and bending our will to God's will. We recognize the Spirit of Christ in self-sacrifice and service. We value a humble and teachable spirit, open to reformation by the Spirit of God.

*Have this mind in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death--even death on a cross.*  
Philippians 2:5-8

*Why are you called a Christian?*  
*Because by faith I am a member of Christ and so I share in his anointing. I am anointed to confess his name [and] to present myself to him as a living sacrifice of thanks . . .*  
Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 32

*The church is called and led to be a community of witness.*

***To be a community of witness*** means that our testimony to the lordship of Jesus Christ and to the new life that comes through faith embraces all aspects of the life of our communities: words, relationships, actions, and organizations.

Therefore, we resolve to maintain the clarity of our witness by showing the love of Christ to all people and by seeking together to measure up to the fullness of Christ.

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*

Acts 1:8

The gifts Christ gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

Ephesians 4:11-13

*The church is to witness to the present and coming reign of God.*

***To the present and coming Reign of God*** means that our communities are not in themselves the Reign of God, but testimonies to God's Reign, for God's Reign is altogether greater and not in any sense dependent on our best efforts. We are saved by grace alone.

Therefore, never confusing the church with the coming of God's Reign, we look to the justice, peace, and joy of the coming Reign of God with eager anticipation and fervent prayer and rejoice in the evidences of God's Reign wherever we find them.

*We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what we already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.*

Romans 8:22-25

*Our hope for a new earth is not tied to what humans can do, for we believe that one day [God's] kingdom shall come fully, and our Lord shall rule forever.*

Contemporary Testimony 56

*The church is to call people to Christ by its witness.*

***The Church by its witness [exists] to call all people to Jesus Christ means*** that we place the evangelistic task of the church in central place. This task does not divide us into two peoples, those who call and those who are called, but one people gathered by the Lord. Therefore we make renewed efforts to be obedient to the call of the Lord ourselves and to call all those who would come to be the disciples of Jesus Christ, filled with the new life of the Spirit.

*But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.*

John 12:32

## **Classical Roles and Values**

A Classis is a community of congregations. It is as necessary to congregations as congregations are to Christians. A Classis encourages congregations and ministries in their walk with the Lord, holds them accountable in spiritual and community matters, and provides them from time to time with financial and other resources. A Classis also worships the Lord and witnesses to the gospel of Jesus Christ, bringing together congregations and ministries into a larger sense of church.

In doing this work, we of Classis Lake Erie have learned to value the following:

- **Meeting together,**  
for it is in our meeting together in discussion, worship, and prayer that our life together in Christ is strengthened and deepened and that we become church.
- **Diversity,**  
for we recognize that communities and ministries can and should take different approaches and that one way is not sufficient to express the whole measure of Christ. We value campus ministries as well as congregational ministries, urban and rural ministries as well as suburban ministries, and chaplaincies as well as churches.
- **Participation of a variety of persons in our ministries and meetings,**  
for in this way the fullness of Christ is revealed. We especially welcome participation by those persons who have been excluded from church leadership in the past.
- **Encouragement of and accountability to each other,**  
for we recognize that the spiritual lives of our communities will be strengthened when we are held accountable for our faithfulness to our Lord, to his Word, and to each other.
- **Justice,**  
for the Scriptures teach us that in the measure that we seek justice for others we do the Lord's work.
- **Sharing of financial, material, and human resources,**  
for the Lord has given us much and calls us to use these resources in creative ways to encourage and develop communities of faith in our midst. As God has given to us, so we all are called to give to others.
- **Participation in the denomination of which we are a part,**  
for we as a Classis owe to our denomination the same level of participation we expect from our congregations.

In short, we value the community of Classis Lake Erie, its history, its variety of congregations, ministries and people, and we seek to foster these ministries by sharing resources and by encouraging each other in the mission the Lord has given us. By gathering together we remind ourselves that the mission that the Lord has given us is larger than our individual congregations and ministries—that it is a mission to the whole area of the Classis. In this, we seek unity of purpose, but not a sameness of approach or style, believing that the wind of the Spirit blows where it will and that we must be open to new manifestations of the Spirit's presence. We hope to have unity in essentials, freedom in all else, and love above all. We hope to avoid both the narrowness of approach that would fit all ministries into a single model and the breadth that would lose our common commitment to the Lord. In all things we seek to be faithful to the Lord, disciplined by the Scriptures, and open to the Spirit.

### **Mission of Classis**

*The mission of Classis Lake Erie is to be a community of witness to Jesus Christ and to the Reign of God in the whole region to which we have been sent, fostering an increasing number and diversity of congregations and ministries where the good news of Jesus Christ is announced, the love of Christ expressed, the worship of God encouraged, and persons of every race, class, ability, age, and background gathered around the table of the Lord in joy and peace.*

## **Vision of Classis**

Therefore, it is our vision as a Classis that

*We come to know the Lord and each other better, so that we may pray for each other, encourage each other in faith, offer guidance to each other, and support each other, while we await the abundant gifts of God, which include:*

***New congregations celebrating with old congregations, new ministries coming alongside long-established, faithful ministries, persons of long faith worshiping joyfully alongside persons of new faith--lives changed by the power of God, the hungry fed, the sick healed, the sorrowing comforted, the despairing given hope,***

*And that given all these things by God, we will be a powerful witness to the hope of the Gospel and that our names and faces will come to reflect not only the richness and diversity of the people among whom we work and worship but the face and name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

## MINISTRY PRIORITIES

- Prayer
- Mission shaped congregations
- New church development
- Specialized ministries
- Leadership development
- A nurturing community
- Effective Classis organization

### MINISTRY PRIORITY 1: PRAYER

*We will pray for  
our ministries.*

***We commit to*** the support of all of the ministries of Classis Lake Erie with prayer, and to call our congregations to a comprehensive and consistent prayer life.

#### PRAYER

***We commit because*** prayer is the context for ministry. The *Heidelberg Catechism* states that prayer is “the most important part of thankfulness.” Prayer is our starting point. By beginning with prayer we acknowledge that our mission comes from God. In prayer, we ask God to shape, direct, and empower us.

#### ***Therefore we will:***

- Encourage and support prayer ministries in our congregations.
- Recruit regional and/or Classical prayer coordinators who will encourage and support congregational prayer coordinators in fostering prayer in our congregations and ministries.
- Provide training for pastors, key leaders, and prayer coordinators.
- Provide for the effective sharing of the joys and needs of Classis, Classical ministries, and the local churches.
- Establish prayer partnerships between churches.

*We will support  
local ministries.*

## **MINISTRY PRIORITY 2: MISSION-SHAPED CONGREGATIONS**

***We commit to*** the encouragement, support, and equipping of congregations for vital local ministries that call all people to become disciples of Jesus Christ and which help people in Jesus' name.

*By the year 2012, our congregations will have active mission plans and we will experience at least 3% total growth by evangelism in this Classis considered as a whole.*



***We commit because*** the first priority for our mission plan is to strengthen, encourage, support, and equip our existing congregations for their ministries. Our existing congregations are our most important resource.

### ***Therefore we will:***

- Communicate the Biblical-theological basis for the mission-shaped congregation to the churches.
- Create a process by which we hold each other mutually accountable for our ministries.
- Make available the necessary tools and resources for development and deployment of mission plans.
- Provide leadership training for pastors and key leaders that helps them to discern God's call for their congregations and to structure their church's ministry around this call.
- Furnish financial assistance through Direct Classical Aid for the development and deployment of ministry plans.
- Create and maintain a resource network to share expertise, ideas, and resources.

### **MINISTRY PRIORITY 3: NEW CHURCH DEVELOPMENT**

*We will plant new churches.*

***We commit to*** continue to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to a diverse and changing population through the planting of new churches.

*By the year 2012, Classis Lake Erie will plant 8-10 new churches in a variety of ministry settings, taking account of the diverse demographics of the Classis Lake Erie region.*

MISSION	DEVELOPMENT
PRAYER	

***We commit because*** by following the New Testament pattern of continually establishing new congregations, we obey our Lord, respond to the needs of those around us, and create a climate in which all of our congregations will grow.

***Therefore we will:***

- Build awareness in local congregations of ministry opportunities in the Classis Lake Erie region.
- Develop effective models for church planting, which address the needs for ministry in the region such as: word and deed ministries, multi-ethnic churches, and clustering new churches in specific geographic areas.
- Identify potential parenting congregations and promote the birth of new churches by established mother congregations.
- Build support resources for new churches and church planters.
- Identify and target areas in the Classis' regions for new church plants.
- Work with congregations interested in joining Classis.
- Develop financial resources to support new church plants.
- Extend Classical privileges to new church developers and solicit their involvement in Classical ministries.
- Provide Classical visibility for new church developers: speaking tours, pulpit supply, oral reports at Classis meetings and other opportunities as they arise.

## MINISTRY PRIORITY 4: SPECIALIZED MINISTRIES

*We will support ministries serving specific groups.*

***We commit to*** taking responsibility for the nurture, encouragement, and support of specialized ministries (such as chaplaincies, campus ministries, youth ministries, diaconal ministries, and prison ministries) both within and outside the congregations of Classis Lake Erie.

*By the year 2012, Classis Lake Erie will bring 20 ministries to diverse, local settings, and will provide encouragement and resources so each congregation of Classis will develop at least one new ministry by 2012.*



***We commit because*** by fostering a variety of new specialized ministries we will reach persons who otherwise would be neglected, we will encourage the growth and diversity of our congregations, and we will obey the Lord who commanded us to reach out to those whom society overlooks.

### ***Therefore we will:***

- Assist congregations to identify specific local ministry needs.
- Provide models and resources for specialized ministries.
- Develop partnerships and networks that support local leaders of specialized ministries.
- Extend Classical privileges to campus ministers and chaplains and solicit their participation in Classical committees.
- Process funding requests.
- Assess the faithfulness with which these ministries pursue their missions and objectives
- Maintain contact with the ministries in order to stay informed regarding their progress.

*We will cultivate  
new leaders.*



### **MINISTRY PRIORITY 5: LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

***We commit to*** the identification, training, and support of leaders (for the local, Classical, denominational and ecumenical levels) who represent the existing diversity of gifts, people, and interests within Classis.

***We commit because*** encouraging training among deacons, elders, ministers and others will do more that almost any other program to enhance the ministries of Classis Lake Erie.

***Therefore we will:***

- Promote the vision of Classis Lake Erie and of the local churches to encourage visionary leadership.
- Encourage each local ministry to use gifts discovery programs regularly.
- Urge each local ministry to identify at least one lay leader each three years who could be trained and deployed Classically, denominationally, and/or ecumenically.
- Assure diversity. To this end, Classis Lake Erie will:
  - Establish a minimum of one half lay leadership for all Classical committees, allowing for exceptional cases.
  - Cultivate Classical leadership that reflects the diversity of our churches and region.
  - Continue to nominate members of Classis Lake Erie, especially from among groups that have been underrepresented, to denominational boards.
- Encourage the use of networks within Classis to strengthen local church leadership.
- Assist local congregations in the development, maintenance, growth, and renewal of youth and young adult ministries.
- Provide training:
  - At the Classical level to elders and deacons.
  - That is ministry specific (e.g. small groups, Church education, and worship)
- Provide financial assistance:
  - To local congregations and their pastors for sabbatical study
  - To those preparing for the office of evangelist and minister of the word.
  - To churches for leadership development in the form of grants for seminar, conference and training event attendance.

### **Ministry Priority 6: A Nurturing Community**

*We will help build relationships.*

***We commit to*** the development and nurturance of relationships and networks that build community and fellowship within Classis, in order to build up the church of Jesus Christ.

<b>SPECIALIZED MINISTRIES</b>	<b>LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>NURTURING Relationships</b>
<b>MISSION</b>		<b>DEVELOPMENT</b>
<b>PRAYER</b>		

***We commit because*** these relationships and networks will enable Classis to truly function as a community of congregations.

***Therefore we will:***

- Continue to hold retreats in conjunction with each Classis meeting.
- Develop the sharing time at Classis meetings to include small group prayer, celebration of ministry and worship.
- Encourage churches to practice regional and/or Classical pulpit exchanges, joint worship services, music festivals, and retreats.
- Promote the development of significant joint ministry relationships among local churches.
- Establish a Classical newsletter so that churches can share their ministries and prayer concerns.
- Maintain and promote a Classical web site and other forms of electronic communication.

*We will be active  
in the CRC  
denomination.*

## **Ministry Priority 7: Denominational Involvement**

***We commit to*** full participation in the life of the Christian Reformed Denomination.

***We commit because*** as Classis is a community of congregations, the denomination is a community of classes. By our participation we strengthen this community and take strength from it.

DENOMINATIONAL INVOLVEMENT		
Specialized Ministries	Leadership Development	Nurturing Relationships
Mission		Development
PRAYER		

### ***Therefore we will:***

- Encourage all established churches to pay full denominational and Classical ministry shares.
- Provide leaders for denominational agencies and boards.
- Provide leadership on denominational issues.
- Advocate for local churches and ministries with denominational agencies.
- Invite denominational representatives to Classis meetings.
- Use appropriate communication channels to bring the concerns of the denomination to the churches and the concerns of the churches to each other and to the denomination.
- Establish a place on the agenda of Classis meetings for discussion of those issues of mutual concern.

*We will create an effective structure.*

## MINISTRY PRIORITY 8: EFFECTIVE CLASSIS ORGANIZATION

***We commit to* BEING STRUCTURED TO CARRY OUT ITS MISSION PLAN AND CHURCH ORDER RESPONSIBILITIES. CLASSIS MEETINGS will be designed TO EMPHASIZE MINISTRY AND fellowship IN ADDITION TO GOVERNANCE.**

Effective Classis Organization		
Denominational Involvement		
Specialized Ministries	Leadership Development	Nurturing Relationships
Mission		Development
PRAYER		

***We commit because*** by providing an effective committee structure and ways to meet, we will enable the Classis to make better decisions and increase the capacity of Classis to support its ministries.

### ***Therefore we will:***

- Nominate and elect those gifted in administration to serve as Classical chairperson and to conduct Classical meetings. A president and vice-president will be elected (from nominations not less that double the number of open positions) with the vice-president succeeding the president as chair of Classis for one year. Both officers serve ex officio on the Classical Executive Committee.
- Request churches to appoint its Classical delegates to a yearlong term of attendance.
- Recognize and facilitate the multi-ethnic composition of Classis through cross-cultural celebration and communication of Classis meetings.
- Provide orientation for new delegates to Classis at each meeting.
- Monitor and evaluate Classical meetings and make the changes needed to enhance our Classical priorities.
- Promote the vision and mission of Classis in a variety of ways so that it is widely known and acknowledged by Classis.
- Provide opportunity for annual church visits (church order Article 42) at one Classical meeting each calendar year.

*We will practice church visiting.*

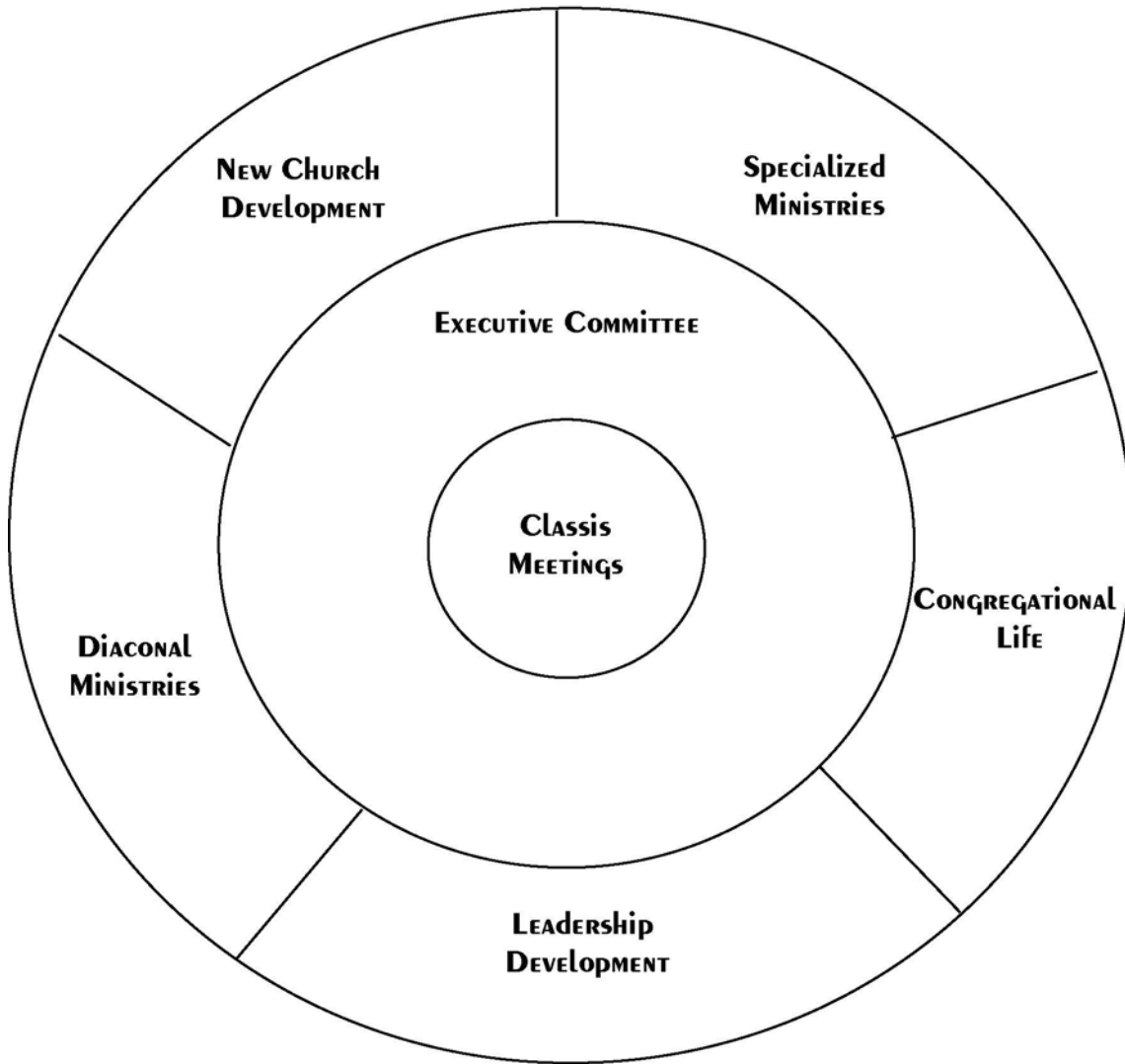
The annual practice of church visiting will take place at the spring meeting of classis each year, according to the following format:

- Delegates from the congregations will be divided into groups of no fewer than three congregations in each group. The Executive Committee in consultation with the church visitors and regional pastors will designate the groups.
- One hour of time will be appointed for these group meetings.
- One person in each group will be designated by the Executive Committee to serve as facilitator and another to serve as

reporter. The facilitator will lead the group through its discussion of the questions designated by the Executive Committee; the reporter will file a report with the Stated Clerk no later than one week after classis has met.

- The Executive Committee will review the reports at its April meeting and present a summary to the next meeting of classis. It will address concerns that arise out of the reports in a timely and appropriate manner.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE CLASSIS LAKE ERIE**



## ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

*Our structure should answer these goals.*

In order to meet our basic goals, the structure and committees of Classis Lake Erie should:

- Be closely tied to the Ministry Priorities previously discussed.
- Have as little hierarchy as possible.
- Avoid meetings to consider the results of other meetings.
- Grant authority as well as responsibility to those immediately involved in ministry.
- Provide continuity for ongoing ministry.
- Honor our commitment to diversity of involvement in committees.
- Empower rather than hinder the ministries of local congregations.

**Classis structure is composed of six committees and the general body.** The committees are:

- The Executive committee
- The Congregational Life committee
- The New Church Development committee
- The Specialized Ministries committee
- The Diaconal Ministries committee
- The Leadership Development committee

The executive committee has six members, one elected from each region represented by Classis. The other five committees have five members each. These members are appointed by Classis from nominations secured through member congregations.

Committee members are elected to office for a term of three years, and are eligible for a second term of election. Committee service is limited to six consecutive years. Each committee will appoint a chair who will call a minimum of three meetings a year.

Each committee will be responsible for presenting a ministry plan through the Executive Committee to Classis. The Ministry Plan will be based on the Classis Lake Erie Strategic Plan and will present specific objectives for the committee. Each committee will report to the Classis through the Executive Committee.

## **THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

At the heart of the structure is an executive committee, empowered to bring order and quality to the various ministries of the Classis.

### **THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:**

#### **Is entrusted with:**

Ministry Priorities      6: A Nurturing Community,  
7: Denominational Involvement, and  
8: Effective Classis Organization.

#### **Is accountable for:**

- The form of subscription (*Church Order* Article 5)
- Admission to the ministry (Article 7)
- Admission of ministers from other denominations (Article 8)
- Appointment of councilors for calling churches (Article 9)
- Examination of candidates and installation of ministers (Article 10),
- Loan of ministers to other denominations (Article 13)
- Release of ministers because of resignation or non-ministerial vocations (Article 14b-e)
- Outside employment of ministers (Article 15)
- Release of ministers not worthy of discipline (Article 17)
- Emeritation (Article 18)
- Certification that a given position meets the criteria for ordination as an evangelist (Article 23)
- Examination of evangelists (Article 24)
- General rules for the agenda and organization of Classis, including appeals (Articles 28-34)
- Implementation of judicial code (Article 31c sup.)
- Mandate for interim functions of executive committee (Article 33b)
- Organization and disbanding of councils (Article 38)
- Supervision of congregational credentials (Article 41)
- Appointment of church visitors (Article 42)
- Licensing of exhorters (Article 43)
- Nomination of synodical deputies (Article 48a0)
- Discipline (Articles 78-81 supp.)

**Works to** expedite and maintain the effective function and relationships of our:

Classical committees  
Leadership and staffing  
Denomination  
Local bodies  
Meetings  
Policies and agenda  
Communications  
Judicial functions.

To serve the goals related to the denomination, the executive committee will:

- Provide leadership on denominational issues.
- Invite denominational representatives to Classis meetings.

To serve the goals related to the goals of policies and agendas, the executive committee will:

- Assign parts of these mandates to another ministry committee or appoint an ad hoc committee as needed.
- Oversee long range planning for the Classis, including five-year evaluations and updates of this plan.
- Act for Classis when matters must be decided before the next plenary session.
- Maintain and review the policies and procedures of Classis.
- Establish a place on the agenda of Classis meetings for discussion of those issues of mutual concern.
- Supervise along with the Leadership Development Committee the nomination and election of Classical representation attending to the issue of diversity in areas of gender, ethnicity, and office.

To serve the goals related to Classical committees, the executive committee will:

- Insure that the provisions of the strategic plan are carried out
- Monitor and maintain the work of the committees.
- Receive reports, budget proposals, and ministry plans from the ministry committees,
- Coordinate the ministries of Classis.
- Be accountable for any church order duties not specifically assigned to another ministry team.

To serve the goals related to leadership and staffing, the executive committee will:

- Supervise the work of the Stated Clerk and Treasurer.
- Provide leaders for denominational agencies and boards.
- Supervise the nomination and election of the Classical chairperson.

To serve the goals related to communications, the executive committee will:

- Insure that these reports are clear, concise, and complete and to present these to Classis so that Classis can efficiently, accurately, and comprehensively decide the issues presented by the committees.
- Encourage churches to practice regional and/or Classical pulpit exchanges, joint worship services, music festivals, and retreats.
- Establish a Classical newsletter so that churches can share their ministries and prayer concerns.
- Maintain and promote a Classical web site and other forms of electronic communication.
- Use appropriate communication channels to bring the concerns of the denomination to the churches and the concerns of the churches to each other and to the denomination.
- Provide orientation for new delegates to Classis at each meeting.
- Promote the vision and mission of Classis in a variety of ways so that it is widely known and acknowledged by Classis.

To serve the goals related to the judiciary functions, the executive committee will:

- Supervise and maintain the judicatory functions of Classis including, when necessary, appointing and assigning tasks to temporary committees before plenary sessions.
- Make all necessary assignments and appointments for the examination of candidates for ecclesiastical office.

To serve the goals related to the meetings, the executive committee will:

- Prepare the agenda for the meetings of Classis.
- Sponsor a retreat in conjunction with each Classis meeting.
- Develop the sharing time at Classis meetings to include small group prayer, celebration of ministry and worship.
- Recognize and facilitate the multi-ethnic composition of Classis through cross-cultural celebration and communication of Classis meetings.
- Monitor and evaluate Classical meetings and make the changes needed to enhance our Classical priorities.

To serve the goals related to the local bodies, the executive committee will:

- Appoint church visitors and supervise the annual visits between churches.
- Encourage all established churches to pay full denominational and Classical ministry shares.
- Advocate for local churches and ministries with denominational agencies.
- Request each church to appoint its Classical delegates to a year-long term of attendance.
- Provide opportunity for annual church visits (*Church Order* Article 42) at one Classical meeting each calendar year.

**Is comprised of** six members of Classis, elected by Classis, each representing one of the six regions:

Northern Ohio: West Park, East Side (Cleveland) Akron (Akron)  
Southern Ohio: Willard (Willard), Olentangy (Columbus),  
Crosspoint (Cincinnati)

Northern Michigan: Community (Saginaw), Good Shepherd (Flushing), Imlay City (Imlay City), Wixom (emerging church)  
Eastern Michigan: First (Detroit), Han Bit (Rochester Hills), North Hills (Troy), Immanuel (Roseville), Dearborn (Dearborn)  
Southern Michigan: Ann Arbor, (Ann Arbor), Community (Toledo), Ann Arbor Campus Chapel (emerging), Ann Arbor Lighthouse (emerging)  
Western Michigan: River Terrace (East Lansing), Cascades Fellowship (Jackson), Covenant (Lansing), Charlotte (emerging), Lansing Hmong Community (emerging)

The president and vice president of Classis, as well as the Stated Clerk, and Treasurer are members of the executive committee.

**Is staffed by** the Stated Clerk and Treasurer

**Is led by** a chair elected by the committee, the Stated Clerk serves as secretary.

**Works with** General Secretary and Executive Director of Ministries of the CRCNA, Abuse Prevention, Chaplaincy Ministries, Disability Concerns, Pastor-Church Relations, and Race Relations agencies.

## **CONGREGATIONAL LIFE:**

This committee is responsible for fostering growth and vitality in the congregations of Classis Lake Erie. The congregational life committee is:

**Entrusted with** Ministry Priority 2: Mission-shaped Congregations

**Is accountable for** Classical home missions (*Church Order* Article 75a)

### **Works to:**

- Communicate the Biblical-theological basis for the mission-shaped congregation to the churches.
- Create a process by which we hold each other mutually accountable for our ministries.
- Make available the necessary tools and resources for development and deployment of mission plans.
- Provide leadership training for pastors and key leaders that helps them to discern God's call for their congregations and to structure their church's ministry around this call.
- Furnish financial assistance through Direct Classical Aid for the development and deployment of ministry plans.
- Create and maintain a resource network to share expertise, ideas, and resources.

**Is comprised of** five members of Classis, one of which acts as chair.

**Works with** Christian Reformed Home Missions, Christian Reformed Publications, and Christian Reformed World Missions

## **NEW CHURCH DEVELOPMENT**

The new church development committee is responsible for fostering the development of new congregations within the boundaries of the Classis. The new church development committee:

**Is entrusted with** Ministry Priority 3, New Church Development

**Is accountable for** Classical home missions committees (*Church Order* Article 75a)

### **Works to:**

- Build awareness in local congregations of ministry opportunities in the Classis Lake Erie region.
- Develop effective models for church planting, which address the needs for ministry in the region such as: word and deed ministries, multi-ethnic churches, and clustering new churches in specific geographic areas.
- Identify potential parenting congregations and promote the birth of new churches by established mother congregations.
- Build support resources for new churches and church planters.
- Identify and target areas in the Classis' regions for new church plants.
- Work with congregations interested in joining Classis.
- Develop financial resources to support new church plants.
- Provide Classical visibility for new church developers: speaking tours, pulpit supply, oral reports at Classis meetings and other opportunities as they arise.

**Is comprised of** five members of Classis, one of which acts as chair.

**Works with** Christian Reformed Home Missions and The Back to God Hour

## **SPECIALIZED MINISTRIES COMMITTEE:**

The Specialized Ministries Committee is responsible for the nurture, encouragement, and support of specialized ministries both within and outside the congregations of Classis Lake Erie. The Specialized Ministries committee:

**Is entrusted with** Ministry Priority 4, Specialized Ministries.

**Is accountable for** Classical home missions committees (*Church Order* Article 75a)

### **Works to:**

- Process funding requests.
- Assess the faithfulness with which these ministries pursue their missions and objectives.
- Maintain contact with the ministries in order to stay informed regarding their progress.
- Assist congregations to identify specific local ministry needs.
- Provide models and resources for specialized ministries.
- Develop partnerships and networks that support local leaders of specialized ministries.
- Provide encouragement and resources so each congregation of Classis will develop at least one new ministry by 2012.

**Is comprised of** five members of Classis, one of which acts as chair.

**Works with** Christian Reformed Home Missions, Christian Reformed World Relief Committee, Abuse Prevention, Chaplaincy Ministries, Disability Concerns, Race Relations, and Social Justice and Hunger Action offices

## **DIACONAL MINISTRIES COMMITTEE**

This committee is responsible for facilitating the work of the deaconates of Classis Lake Erie. The Diaconal Ministries committee:

**Is entrusted with** Ministry Priority 5, Leadership Development

**Is accountable for** Diaconal ministries (*Church Order* Article 75b)

### **Works to:**

- Encourage visionary leadership among deacons.
- Cultivate diaconal leadership that reflects the diversity of our churches and region.
- Provide deacon training at the Classical level.
- Provide models and resources for diaconal ministries.

**Is comprised of** five current or former deacons of Classis, one of which acts as chair.

**Works with** Christian Reformed World Relief Committee and Social Justice and Hunger Action Office.

## **LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

This committee is responsible for fostering leadership development at all levels within and among the congregations and ministries of the Classis. The Leadership development committee:

**Is entrusted with** Ministry Priority 5, Leadership Development

**Is accountable for** the Student fund (*Church Order* Article 21)

### **Works to:**

- Regularly promote the vision of Classis Lake Erie and of the local churches to encourage visionary leadership.
- Encourage each local ministry to use gifts discovery programs regularly.
- Urge each local ministry to identify at least one lay leader each three years who could be trained and deployed Classically, denominationally, and/or ecumenically.
- Cultivate Classical leadership that reflects the diversity of our churches and region.
- Sponsor ministry-specific training events (e.g. small groups, church education, and worship).
- Encourage the use of networks within Classis to strengthen local church leadership.
- With the Diaconal Committee, provide elder and deacon training at the Classical level.
- Provide grants to churches for leadership development through seminars, workshops, and training events.
- With the Executive Committee, continue to nominate members of Classis Lake Erie to denominational boards, especially from among groups that have been underrepresented
- Provide financial assistance to those preparing for the office of evangelist and minister of the word.
- Provide financial assistance to congregations and their pastors for sabbatical study.
- Assist local congregations in the development, maintenance, growth, and renewal of youth and young adult ministries.

Is comprised of five members of Classis, one of which acts as chair.

**Works with:** Pastor Church Relations, Race Relations, Calvin College, Calvin Theological Seminary, CRC Publications, CRC Home Missions, and Dynamic Youth Ministries.

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