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**SYNOD OF MID-AMERICA**  
**Reformed Church in America**  
**NEWSLETTER - - - Volume 13, Number 2 - - - January 23, 2012**  
<http://www.midamericasynod.org>  
<http://msyn.org>

**“Healthy classes and congregations through revitalization and multiplication”**

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### **Synod Assembly Delegates Now in Place**

A new synod structure was approved at the last annual session of the Synod of Mid-America; since then it has been transitioning into that structure. The ongoing regular oversight of the regional synod is now charged to an Executive Team. The annual session of the regional synod is now known as the Synod Assembly. The delegates from the classes making up the Synod Assembly will have an extended role in that they will have multiple year terms. Synod Assembly delegates will have time to get to know the mission, vision, and work of the synod in order for them to best carry out their two primary responsibilities:

- Be responsible to see that the Mission of the Synod is carried out, to establish policy to realize the Vision of the Synod, and to continually evaluate the progress towards realizing the Vision of the Synod.
- Be responsible for long-range plans and goals of the Regional Synod.

The new Synod Assembly members will have orientation conference call meetings in late February or in March. The Synod Assembly meeting has been set for Tuesday, April 24, 2012. Details of the meetings are still being finalized. The Synod Assembly members are:

- Chicago Classis: Dave Parrish, Christopher Poest, Rich Schuler
- Illiana-Florida Classis: Newton Fairweather, Aaron Klein, Kurt Koster, Glenn Sterrett, Matt Waterstone
- Illinois Classis: Edie Lenz, Jim Patterson, Ken Renkes
- Wisconsin Classis: Carleen Vande Zande, Brad Veenendaal, Bob Wierenga, Lyle Zumdahl
- Officers and staff: Chad Schuitema (P), Jimmie Stevenson (VP), Elmer Van Drunen (PP), Randy Kooy (SC/T), Wayne Van Regenmorter
- Ex officio members/representatives: Cary Winn (OBJ chair), Laura Vroom (Manitoqua director), Christopher Poest (GSC representative & already a Synod Assembly member)

### **2012 Youth Ministry Conference**

Journey at Western Theological Seminary in partnership with the RCA Youth Team have announced this year's Youth Ministry Conference. The conference begins Thursday, May 3 at 3:00pm and ends on Friday, May 4, 2012 at 3:30pm. The main presenter this year will be Kara Powell, author of *Stickyfaith*, a guide that presents both a compelling rationale and a powerful strategy how to actively encourage young persons' spiritual growth so that it will stick to them into adulthood and empower them to develop a living, lasting faith. In addition to three main presentations there will be an opportunity to choose and attend two workshops. More information will be coming, but you can already see more by following this link: <http://www.westernsem.edu/journey/events/youth-ministry-conference/#3>. Those who work with the youth are encouraged to reserve these dates.



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### **Celebration Stories**

You can share your stories of celebration what is happening in your church in this section. The story in this issue is a discovered one! An interview column in The Post-Tribune, a newspaper that serves northwest Indiana, recently featured an interview with Shawn Gerbers. Shawn is the pastor of Ross Community Reformed Church in Gary, Indiana. The headline given by the columnist, Jeff Manes, is **Young pastor feels blessed by congregation**. Much of the article is written in question and answer format. You can read it here:

<http://posttrib.suntimes.com/news/manes/10064213-452/jeff-manes-young-pastor-feels-blessed-by-congregation.html>.

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We share stories with one another so that God's name is praised, first of all. These stories, though, have the added value of encouraging those who do God's work. Please send your stories of God's activity in the revitalization of people or of a ministry and/or stories of the multiplication of ministries to Randy Kooy at [rkooy@msyn.org](mailto:rkooy@msyn.org).

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**From Wayne Van Regenmorter, Synod Visionary Leader ([wregen@msyn.org](mailto:wregen@msyn.org)):**

***Ridder Leadership Initiative Is Expanding...***

Last week the Sustainability Team of the Ridder Leadership Initiative (RLI) met in Grand Rapids for a day of visioning, strategy, and planning for the future. The RLI is an intentional process of focusing on personal and congregational transformation. It is a joint effort of Journey at Western Theological Seminary, the regional synods of the Great Lakes and Mid-America, and the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) Home Missions. Currently the RLI functions as a learning community of pastors and 29 congregations (25 RCA and four CRCNA, with 50 pastors and 225 congregational leaders). This learning community initiates and practices a systemic learning process of health and vitality for leaders and churches that is aimed at faithful and fruitful missional engagement.

As a transformational learning model, the RLI draws on participants learning as they work through an ongoing spiral of learning (information), practice, reflection, and further learning--Jesus' model with His disciples. Transformational learning, seen in this way, is **high expectation learning** (where participants enter into a clear covenant which is honored with high expectations) **in community** (where the pastor(s) and congregational leaders learn, practice, reflect, and engage in further learning together), **in and out of context** (where new material is often learned in a location outside of the congregational context and the practice and reflection is done in the congregational context) **over time** (the first learning module lasts two years and a second module of two years is available, as well).

Working in partnership with Jim Herrington and Trisha Taylor, the RLI encourages pastors and congregations toward one focus--personal and congregational missional living. Most churches have a variety of good programs and events that are offered but what often is missing is the more personal transformation and passionate spirituality needed by leaders and congregations for sustainable change and community impact. Consistently in the RLI there are four values that are communicated, practiced, and lived: integrity—doing what we say we will do when we say we will do it; authenticity—saying what is so for us; courage—the ability to stay in action in spite of negative feelings; and love—playing in a way that no one wins unless everyone wins.

Five mental models are taught and their implications are lived out: missional discipleship, thinking systems and observing process, developing and sustaining creative tension, team learning, and practicing how to live into God's preferred future with a community of leaders and disciples. Through this one "end game," four core values, and five mental models, the pastors

and congregational leaders deepen into communities of shared practice and join Jesus in ministry and mission.

So what are pastors learning and dreaming about? What are churches experiencing in practicing new ways of doing things? Here are some examples:

- "It's really personal--the goal is to help us become the kind of people who can manage change well as we move at a congregational level through some difficult initiatives of creating and sustaining good, positive change toward the future. "
- "It has helped us be able to give language to what we are trying to model for the congregation in terms of community and grace and truth."
- "The Leader's Journey has been very helpful for our leadership, because we've been able to open up avenues of discussion and conversation about church life that I'm not sure we've ever had."
- "Our consistory meetings are looking very different--the percentage of time that we spend on business is less, with more time on personal growth, spiritual growth, looking at group dynamics and how we handle conflict, how we need to learn to listen better and work as a group."
- "Our small groups will look different...not just Bible study, but will also have components of accountability, really challenging congregation members to look at whether the goal is just to create good church members or to create disciples of Christ."
- "This process allows us to let 'what is' be out there, and let the Holy Spirit do something with it." The challenge is to ask, 'Why is it the way it is?' without trying to fix it."
- "I have a dream that one day, I will lead a community of people who follow Jesus; not just so that we have the benefits of a Savior, but also so that, in following Jesus, we know what it means to live into God's design for each and every human being."
- "I have a dream that one day, I will be part of a community of people who look deeply into how they were shaped in their family of origin and *allow Jesus* to heal them, *ask Jesus* to help them move forward, and then, *hear Jesus* calling them to take responsibility for their role as co-creating change agents for the Kingdom-Come in their community."
- "I dream of my own journey from death to life – from despair to hope becoming not just a part of me but who I truly am. I dream of not being defined by my losses and my past, but having learned from them, to become a more gracious, loving, authentic person. I dream of being the person I know God called me to be. I dream of tearing down the walls I have built around me – the walls that I use to keep others out but also the walls that keep me trapped."
- "I dream of a transformed church – a church that is able to allow that which is not healthy, faithful or life-giving to die. Of a church willing to embrace deep change and allow death to happen for the things that hold them back."
- "I dream of living my life with authenticity, courage, integrity, and reliance on Christ in such a way that it inspires others to press deeper into the realities and joy of Christ."
- "I dream of a community who loves each other so well the loves spills out to those around. A place where love is not confined to those who look like us and think like us, but is large enough, strong enough, and complete enough to invite others to share in it."
- "I have a dream that one day...my life won't be more important to me than the lives of those around me, that my selfishness and self-absorption will be weeded out through the hard work of transformation."
- "I have a dream that one day...I will be a man who lives out of his heart instead of his head; that I will no longer just know the right thing to do, but I'll do it; that an active love will drive me in my marriage, with my sons, and with the people I co-labor."

Currently there is an expressed interest to replicate the RLI in at least five of the six other regional synods and in some other areas of Home Mission in the CRCNA. The Ridder Leadership Initiative Sustainability Team's prayer is that more and more congregations will be

learning communities of missional imagination and Christian practice through which an untold number of lives will be transformed and communities will be renewed to the glory of God. If you would be interested for you and your congregation to be a part of this learning community in May, 2013 (the next learning cycle) please contact me.

Wayne Van Regenmorter

January 23: Chicago Coordinating Committee/Calvary Reformed Church/Orland Park, IL  
24: Illiana Executive Team/New Wave Network Meeting/Faith Church/Dyer, IN  
25: Office/Coaching  
26: Wisconsin Classis Revitalization Team Meeting/First Reformed Church/Waupun, WI  
27: Vacation Day  
28: Off  
29: Sunday Worship  
30: Office  
31: Illinois Revitalization Team Meeting/Emmanuel Reformed Church/Morrison, IL  
February 1: Meeting/Community Reformed Church/Lafayette, IN  
2: Staff Meeting/Camp Manitoqua  
3: Office  
4: Off  
5: Sunday Worship

**Wayne's contact information:**

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**From Randy Kooy, Coordinator-Administrator-Stated Clerk-Treasurer ([rkooy@msyn.org](mailto:rkooy@msyn.org)):**

What follows below are a few links to on-line articles that one may find interesting or helpful:

**High court exempts churches from job discrimination laws** – from The New York Times  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/12/us/supreme-court-recognizes-religious-exception-to-job-discrimination-laws.html?\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/12/us/supreme-court-recognizes-religious-exception-to-job-discrimination-laws.html?_r=2)

In what may be its most significant religious liberty decision in two decades, the Supreme Court on Wednesday for the first time recognized a “ministerial exception” to employment discrimination laws, saying that churches and other religious groups must be free to choose and dismiss their leaders without government interference. “The interest of society in the enforcement of employment discrimination statutes is undoubtedly important,” Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. wrote in a decision that was surprising in both its sweep and its unanimity. “But so, too, is the interest of religious groups in choosing who will preach their beliefs, teach their faith and carry out their mission.”

*Related article:* **Court: Judges cannot get involved in church dispute** (The Associated Press via Yahoo News)

<http://news.yahoo.com/court-judges-cannot-involved-church-dispute-152559467.html>

**Study: Younger Christians care less about church** – from The Christian Post

<http://www.christianpost.com/news/study-younger-christians-care-less-about-church-66731/>

The Barna Group has released a study of what American Christians experience in their hearts and minds during their time in church, revealing the gaps in experiences regarding denomination and age. One category that was monitored was connecting with God, which the study described

as the most important outcome to churches. According to the study, 66 percent of churchgoers said they have had a personal connection with God during church service, while one-third of churchgoers never felt a connection God during church. ... The generation gap least affected by church is the 18-27 group. Only 47 percent feel a connection to the church versus 71 percent in the 28-46 age group and 71 percent in 47-65 age group. Only a fifth of 18-27-year-olds say that church has affected their life greatly and 56 percent feel a personal connection with God.

*Related article using the same study: **God-Connections in Church Are Rare, Study Says** (The Christian Post)*

<http://www.christianpost.com/news/god-connections-in-church-are-rare-study-says-66779/>

**The (digitally) connected church** – from Leadership Journal

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2011/fall/connectedchurch.html>

Many church leaders are waking up to the fact that social media is a force to be reckoned with. The numbers don't lie: there are 500 million Facebook users—and 50 percent use it every day. Twitter, a micro blogging tool that allows users to post 140 character messages, also boasts millions of active users with thousands joining daily. With numbers like these, it's only natural to wonder how you might use social media to help your ministry. This article explores three significant ways to leverage social media to multiply a ministry's effectiveness.

**When hubris comes to church** – from Church Central

<http://www.churchcentral.com/blog/7234/When-hubris-comes-to-church>

For nearly the past three decades, Thom Rainer has been studying the life cycle of churches. He continues to be amazed at how certain patterns play out repeatedly in most churches. Yet, he is also challenged to discern how churches can avoid the last two stages of the life cycle: irrelevance and death. In this article, he focuses on one particular stage, a part of the cycle that may be the most dangerous for the health of churches. He calls this stage "hubris." Church leaders need to be watchful and keep this shortcoming out of their midst.

**7 temptations all leaders face** – from ChurchLeaders.com

<http://www.churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-blogs/157258-perry-noble-seven-temptations-leaders-face.html>

The first is Wasting Time: We live in a world where it is easier to waste time than it ever has been before. Comment wars on blogs, tweeting arguments, browsing through random facebook pages and numerous other things can absolutely distract us from what we were put on this planet to do. Follow the link to read about the other six.

**Who says small, rural churches can't grow?** – from Church Executive Magazine

<http://churchexecutive.com/archives/who-says-small-who-says-small-grow-not-shannon-odell>

Ever tempted to think "we're just a country church of 30 souls, we'll never grow much larger"? Or you've thought, "There's no way we will ever see our church at 3,000 people." Don't tell that to Shannon O'Dell, senior pastor of Brand New Church in the small, rural church of Bergman, Ark. O'Dell tells about his experience of raising up a church of 30 to 3,000 over just six years in *Transforming Church in Rural America: Breaking All the Rurals* (New Leaf Press, 2010). He talks about "the rules" about the rurals — "the unspoken but clearly understood values that permeate American Christianity's beliefs about churches in the boonies." Bottom line, he says, is "forget the rules."

**How much should I share?** – from SmallGroups.com

<http://www.smallgroups.com/articles/2012/howmuchshare.html>

Every believer sins. No one is perfect—not even leaders. On the other hand, when you're struggling with temptation or are caught up in a sin pattern, how much should you share with your group? After all, while confession is good for the soul—and for strengthening a group—it can be bad for the reputation or make a messy situation even messier. Here are some suggestions for navigating this tricky issue.

**'Church diversity' movement aims to 'desegregate' houses of worship** – from The Christian Post

<http://www.christianpost.com/news/church-diversity-movement-aims-to-desegregate-houses-of-worship-67257/>

This week, Americans across the nation are honoring the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., a catalyst for the civil rights movement who advocated equality for all races. However, 43 years after his assassination, churches throughout America still face segregation – giving rise to a "Church Diversity" initiative to "see a more unified body of Christ." From Jan. 13-19, "Church Diversity Week" aims to open communication about the importance of diversity in places of worship. Pastor Scott Williams, author of Church Diversity – Sunday The Most Segregated Day of the Week, shared that this campaign, which he spearheaded, is about raising "awareness to help propel the movement."

**10 trends in the multisite movement** – from Outreach Magazine

<http://www.outreachmagazine.com/features/4544-Trends-the-Multisite-Movement-2012.html>

The multisite model continues to grow in its acceptance as a legitimate and effective vehicle for outreach, volunteer mobilization, leadership development and regional impact with more than 3,000 expressions of multisite church across North America. Even though 50 percent of megachurches have multiple campuses and another 20 percent are thinking about it, the multisite movement has outgrown the megachurch movement. Each multisite church has a unique church-print but there are some common trends and buzzwords emerging from them as we enter 2012.

**Create an inviting environment for preteen ministry** – from LifeWay

<http://www.lifeway.com/article/church-preteen-ministry-inviting-environment?intcmp=LWMain-article-3-preteen-environment-20120117>

Parents can often be heard clamoring around the church about their preteen child's disdain for church. They say that their kid doesn't like the teacher, doesn't have friends, or maybe he doesn't feel welcome. Parents want their kids to want to come to church. You, as a ministry leader, want their kids in church. Not only their kids, though, you want all preteens to feel welcome and loved in your church.

**10 ways to upgrade your leadership influence** – from ChurchLeaders.com

<http://www.churchleaders.com/smallgroups/small-group-blogs/156318-alan-danielson-10-ways-to-upgrade-your-leadership-influence.html>

Leadership is not about position. It is not about power. Leadership is about influence. Poor leaders don't understand this, so they spend their time flexing muscles, raising their voices, and imposing their will. Good leaders do understand this truth, so they focus their attention on improving their ability to influence. Here are 10 practices you should consider to help improve your ability to influence the people you lead.

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In the last newsletter I posted an article that I wrote titled: **Did I Come to Your Church this Christmas?** The impetus for this article was a survey that I did just before Christmas where I took a look at all the websites of the churches of the Synod of Mid-America from the perspective of a community member looking to find a church to attend a Christmas service. I discuss what I found and why it is important to look at what we have on our websites. You might find what I discovered to be surprising – or at least interesting. In case you missed it in the last newsletter, I give you the link to it again: <http://midamericasynod.org/pdf2/InvitingWebsites.pdf>

...Randy

**Schedule:**

January 23 – DeMotte office

24 – Illiana MLT/Exec mtg AM

25 – DeMotte office  
26 – Meeting, Beecher AM; Manitoqua office  
27 – DeMotte office  
30 – DeMotte office  
31 – DeMotte office  
February 1 – DeMotte office  
2 – Manitoqua office; Staff mtg  
3 – DeMotte office

The Manitoqua office phone number can more consistently reach me wherever I am as it is usually forwarded to my current location. **New cell phone number as of November 2011: 219-241-2375.**

**Randy's contact information:**

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