

Serving in Partnership with Classes and Congregations

Equipping – Celebrating – Learning – Serving

Notes From Harold September 2009

Dear Friends,

September means that while we are moving into a new program year in most of our congregations, we are also moving ahead with plans for a new year. Often these plans require the work of finance committees to consider ways to provide the shared resources necessary for making our ministry plans and dreams come to life.

With this being my first fall season serving you as Synod Executive, I am seeing many things from an important perspective. These are stressful times. They will call for the best of our **hopeful imagination** (to use a Walter Brueggemann phrase). We are called to be courageous and imaginative in an environment of anxiety and fear. To do this, we need one another and to live as one beloved community.

And so, it is important to clarify the purpose and importance of Synod funding.

The Regional Synod will be funded in 2010 from three sources: assessments, donations to the Fowler Ministries Board, and donations to the Classis Ministries Board. The article entitled, "Why Voluntary Contributions are Important to Albany Synod...and to Your Congregation," on the adjoining pages discusses the Fowler and Classis ministries; in this letter the topic is assessments.

One finance committee representative recently asked if his congregation had to pay their assessment. This representative is clearly feeling the stress. However, the honesty of the question gives me a refreshing opportunity to unpack what we really mean by assessment - a word that often sounds like taxation.

Assessment is all about sharing resources. In our churches we make these decisions together. At each level in which we gather as the church (the Classis, the Regional Synod and the General Synod), we decide together how much we will each contribute to share the costs for being the church at these three levels.

Sharing resources through the paying of assessments really is about keeping a commitment to the gatherings of the church of which each congregation is a covenant partner.

And, this **partnership must be a two-way street**. On the other side, those of us who work within the leadership of these structures, need to remain highly sensitive to the pressures our local congregations feel and to be sure that what we do is relevant to what congregations need to carry out their ministry.

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We need to support, encourage and uphold one another in these stressful times. I know from experience that when the financial pressure is high, we may easily fall into blame and criticism. As your committees begin the hard work of budgeting, don't let yourselves fall into these traps. Ask one another good honest questions, trust one another, and use your imaginations in new ways to achieve your goals, clarify what your goals for ministry really are and what priority each holds. Keep a grateful heart – scarcity can bring out our most destructive and our most noble qualities. As I continue to reach out to you over the fall, I will seek to understand how your Synod staff can help. We are here for you with both our skills and our compassion.

Yours in Christ,

Harold M. Delhagen

Why Voluntary Contributions are Important to Albany Synod... and to Your Congregation (Written by Harold Delhagen)

For 2010 the funding structure of your Regional Synod will change. We believe these changes will benefit us all, by making it easier for the Synod to administer and deliver important programs, and by focusing the significance of our important ministries.

The letter, which precedes this article, discusses the assessment rationale. Your church's total assessment is paid on a per member basis and supports the three levels of the church: the Classis, the Regional Synod and the General Synod. The Classis assessment usually is the lowest amount often paying the cost of a stated clerk and treasurer, and sometimes limited program and/or church support money.

The Regional Synod will be funded in 2010 by **three** sources. **The Synod's share of the assessment** covers the cost for the basic operation of the Regional Synod. This includes the salaries for the Synod Executive and the office manager, the building, its office equipment and maintenance. This is the infrastructure that allows us to carry out the Synod's two core dimensions of ministry: the Fowler ministry and the Classis ministry.

For the first time this year, these two core ministries will be primarily funded with voluntary contributions from our member congregations. In previous years, this voluntary giving was called the Mission of Albany Synod (MAS).

Albany Synod's mission statement is as follows:

The Regional Synod of Albany will provide resources for the healing and nurture of our member congregations so that they might effectively and faithfully carry out Christ's mission in their communities and their world.

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This is a mission that requires the covenantal grouping and resources of a Synod to achieve.

The mission is carried out in two areas, briefly described in the adjacent boxes. **In our new Synod structure, the Fowler Ministries Board (FMB) oversees Fowler ministries.**

The other aspect of Synod ministry is focused on the health and development of our congregations, clergy and leaders. **The new Classis Ministries Board (CMB) oversees those ministries.**

The intention is to approach Albany Synod congregations as well as other funding sources with a two-fold annual fund raising appeal. There will be requests to support both Fowler Ministries and Classis Ministries.

In round numbers, Fowler Ministries will need to raise about \$90,000 in 2010. In addition, the Synod will contribute \$50,000 - \$60,000 in order to provide programming support. The total budget will include, among other things, the salaries of the Fowler Director and office staff as well as the camp facilities costs.

The Classis Ministries will need to raise about \$150,000.

This includes the salaries for our two professional staff and some office staff as well as the cost for Classis Ministries Board programs.

In future articles and in presentations to many of our churches, you will hear more about the inspirational work of these two core ministries. We are eager to share how the mission of your regional synod is being fulfilled by the work of the Fowler Ministries Board and the Classis Ministries Board.

Our hope is that Synod congregations will continue to include Fowler and Classes Ministries in the budgeting process. Ideally, a congregation might designate two contributions outside of assessments: one for the Classis Ministries and one for the Fowler Ministries. Congregations might also choose to send one contribution and ask for it to be divided between the two.

We realize that our congregations are living through strained economic times. Therefore, we are motivated to work hard to be wise stewards of all gifts from our congregations. As we live into our new structure for ministry, we trust that our congregations and individuals will find new ways to provide the financial resources needed to serve and strengthen Albany Synod congregations.

What does the Fowler Ministries Board do? The FMB runs the annual summer camp with 800 campers, cares for the grounds and facilities at Fowler, offers retreats for members of our denomination and many others groups, and provides an important link between all the members of our Synod.

What does the Classis Ministries Board do? The CMB oversees the Synod's efforts to provide for church revitalization, clergy support, leadership development, clergy networking, development of pastoral leadership, discipleship resourcing, and resourcing for social witness.

Contact the synod office for more information on Close to Home items—www.albany.rca.org

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September 18 Clergy Coaches Lunch

On Friday, September 18, trained clergy coaches and clergy network facilitators from across the synod will gather at the Radisson Hotel in Utica for a lunch-time conversation about further development of clergy networks in Albany Synod. This is in partial fulfillment of the Classis Ministries Board's commitment to nurture clergy health.

September 19 Classis Ministries Board Meeting

The Classis Ministries Board (CMB) of Albany Synod will meet at Camp Fowler's Fenimore Hall on Saturday, September 19 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Synod congregations are encouraged to include the CMB in their prayers. Pray for safety as members travel to and from the meeting, for **Dan Griswold** as he moderates the meeting, and for wisdom and fresh insight as the board engages in discussion and decision-making about ministry and mission by classes and congregations. Worship will be led by **Bruce Cornwell**.

October 6-8 Spiritual Retreat at Fowler

Offered by the Office of Ministry, RCA, *A Spiritual Retreat: Living with Purpose in Midlife and Beyond*, focuses on a process of life reflection that increases our awareness of how God's grace has worked in our lives and prepares us for the next season of living into God's purposes and plans. Presenter is **Dr. Holly Schut**. The retreat will be held at Chi Rho House and starts with dinner on Tuesday evening and ends with lunch on Thursday. Space is limited. To register, send a check made payable to the Reformed Church in America to **Ellen Ratmeyer**, 30 Church Rd., Selkirk, NY 12158.



Cost: \$50 single room \$35 double occupancy

Includes two nights' lodging, program and meals

For more information, contact **Ellen Ratmeyer** by email at eratmeyer@rca.org or by phone at 973-951-8176.

October 18 Youth Group Gathering

The Capital District Reformed Churches invite youth 6th grade and up and their leaders or adult supervisors to a time of food, fellowship and fun, Sunday, October 18, 3:30-7:30 p.m. The event will be held at the First Reformed Church of Bethlehem. Please call 767-2243 or 316-6544 for more information and reservations. The cost is \$1.00 per person to cover the cost of pizza.

October 24 International Day of Climate Action



Community Reformed Church of Colonie is committed to this. Will you join too? Check out the website www.350.org. There is an open invitation to join a global day of action with events all over the world. The idea is to send world leaders a clear message before a meeting in December when they will discuss climate change and the urgent need to reduce our carbon footprint. Look on our synod website under "Events" to see how you can get involved.

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January 11-15, 2010 Mediation Skills Training

Conflict is normal and inevitable — whether in the home, school, community, church or workplace. Leaders in all walks of life often have a responsibility to help others work through their conflicts. The Mediation Skills Training Institute presented by the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center (LMPC) is designed to equip church leaders with the skills necessary to deal effectively with interpersonal, congregational, and other forms of group conflict. The five-day institute also includes a component on congregational intervention and consultation, placed within the context of family systems theory.

January 11-15, 2010 are the dates for the next Mediation Skills Training Institute in Albany Synod. The location is Brighton Reformed Church, 605 Blossom, Rochester, NY. The training will run daily from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., with the exception of Monday, which starts at 9:00 am and Friday, which concludes at 4:00 p.m.

Registration flyers are being sent to synod churches and will be available on the synod website. Scholarship assistance will be available to Albany Synod RCA members. For more information, contact **Phyllis Palsma**.

March 20, 2010 Discipleship Event Rescheduled

The Classis Ministries Board responded to a request from the classes of Albany and Schenectady, and will sponsor a special discipleship event with guest presenter, the **Rev. Kirsty DePree**, RCA Coordinator for Discipleship. The event entitled, *Transforming Discipleship*, provides the foundation for growing and empowering faithful and fruitful disciples. All church leadership is encouraged to attend. Included in the day will be workshops for consistory members. Thanks go to Delmar Reformed Church for hosting this event. Watch the next *Close To Home* and our synod website for more information.

2009 Christmas Gifts For Persons and Families with HIV/AIDS

The Classis Ministries Board is pleased to endorse and support this year's collection. Publicity will be handed out to Classis Ministries Board members at their retreat on September 19. Look for flyers and information on our website and also through emails to synod congregations. Thanks go to board member **Rev. Brian Dykema** for helping to coordinate this special ministry of compassion and hope.



Synod Lending Library Features Resource on Child Protection



Does your congregation have a child protection policy in place? Can your church leaders recognize the various kinds of abuse? Has your congregation implemented guidelines for recruiting and screening volunteers? If you have not developed policies to protect both children and youth in your care and the adults who work with them, now is the time. **Nancy McNiven** highly recommends the *Safe Sanctuaries* resources by **Joy Thornburg Melton**.

Melton is an attorney, minister and child advocate in the Methodist church. Her 90 minute DVD, *Safe Sanctuaries for Children and Youth ~ Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church*, and her print resource by the same title, provide congregations and leaders with a comprehensive risk management plan from a Christian viewpoint. Congregations can download a study guide for the DVD from the *Upper Room* website. Check out her material at www.upperroom.org.

Our library currently has the DVD and an older rendition of the print resource that includes a training model, forms and guidelines for recruiting, screening and working with volunteers and policies and procedures that will reduce the risk of abuse in your church. Contact Nancy for more information and for other child protection titles in our library.

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CRTC Enrichment Courses Coming in September

Courses offered through the Capital Region Theological Center provide a unique learning opportunity in an ecumenical setting. Albany Synod church leaders can explore topics relevant to church life and leadership. Don't delay! The registration deadlines rapidly approach for the following one-day courses offered through the Capital Region Theological Center:



SafeTALK

Saturday, September 19, 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. at First United Methodist Church, Schenectady
This timely and important introductory suicide prevention workshop will explore warning signs and early intervention techniques. The instructor is **Melanie Puerto** from the New York State Office of Mental Health.

Generational Dynamics

Saturday, September 26, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Loudonville.
Andy Chestnut will help participants see beyond today and connect your church to the future by exploring generations; what they are, why they matter, and why you should care.

Helping Children Listen to God

Saturday, October 17, 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. at Westminster Presbyterian Church, Albany
Barbara Cullum, a Reformed Church in America Christian educator & trainer, will demonstrate the ***Godly Play and Children and Worship*** models which can be used in the faith nurture of your church's young children.

CRTC New Testament Course

Preaching elder candidates in the capital region who are ready to take the ***New Testament*** course, are urged to register for Introduction to the New Testament taught by **Dr. Peter Bedford** of Union College. The course meets at Emmanuel-Friedens Church in Schenectady on Tuesday evenings (7 p.m. – 9 p.m.) beginning October 13 and runs through December 15. Students will explore the unity and diversity of structure, composition, and theology as well as the historical, social and religious contexts and values in everyday life of New Testament texts. Scholarship assistance is available. For tuition and registration information, go to www.capitalrtc.org.

Ministers on the Move

Rev. Nolan Palsma has accepted a call to the Community Church at Upper Ridgewood in Ridgewood, New Jersey. He will be concluding his nineteen year ministry at the Pitcher Hill Community Church in North Syracuse at the end of September.