

Missional Structures Task Force Report



Analysis and recommended
RSMAt overture

The Mandate – R-42- GS2005

- **To instruct the officers of General Synod to initiate a denomination-wide *conversation* of “missional reflection” on the structure of our present four assemblies, in wide consultation with those from regional synods, classes, and consistories as well as the Commission on Church Order and other bodies; and further,**
 - *Open conversation vs. advocacy for any one viewpoint*
 - *Implies broad information-gathering*
 - *Consultation implies dialogue;*
 - *Task force model not specified.*

R-42-GS2005

- **to give attention to “best practices” of emerging cooperation between regional synods and classes in carrying out the task of equipping congregations for mission and ministry; and further,**
 - *Implies a search for possible models for replication;*
 - *focus confined to middle-level assemblies.*

R-42-GS2005

- **to gather suggestions, ideas, and models of how our present structure and relationship of assemblies might be adapted to more effectively carry out the mission of the church; and further,**
 - *Assumes current structures are retained and possibly adapted;*
 - *Again, information gathering vs. advocacy*

R-42-GS2005

- **to share the results of this reflection with the General Synod no later than 2007, and with the church at-large along the way, in order to determine what future steps, if any, might be undertaken.**
(ADOPTED)
- *What is reported is informational;*
- *Wide-spread reporting of progress during the conversation*
- *Future steps to be determined by GS, not by the study.*

The Process

- GPC officers choose task force format
 - Appoint 8 people as members from
 - 8 of 45 classes
 - 7 of 8 Regional Synods
- TF listens to:
 - 4 denominational bodies and staff
 - PACT, Minority Councils, CM Team, CR Team
 - 2 Regional Synods
 - Heartland, Far West
 - 2 denominations
 - Mennonite, Brethren Church

The Process

□ TF listens to:

■ 4 Classes

- Cent. Cal, Cent. Plains, SW Great Lakes, Cascades
- Reported conversation with GPC did not occur.

■ 1 local church

- With Pastor in Dyer, IN

□ TF also:

- Read 2 books
- Attended seminars, lectures,
- Read 4 ecumenical case studies
- Met with stated clerk attendees @ GS 2006

Characteristics of the process

□ Task Force composition:

- Members of RCA Commissions, agencies - 6
- Held Regional Synod office or staff position - 6
- Suburban residents – 8
- Diverse in gender 6m/2F, but not in ethnicity.

□ Data collection methods:

- Theoretical framing of issues, followed by--
- Anecdotal data/interviews of selected persons.
 - No random sample survey as check on anecdotal data;
 - No new empirical data on RCA field situation;
 - No open hearings—few direct field observations.

Characteristics of the process

□ Timeline:

- Task Force appointed – 10/2005
- Mentioned in GenSec report as “having begun its task..” [MGS 2006 p. 40] – 06/2006
- Study and conversations – to 01/2007
- First draft report to church at large – 02/23/2007
- Finalized draft through GSC – 03/25/2007

□ Overall:

- “We recognize that we did not listen to everyone and there are many “best practices” we did not hear.” [p.20]

Proposal 1 – “Open Space”

- To instruct the General Synod Council, in consultation with regional synods, to appoint a “Missional Church Guidance and Support Team” of not more than eight members, to oversee a three-year period of structural “open space”;
 - *Establishes an entity of oversight under GSC;*
 - *8 members [8 Regional Synods]*
 - *2007-2010 period*

“Open Space” powers:

- to receive, review, and approve proposals for structural realignment for implementation.
 - from assemblies and/or General Synod institutions or agencies,
 - starting in the fall of 2007 and concluding with the General Synod in 2010.
- “In no case should an open-space proposal cause significant harm to a current structural body; similarly, however, current structures should not have “veto power” over innovative attempts at missional engagement.” [11]

“Open Space” Implications

- A General Synod agency [MSGST] is to be given authority to initiate, fund, conduct, supervise, adjudicate and terminate local ministries.
 - GS lacks this authority under the BCO; it is the responsibility and prerogative of classes to assess the need for and conduct local ministries.
 - If enacted by GS, the proposal would suspend the Constitution for 3 years;
 - Supervisory powers of classes over the ministries proposed would also be suspended.
- An illegal short-cut around amending the BCO.

Proposal 2-Middle Assemblies

- To instruct the General Synod Council, by 2010, to pursue development of a specific plan by which our present 45 classes and 8 regional synods will be replaced with “middle assemblies” whose structure and ministry is focused on missional engagement
 - To be staffed; with accountabilities to GS [12]
 - Larger than current classes & non-geographic;
 - Funded by redistribution of resources.[13-14]

Middle Assemblies

- Also exceeds authority given to GS under BCO.
- Based upon a view of classes being “reactionary” that the report itself refutes.
 - “If it’s working,....”
- Ignores the effects of organizational culture shock that comes from merger.
 - A decade of internal focusing;
 - Re-establishment of identity;
 - Diversion to progress being made on Our Call.

Proposed RSMAt Overture

- The Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics respectfully overtures the General Synod to defer further consideration and/or implementation of structural merger of classes and regional synods until the completion of the goals of “Our Call” in 2013.

Reasons:

- From the positive accounts of progress on Our Call made available in the Church Herald, the RCA website, congregational mailings, reports of Church Multiplication and Church Revitalization staff, and reports of the President and General Secretary to previous General Synods, it is clear that the current structure of classes and regional synods are posing no significant structural barrier to attainment of RCA missional goals.

Reasons:

2. Nothing in the current structure of classes and regional synods prohibits them from undertaking as extensive an internal reorganization as they may judge appropriate to further improve their missional goal performance; indeed many have already done so.

Reasons:

3. Nothing in the current structure of classes and regional synods prohibits them from undertaking as extensive a program of cooperation with other assemblies of the RCA or aligned denominations as they may judge appropriate to further improve their missional goal performance and there is ample evidence of such cooperative efforts already underway.

Reasons:

4. Since open space for structural adjustment already exists and is being utilized, there is no need to impose upon classes and regional synods an additional time-consuming burden of developing formal proposals justifying what, in many cases, is already taking place.

Reasons:

5. The current structure of classes and regional synods allows for a wide variety of regionally and locally-relevant responses to Our Call that would not be available if all classes and Regional synods were merged according to a single design.

Reasons:

6. Merger of classes and regional synods will be a major diversion of their focus, time and resources away from attaining Our Call goals, toward matters of merely internal concern such as conforming to state statutes, allocation of fiscal resources and indebtedness, recruitment of staff, setting boundary lines, reforming committee structures and the development of new organizational cultures and identities.

Reasons:

7. The experience of the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics, which merged its classes twelve years ago, is that this internal readjustment process will consume a minimum of ten years, with little net gain in resources available for missional work.

Reasons:

8. At the completion of the Our Call timeline, there will be ample time and data for analysis as to whether merger of classes and regional synods is warranted.

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