

Classis Matters

March 9, 2014

25th Anniversary Edition

Looking Backward Looking Forward

On February 20, 2014, fifty pastors, elders, and classis support people gathered in the main banquet hall at the Sunnybrook golf course in Jenison. On that afternoon and evening, there was no wedding reception music that we often associate with that room and there was certainly no golf! Twelve foot snow piles surrounding the parking lot served as a makeshift mountain range that insulated the gathering and contributed to the retreat-feel that we could share. Together, the 20 churches of Classis Georgetown gathered to be One Church and celebrate 25 years of being a Classis. We recognized that during those 25 years, many changes had taken place in our community and in our congregations. We also recognized that we are always changing, always reforming, and always adapting as God's people seek to live out our faith and live it out together. A Classis is a human-made construction to organize our churches according to geography. The strange thing was - and is - is that our solidarity with one another

has grown to be much deeper than just geography and a 25 year history. The truth is, the Classis is growing friendships and ministry partnerships. In the past, geography and the necessity of meeting together 3 times per year is what brought us together because - well because "that's what you are supposed to do." So we did it. Five years ago, we began to ask ourselves, "shouldn't we come together and work together for more reasons than geography and the calendar?" Now those early conversations have grown up and so have we. We continue to find ways of connecting our congregations and our conversations. We realize that we have more to share with one another and less to fear. We realize that together is better than alone. Elders have begun to enjoy coming to classis and some even volunteer to come! Classis is meaningful, intentional, purposeful, and even encouraging. And while there is always an agenda and always business to tend to, we put our emphasis and our momentum into work-

ing together. As our preacher said that night, "it is both new wine and new wineskins" and Classis looks and feels more different than ever. We enjoy our togetherness. One of the memorable and important decisions that was made on the 25th anniversary of Classis was an invitation of welcome to women elder and pastor delegates to Classis meetings. The conversation around this request from Ridgewood CRC was balanced, caring, and charitable on a matter that could be divisive. Delegates expressed their concerns and also their yearnings and brothers disagreed in a spirit of unity. When the motion passed with strong but not unanimous support, the church requesting this change prayed for other congregations who would struggle with the decision. The gentleness of Jesus was evident and there was no stridency on anyone's part. It was a night of snow, dreams to dream together, new wineskins and communion. It is truly a new day for Classis Georgetown - and a good one! (Rev. Marc Nelesen)

We Have a Dream

We have a dream of a place where our congregations love and support each other to such an extent that we rejoice with everyone's growth and weep with everyone's trials. A place where we celebrate our differences, applaud our ministries, pray for our weaknesses, and cooperate in the Kingdom. A place where we compete only against the Devil and not each other.

We have a dream of a place where God is worshipped with such power and majesty that we find ourselves doing our best work on our knees. A place where we can come together with our drums, guitars, trumpets, saxophones, violas, flutes, pipe organs and loud clashing cymbals; all a chorus making a sweet aroma for our God. A place where we powerfully worship with the saints of the past while blazing a path into the future like a shooting star.

We have a dream of a place where barriers are broken down as we reach across ethnic,

social, and economic lines to extend daring hospitality to our neighbors. A place where a good neighborhood is a neighborhood that reflects the values and variety of the Kingdom of God, where the Gospel story is accompanied by a Gospel shaped life. A place where we no longer live here because it is safe, but to build homes and new lives for the alien and the refugee.

We have a dream of a place where we risk showing compassion to the elderly, the orphaned, the single moms, the drug addict and the disabled. A place where both abled and disabled can worship, work, and live together in the love of Christ. A place where every individual is affirmed and recognized as having gifts from God that can be used in his Kingdom.

We have a dream that because of Classis Georgetown there will be transformed lives and communities. (Rev. Gerry Koning)

Vision Statement

Classis Georgetown

Classis Georgetown is a community of Christian Reformed Churches in Eastern Ottawa County who live and minister together, in Christ, to transform lives and communities.

Classis Values

Healthy Leaders

We equip leaders to transform lives and communities.

Collaborative Relationships

We call out the strengths of each church and pursue ministry together to create new ways of transforming lives and communities.

Empowering Worship

We celebrate and are sustained by God's presence as he transforms lives and communities.

Daring Hospitality

We welcome the stranger in ways that transform lives and communities.

Risky Compassion

We extend uncommon generosity to the suffering and work to eliminate the causes of that suffering in order to transform lives and communities.

Classis Georgetown

Member Churches

- ◆ Alive Ministries
- ◆ Baldwin Street CRC
- ◆ Bauer CRC
- ◆ Cottonwood Church
- ◆ EverGreen Ministries
- ◆ Fairway CRC
- ◆ First Hudsonville CRC
- ◆ First Jenison CRC
- ◆ Forest Grove CRC
- ◆ Friendship Chapel
- ◆ Georgetown CRC
- ◆ Hillcrest CRC
- ◆ Immanuel CRC
- ◆ Jamestown CRC
- ◆ Messiah CRC
- ◆ Ridgewood CRC
- ◆ Searchlight Ministries
- ◆ Trinity CRC
- ◆ Twelfth Avenue CRC
- ◆ Zutphen CRC

Hebrews 10:24-25: And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.



Classis Georgetown

Of the Christian Reformed Church in North America

“Three Tables” A Communion Meditation

Classis Georgetown Meeting, February 20, 2014

Long ago Jesus gathered with his disciples around a table in the upper room of a house in Jerusalem. Historians tell us that such dinners took place at low tables, formed in the shape of a capital “u”, and that everyone reclined instead of sat. The occasion for this dinner was the annual Jewish Passover celebration, the memorial of God’s ancient deliverance of the Jews from slavery in Egypt. Jesus led his disciples through the celebration, with its scripture readings, bitter herbs, cups of wine, and Passover lamb. But then he surprised them by pointing them to a new deliverance, a greater deliverance. They would be delivered not from cruel earthly masters but from deadly spiritual masters: Sin and Eternal Death. Like the old deliverance, it would be pro-

vided by God, and it would come through a death. But the one to die would be their much-loved rabbi, Jesus. His death would satisfy the just demands of a righteous God, and set free all who come to God in faith. And so, at that ancient table in the upper room, the celebration of something old turned into the stage for something new.

Today we also gather around a table—the table of Holy Communion. At this second table we remember the first one and the events that were announced there. We take the bread and the cup, and we remember and believe together in Christ’s death and its life-giving blessings for us. At that first table Jesus had commanded his disciples to remember and believe again and again, and we carry on that obedience. Of course, at this second table we don’t merely remember the first table and the events that it proclaimed.

We also look ahead, from this table, to a third one.

There is a table to come! It is the banquet table at the wedding feast of the Lamb and his bride, the church. John speaks of it in Revelation 19, and it will be glorious! At that table we will celebrate, in person with Jesus, in the Kingdom of God, the fulfillment of all the promises God has made. His mission to restore the world from the fall will be complete. His enemies will be defeated. His saints will be vindicated. His glory will be revealed. This third table is both hidden and proclaimed in the elements of the first and second tables. It is a table that will never end.

Three tables—gifts of God for the people of God.

Amen.
(Rev. David Den Haan)

As you will notice in the sidebar on the front page, Collaborative Relationships is just one of the Values adopted by Classis Georgetown. Our newly formed 10:24 Encouragement Teams (based on the verse printed on front) came to this meeting with the following proposal.

The Plan:

- Classis is formed into four regions with five churches in each region.
- A church from one region is paired with a church from another region, by lot.
- The pairings will be in place for two years. After two years, new pairings will be made using the “region” meth-

Collaborative Relationships

od, making sure every church has a new partner church.

- During the two years the following is encouraged to take place:
 - A. Each church in the pairing will form a leadership team (Pastor, Elder, Deacon reps) to make an encouragement visit to the other council of the 10:24 church, using suggested questions. We encourage one visit per year of this nature.
 - B. The paired churches are encouraged to have an occasional pulpit exchange, combined event (worship service or other desirable gathering) as they see fit during their two years of partnership.
 - C. The churches function as prayer

partners with one another in ways they deem appropriate.

D. The paired churches will make at least one report to Classis (verbal) on whatever they deem newsworthy of their collaborative efforts.

Team Visit Format:

- Team contacts Pastor to schedule a visit with their Elders/Deacons/Council.
- Begin the meeting with a Prayer of thanksgiving and praise.
- Move into suggested questions. . . . and listen, listen, listen.

(Rev. Brian Bosscher and Ms. Tricia Bosma collaborated on this information)

Matthew 9 Classis Devotional

Matthew 9:16-17 - “No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.”

Matthew, Mark and Luke all include these verses from Jesus, yet only Matthew includes the last phrase, “both are preserved.” Matthew stresses that in order for things that are new to be preserved, both wine and wineskins must be new. This seems obvious at first. However Matthew, a Jew, is writing to a Jewish audience that struggled to not ‘mix and match’ Judaism and Christianity. We learn from other places in the New Testament that the Jews struggled to let go of old requirements and customs. A group called the Judaizers regularly threatened to undo Paul’s work by requiring old Jewish practices. Paul also faced difficulty over whether circumcision was necessary for Christians of Jew-

ish ethnicity. Matthew wants to make clear to those reading that newness must be carefully tended.

Many of us are well aware that trying something new often brings struggle. We witness new ideas that fail to bloom and proposed structural changes that never get off the ground. We struggle to implement new cultural realities at churches, even as proposed structures fail to have the kind of affect we desire. We watch as new wine (culture) gets poured into old wineskins (structures) and spoils. Or as old wine (culture) gets poured into new wineskins (structures) and bursts. Matthew stresses both the wine AND the wineskins must be new. In other words, the culture and the structures we desire to implement must go hand-in-hand. Otherwise they will spoil. Matthew’s point is not that we can simply start over either. If we lived in first century Galilee we could not head to WalMart, pick up juice for wine-making and grab some wineskins. It took time and preparation to tend vines, improve soil, add nutrients, prune, graft and then harvest. Only

then could grapes be squeezed for juice to be placed in wineskins. Careful tending and preparation were the only ways to ensure that the juice for making wine was ready. The same applied for wineskins. It took time to cut, tan, sew, dry and cure wineskins. It takes time and effort to ready culture and structures for preservation. For that reason, Classis Georgetown has taken its time to prepare not just a new structure but a new culture so that both will be preserved. So both can be a blessing.

However, there is one crucial gospel element to bear in mind. The Gospel of John reminds us that fruit comes from abiding in Christ. For apart from Him we can bear no fruit. The culture we so desperately desire to create in Classis and in our churches comes not just from brilliant, strategic thinking. It comes from fruit grown by abiding in the Truth Vine, Jesus Christ. So as we pour (establish) new culture into new structures, may we abide in the One who produces fruit so all may be preserved.
(Rev. Josh Van Drunen)

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