

Classis Georgetown Handbook

October 2024

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Classis Georgetown Mission Statement

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 Georgetown 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 in order to transform lives and communities.

A. Classis Georgetown Vision Team

I. The Vision Team and Its Work

- A. The Vision Team helps the churches of Classis Georgetown pursue their mission, *"Living and Working Together to Transform Lives and Communities."*
- B. The Vision Team's functions include the customary work of the Classical Interim Committee and acts for Classis between meetings on matters which require immediate consideration and have not been referred to other committees. The duties shall include the following:
 - a. Arrange for the examination of candidates and the conduction of a "colloquium doctum".
 - b. Appoint counselors for vacant churches upon request of the church council.
 - c. Process the credentials of ministers leaving or entering classis.
 - d. Fill temporarily any vacancies that may occur in the standing committees of Classis.
 - e. Call special meetings of classis when it deems this necessary.
 - f. Review the honorarium paid to support staff and report each year at the October session of classis with their recommendation. Implementation shall always coincide with the fiscal year of classis.
 - g. In consultation with the stated clerk, it shall approve requests of those desiring to speak at classis.
 - h. It shall appoint church visitors in case of a vacancy or necessity.
 - i. It shall present a written report to each meeting of classis of its activities performed.
- C. The Vision Team designs and leads the meetings of Classis to be reflective, motivating, and inspiring in seeing God at work in our midst, using our efforts to evidence the coming of God's Kingdom" on earth as it is in heaven."
- D. Vision Team members will include the Five Value Stewards and a member-at-large who will be elected for a term of three years.** One of the two regional pastors will serve on the Vision Team.

**Committee terms: The first term of three years may be followed by a second term of three years. After two consecutive three year terms members shall not be on the same committee for at least another three years. After three years off a committee persons are again eligible for successive three year terms.

II. Value Stewards

- A. Each one of the five values will have a Value Steward who will keep, protect and grow one of Classis Georgetown's five values: Healthy Leaders, Collaborative Relationships, Empowering Worship, Daring Hospitality, and Risky Compassion. These assignments will be made in accordance with the keeper's gifts and passions and will be held as long as mutually agreed upon between the keeper and classis.

A Value Steward

- Has a keen and growing interest in developing the meaning and implications of the value for our individual and communal lives in the ever-changing environment of our classis and our world.

- Possesses specific gifts for developing a deepening understanding and practice of the value.
 - Nurtures a passion to see the value lived out in the choices and behaviors of the members of classis and the Georgetown community.
 - Models the value in his/her own life.
 - Makes a prayerful commitment to be the Value Steward.
 - Stimulates creative conversation about the value.
 - Collaborates in discerning and planning ways to live the value.
- B. The Value Stewards will be responsible to make sure their assigned value is upheld by classis in all its various ministries and activities and will coordinate all efforts by classis to promote this value in the individual churches of classis.
- C. The Value Stewards will evaluate and make recommendations to classis regarding any grant applications that are in line with their particular classis value.
- D. Value Stewards will attend monthly meetings of the Vision Team.

III. The Value Stewards & their work

Healthy Leaders Value Steward

This steward will:

- Oversee the work of the CMLT (formerly Student Aid Committee)
- Oversee the Safe Church Team
- Connect with the Synodical Deputy and alternate
- Regional pastoring

Collaborative Relationships Value Steward

This steward will:

- Creatively encourage churches to pursue joint ministries (examples: worship services, youth activities, mission trips, etc.)
- Oversee the Church Visitation program of Classis Georgetown/Church counselors

Empowering Worship Value Steward

This steward will:

- Plan and coordinate any classis-wide worship services
- Oversee the work of the Classis Prayer Catalyzer

Daring Hospitality Value Steward

This steward will:

- Promote new church development
- Assist churches in any needs regarding evangelism in community

Risky Compassion Value Steward

This steward will:

- Have a strong connection to the diaconate.
- Challenge classis to seek ways of ministering with the homeless, disenfranchised, and those suffering from food scarcity

IV. Vision Team Leader (Chair/Facilitator) (Paid Position)

- A. The Vision Team Leader will set agendas for and preside over Vision Team meetings.
- B. The Vision Team leader will help the team focus on visioning for classis, on promoting congregational wellness, and on developing leadership in classis.
- C. The Vision Team leader will work up to 20 hours per month and receive compensation for these hours, reviewed by the Vision Team and approved by classis annually. The Vision Team leader will also be reimbursed for expenses related to carrying out all required tasks.
- D. The Vision Team leader will have the help of the administrative assistant in clerical matters.

B. Additional Positions in Classis Georgetown

I. President of Classis

1. The president of classis will be selected by the Vision Team of classis for a period of one year beginning with the Fall classis meeting. This person will be approved by classis at least one meeting before beginning to act as president.
2. The president, along with the Vision Team of Classis, will set the agenda for classis meetings.
3. The president will preside at the classis meetings, striving to create consensus around our shared vision.
4. The president will make use of Classis Georgetown Rules of Order when presiding over classis meetings.

II. Vice-President of Classis

1. The vice-president of classis will be selected by the Vision Team of classis and will serve for a period of one year, beginning with the Fall classis meeting. This person will be approved by classis at least one meeting before beginning to act as vice-president.
2. The vice-president will take the place of the president in the case of the latter's absence and with the president and the Vision Team plan the events of Classis.
3. The vice-president will be available to assist the president as the president may request.
4. The vice-president will preside whenever the president chooses to participate in the debate on a pending question.

III. Stated Clerk (Paid Position)

1. The stated clerk is elected for a renewable term of three years. An alternate will be elected for a concurrent term and will assume the duties of the office whenever the stated clerk is unable to serve.
2. The stated clerk is a non-voting member of the Vision Team.
3. The stated clerk may also serve as the administrative assistant to the Vision Team.

4. The stated clerk will email the Classis meeting agenda to the church councils prior to the next meeting of classis, as well as submit it to the Web-keeper to be posted on our web site.
5. The stated clerk will serve as the recording secretary at each meeting of classis.
6. The stated clerk will submit the minutes of the Classis meeting to the officers of classis and if approved by them, email them to the councils of each church in classis, as well as submit them to the classis web-keeper to be posted on our web site.
7. The stated clerk will conduct all correspondence of classis and will give proper notification to all persons appointed to any task by classis.
8. The stated clerk will keep a digital file of Classis documents.
9. The stated clerk is responsible for informing classis of all appointments to be made (board delegates, committee members, etc.). Additionally, the stated clerk will include with the minutes of the February Classis meeting, a complete list of current committee members, classis positions, board members, etc., with their term of service.
10. The stated clerk will handle all official correspondence between classis and synod regarding delegates, overtures, nominations, etc., and observe all rules adopted by Synod.
11. Compensation for the stated clerk shall be reviewed annually by the Vision Team and approved by classis. All expenses related to the stated clerk position will be reimbursed.

IV. Treasurer (Paid Position)

1. The classical treasurer will be elected for a renewable term of three years.
2. The treasurer will keep a proper record of all monies received and distributed.
3. The treasurer will reimburse the elder delegates at their request the per diem amounts set by classis and reviewed as needed.
4. The treasurer will provide a financial report for every meeting of classis and will also furnish an annual report at the February meeting of classis.
5. The treasurer will be able to speak to classis in all matters pertaining to the finances of classis.
6. The financial records will be reviewed each year.
7. Only monies for causes approved by classis and/or synod shall be handled by the treasurer.
8. The treasurer will inform the church councils regarding all ministry shares and any other revenue agreed upon by the classis.
9. The treasurer will inform the classis at least once each year as to the bank or banks in which Classis funds are deposited. Such information is to be recorded in the minutes of Classis.
10. The treasurer will receive a stipend the amount of which shall be reviewed annually by the Vision Team and approved by classis, in addition to reimbursement of all expenses made on behalf of classis in the performance of these duties.
11. The treasurer will receive and disburse all funds of the Vision Team, CMLT, and other committees as assigned by classis.

V. Assistant Treasurer (Paid Position)

1. An Assistant Treasurer will also be elected for a renewable term of three years to assist the treasurer as needed. The assistant treasurer may succeed to the office of treasurer if the treasurer is no longer able to serve. Before the new treasurer can assume this office, all financial records must be duly audited and the accounts verified.
2. If/when the assistant treasurer succeeds to the office of the treasurer, he/she assumes all of the roles and responsibilities of the treasurer.
3. The assistant treasurer will also receive a stipend reviewed annually by the Vision Team and approved by classis.

VI. Administrative Assistant (Paid Position)

1. The Vision Team Administrative Assistant assists the Vision Team by performing needed administrative duties.
2. The administrative assistant maintains a list of all servants of Classis Georgetown, including contact information and terms of service.
3. The administrative assistant works an average of 10 hours per week or up to 15 hours per week if performed in combination with the position of stated clerk. Compensation will be reviewed annually by the Vision Team and approved by classis. Mileage, office supplies, and other approved expenses will be reimbursed. Computer, printer, software, telephone and telephone line will be provided by classis.
4. The administrative assistant keeps minutes for the Vision Team.
5. The administrative assistant will be proficient in operating systems (ie. Microsoft Word, Excel, Google Docs, etc.)
6. The administrative assistant carries out any other tasks as needed by the Vision Team.
7. The administrative assistant is accountable to the Vision Team for overall performance evaluation, salary considerations, benefits (if any) and continuance of employment.

VII. Web-keeper (Paid Position)

1. The Web-keeper is appointed by the vision team for the purpose of maintaining the classis website and may keep this position as long as mutually agreed upon by the vision team and the Web-keeper.
2. The Web-keeper will edit, post, and keep up to date any articles and other information that is relevant to the values and vision of classis in an engaging and user-friendly format.
3. The Web-keeper will post and update all documents relating to classis meetings as approved by classis or its committees, including agendas, minutes and financial reports.
4. The Web-keeper will work, alongside other Vision Team and classis members, to help promote the use of the website.
5. The Web-keeper will assure the security and functionality of the website, seeking outside expertise as needed.

VIII. Alternate Stated Clerk (Paid Position)

1. The Alternate Stated Clerk will assist the Stated Clerk if/when the Stated Clerk is unable to perform expected duties or is absent.
2. The Alternate Stated Clerk will assume the role of Stated Clerk when said person vacates the office.

IX. Classical Ministry Leadership Team (CMLT), formerly Student Fund Committee **Value: Healthy Leaders**

Every classis shall maintain a student fund and a Classical Ministerial Leadership Team (CMLT) to provide support and encouragement for individuals preparing for ministry in the Christian Reformed Church. CRCNA Church Order, Article 43a

CMLT (Student Loan Fund) guidelines

Approved by the Student Loan Fund Committee (needs to be approved by the VT) (Approved by the Vision Team at their August 25, 2015 meeting)

Classis Guidelines

The churches shall encourage individuals to seek to become ministers of the Word and, in coordination with classis, shall grant financial aid to those who are in need of it. (CRCNA Church Order, Article 21)

The CMLT will provide up to 50% of the cost for tuition and books for eligible Classis Georgetown Master of Divinity (M.Div) students at Calvin Theological Seminary, and up to 30% for eligible Classis Georgetown M.Div students at other accredited Reformed seminaries.

These percentages apply to full or part-time students and are based on the number of credit hours taken. The cost of tuition and books will be determined by Calvin Seminary even if the student attends a different seminary to obtain an M. Div.

The CMLT will provide up to 25% assistance for Classis Georgetown students pursuing other degrees at Calvin Seminary with the understanding that such degrees are pursued for the purpose of direct service in the church or parachurch ministries. These graduate degrees should be the first of their kind for a Classis Georgetown student. As such, degrees such as MA or MTS will usually be supported, but degrees such as ThM, D Min, and PhD will not.

Classis considers the financial aid given to students a loan and not a grant. The loan is forgiven after ten years of ministry in a CRCNA congregation or CRCNA supported ministry (whether at the denominational or classical level) at a rate of 10% forgiven for every year served. The service can be part time or full full time employment in the congregation or ministry. The CMLT is tasked with soliciting repayment from recipients who do not go on to serve in either a congregation or CRCNA supported ministry. The loan does not accrue interest and there are no additional fees, but it is a loan and it ought to be repaid to the classis. The CMLT has further details among its documents.

Grounds:

1. Higher education costs continue to rise. Furthermore, it is as intrusive as it is difficult to ascertain the financial need and the deservedness of that need from one student to another. Classis Georgetown is better served with a percentile goal than a fixed dollar amount and we are far better off giving everyone the same percentages based on degree and institution.
2. These goals reflect the priority of the classis and the denomination in focusing our assistance to those seeking to serve as ordained pastors. However, service in ministries in direct connection to the CRCNA, whether at the congregation, Classis, or denominational level is also desired and will be supported. An example of this is service in Campus Ministry at GVSU (since Classis Georgetown supports Campus Ministry at GVSU).

Explanatory Notes:

1. In 2024-2025, the cost per credit hour for an M. Div is \$607 which puts full time (29 credit hours) at \$17,603. In 2019-2020, the cost per credit hour was \$499.
2. In the past, we have funded at least one PhD pursuit from a student in our classis. However, the team has since decided that it is beyond our mandate to fund multiple graduate degrees in the same field. We wish to encourage pastors to keep learning and where appropriate pursue advanced degrees, but the funding of those degrees should not come from classis.
3. The CMLT has unfortunately had several past recipients borrow and then fail to serve in a CRC congregation or supported ministry and still not repay their loan. Often these students fail to return calls and emails and essentially disappear from the view of classis. Such actions financially damage our ministry efforts and discourage everyone involved.

Responsibilities of CMLT

1. The CMLT/student fund committee chair, with the assistance of the other student and committee members, will determine if the applicants are eligible for aid, how much aid the applicant should receive, and if applicable, make sure the loan is paid back as required.
2. Someone from the CMLT will make reports to classis and also make recommendations to classis regarding student aid applicants.
3. The CMLT chair will schedule meetings of the student fund committee on a regular basis, set the agenda for the meetings, and preside over the meetings.
4. The CMLT chair, along with the other student fund committee members, will organize events or in other ways connect with the students in order to establish relationships with them, to encourage them in their studies, and also to help them to become healthy leaders in the ministry areas they are pursuing. The CMLT will make required reports to the Candidacy Committee of the CRCNA as needed (typically for students on the M Div track).

X. Safe Church Coordinator (Paid Position)

Value: Healthy Leaders

1. The safe church coordinator will serve as the safe church team leader.
2. The safe church coordinator will recruit safe church team members from every church in classis.
3. The safe church coordinator will call all meetings of the safe church team.
4. The safe church coordinator will provide intervention in alleged abuse or misconduct as needed.
5. The safe church coordinator will report to classis one time per year.
6. The safe church coordinator will provide advice and counsel to churches of classis regarding the Advisory Panel Process approved by Synod.

XI. Synodical Deputy and Synodical Deputy Alternate

Value: Healthy Leaders

1. A deputy shall be appointed to serve a 3-year term, which is renewable.
2. A deputy shall, upon request, extend help to the classes in the event of difficulties in order that proper unity, order and sound doctrine may be maintained.
3. An alternate deputy can be called to serve if the deputy is not available.

XII. Regional Pastor (Paid Position)

Value: Healthy Leaders

1. The Regional Pastors of Classis Georgetown are “pastors for pastors” and are in place to provide:
 - pro-active supportive encouragement to Classis Georgetown pastors,
 - responsive support in times of need or crisis,
 - counsel to pastors and councils when invited to do so,
 - good process and supportive advocacy when needed,
 - opportunities for classis pastors and other church leaders for ongoing learning.
 - Regional Pastors oversee the relationship with Pine Rest that supports pastors, their families, and their paid staff.
 - Regional Pastors oversee and maintain the ministry to spouses.
2. One Regional Pastor sits on the Vision Team and the other Regional Pastor is “at-large”. The Regional Pastor on the Vision Team generally handles matters of leadership, systems, and crises, the other Regional Pastor has been more engaged in one on one maintenance and support encounters with pastors.

XIII. Church Visitors

Value: Collaborative Relationships

The Guide for Church Visiting (2015) provides the following statement of purpose for church visiting:

Clear statement of purpose: Church Order Article 42 specifies the practice and purpose of church visiting:

- a. The classis shall be responsible for appointing persons to provide counsel and advice to churches. The classis shall appoint church visitors to visit each church in classis on a yearly basis. The classis shall appoint classical counselors to provide advice to any church in the process of calling a minister of the Word.
- b. The church visitors shall consist of one or more teams of officebearers chosen for their experience and counsel. Team composition shall include a minister of the Word and at least one other officebearer. Their task shall be to ascertain whether the officebearers of the church faithfully perform their duties, adhere to sound doctrine, observe the provisions of the Church Order, and promote the building up of the body of Christ and the extension of God's kingdom. Churches are free to call on the church visitors whenever serious challenges arise that would benefit from their advice. The church visitors shall provide classis a written report of their work.

Four aspects of church visiting

1. Ascertain—this involves data gathering, conversation, and listening.
2. Admonish—a limited aspect, but occasionally required.
3. Advise—councils have questions that can be dealt with at the official visit or between visits.
4. Accountability—church visitors report their work to classis.

The four aspects above all suggest that the biblical teaching of mutual accountability is foundational to the practice of church visiting. Covenant life together includes a willingness to submit oneself to others and a willingness to live faithfully to agreed-upon commitments.

In keeping with the Classis Georgetown value of collaborative relationships, the following format is designed to set the tone of the meeting as one of prayerful listening, discernment, and encouragement. We have also provided a set of discussion starter questions designed to call out the strengths of each church and foster collaborative ministry whenever possible. These are not the only questions that can be asked, as the link to the "Guide for Conducting Church Visiting" shows, but they do provide a framework for healthy discussion and collaborative relationships.

Church Visiting Format

- Church Visitor teams consisting of one pastor and one other office bearer will contact the pastor to schedule a visit with their elders/deacons/council. Plan on one hour for the visit to occur with the council present. If a council knows that it has some issue(s) on which it will seek advice, it should inform the visitors in advance of the visit so that they can give some thought to the advice they want to give.
- Begin the meeting with a prayer of thanksgiving and praise

- Move into the questions...and listen, listen, listen. The general approach is one of discussion: how is God at work among you, what joys and challenges do you face, how can Classis Georgetown help and encourage you?
- Close the meeting with a time of prayer that allows everyone present to contribute a prayer if desired.
- Church Visitors will summarize in writing the things shared at the meeting and send it to the pastor/congregation for review and then report on it at the next classis meeting. A record of that document will be kept in a classis file for future reference of other church visitor teams.

Suggested Starter Questions:

1. What are some of the blessings from the Lord that your congregation has experienced recently?
2. What strengths for ministry are evidenced today in and through your congregation?
3. How would you describe your congregation to someone who knows very little about you?
4. What are some of the ministries to the community and the world at large that you as a congregation or as individual members have invested in? Are there some that have been a particular joy in which God has blessed your efforts?
5. Are there any particular items of praise and/or petition which the other churches of classis could partner with you in prayer?
6. Are there any ministry opportunities, needs or challenges within your own congregation in which Classis Georgetown could encourage you or assist you?
7. Further sample questions and guidelines are available in the [Guide for Conducting Church Visiting](#).

XIV. Prayer Catalyzer

Value: Empowering Worship

1. The prayer catalyzer encourages and equips members of classis in prayer
2. The prayer catalyzer challenges members of classis to pray along the core values of classis.
3. The prayer catalyzer will assist churches with prayer resources for any special prayer activities or events upon request.

C. Designing Classis Meetings

Classis Georgetown meetings are designed to assist the churches in their unique ministries along with their communal classical vision and five values.

1. Themes for Classis meetings

- The Vision Team identifies the themes for at least the next *two* classis meetings.
- The Vision Team suggests the tone and the take-aways of the meetings.

2. Agendas for Classis meetings

- All agenda requests from classis churches are sent to the stated clerk at least six weeks before the classis meeting date.
- Vision Team selects two months before the meeting of classis those requests (from denomination, grant recipients, etc) that fit the theme of the classis meeting and conveys their decision to the meeting planner.
- The president of classis, the vice-president, the Value Steward of that meeting theme, and the Stated Clerk, plan the meeting agenda flow.
- The meeting agenda with relevant documents are sent to the churches at least 10 days before the meeting date.

3. Classical Credentials

- Ordinarily, all credentials should be sent in one week prior to the meeting

D. Synodical Delegates

Synod is the assembly representing the churches of all classes. Each classis shall ordinarily delegate one minister, one elder, one deacon, and one other officebearer to synod. A classis may send no more than two delegates bearing the same office. CRCNA Church Order, Article 45

1. Classis Georgetown elects its delegates to synod at its February meeting.
 - Classis Georgetown elects 2 minister delegates and 2 minister alternates
 - Classis Georgetown elects one elder delegate and one elder alternate
 - Classis Georgetown elects one deacon delegate and one deacon alternate
 - If there are no deacon delegate nominees, Classis Georgetown will elect an additional elder as a delegate.
2. **Elder delegates**
Church councils are asked to submit *elder* nominations to the stated clerk for classis consideration two weeks before classis meeting.
3. **Deacon delegates**
Church councils are asked to submit *deacon* nominations to the stated clerk for classis consideration two weeks before classis meeting.
4. **Minister delegates**
All ministers employed by member churches are listed as nominees unless they request the removal of their names at least two weeks *in advance* of the classical meeting.
Associate ministers (i.e. ministers whose credentials are with a church but who are not employed by it) are eligible for nomination *only* as minister delegates
Commissioned pastors serving as a solo pastor of an organized congregation may be sent as a ministerial delegate to synod.
Commissioned pastors serving in emerging churches and associate staff positions may be delegated as elder delegates to synod and nominated to serve in other denominational functions where a person must normally be an elder.
5. Officebearers who are delegated to synod (minister, elder, deacon), need to be serving in the office at the time synod meets.
6. To show appreciation to those who serve the denomination on our behalf, an honorarium of \$600 is offered to the elder and deacon who will be the delegate to Synod from Classis Georgetown (Classis Minutes of February 15, 2018).

Notes

- a. Synod has encouraged each classis to delegate at least one person of color.
- b. The names of delegates to previous synods will be reported for information to classis prior to voting.
- c. All nominees for elder and deacon delegates are made subject to biographical data being provided (75 words or less for each nominee).

E. Grant Policy (for our member churches)

1. Background: Since classis adopted a vision and five values, the Vision Team with the approval of classis relates its financial grant recommendations closely to the vision and values of classis so there is alignment of mission and money and value is added in the entire classical community.
2. Applications: Grant applications ordinarily are sent out in April for the following calendar/fiscal year.
 - A. Grants for the current calendar/fiscal year can be made by classis IF
 1. Classical funds are available.
 2. The request is in line with the classical vision and at least one of the five values.
 3. The church has financial need.
 - B. If classis makes a full or partial grant for a ministry initiative or program that has come up during the year, the opportunity to apply for such a grant is to be extended to ALL the churches of classis.
 - C. Grant recommendations are made through the Value Steward and the Vision Team to the fall meeting of classis.
 - D. The request includes specific and measurable outcomes.
3. Financial need: Exceptions or partial *encouragement* grants can be made even if the church does *not* have financial need.
4. Reporting progress: Grant recipients are required to report during the last week of June to the classis through its Vision Team the progress made in achieving the desired results and outcomes specified in the grant request. The last two-quarter payments of the grant money are made after receiving by July 1 a satisfactory report of progress as anticipated in 2-D above.
5. Grant payments:
 - A. When satisfactory outcomes are not being realized and reported on, classis could postpone, reduce, or cancel the remaining part of the grant.
 - B. If a grant recipient realizes that the anticipated outcomes are not achievable at any time during the grant, the church is expected to alert the VisionTeam and unused funds returned to classis.

Note: Additional information and grant application forms are available on the classis website:
<https://classisgeorgetown.com/ministry-grants/>