

Frequently Asked Questions

Regarding the restructuring team report and recommendations

1. Will the General Synod vote on all these recommendations together or will they be separate votes? Is it possible for the synod to adopt some of the team's recommendations and not adopt others?

Each individually numbered recommendation will be presented to the synod for a vote (RF 24-1, RF 24-2, etc.). This means that the synod can adopt some of the restructuring team's recommendations and not others. However, a number of the recommendations do have financial implications that could affect other recommendations. The synod should carefully consider the ramifications of adopting recommendations that reduce denominational income (RF 24-9, capping covenant shares) if it does not also adopt recommendations that would reduce denominational expenses (for example, RF 24-2, General Synod delegations; RF 24-4, frequency of General Synod meetings; RF 24-6, commission composition).

2. In what order will General Synod vote on these recommendations?

The team intends to present its recommendations to the General Synod in the order that they appear in the written report. This means that synod will first consider CO 24-4 (while it appears in the report of the Commission on Church Order, CO 24-4 is the first recommendation referenced in the restructuring team's report and the team intends for it to be considered first). RF 24-1 is a conditional recommendation and will only be presented to the synod if CO 24-4 is adopted, followed by RF 24-2, RF 24-3, and so on.

3. What support will be available from the denomination for regional synods as they work with their classes and consistories to do the required work to reorganize into middle assemblies?

Renovations, a learning process that helps churches learn adaptive change, could be tailored to help regional synods work with classes and consistories to reorganize into middle assemblies. Churches in the region would go through the process together, with shared learning modules. As churches are learning and identifying what their mission and vision is for a middle assembly, the group of churches is doing collective work about how they will relate to and support each other. Each participating congregation benefits from individualized coaching, and grant money will be available as launch grants for the new assemblies, once they begin to take shape. Launch grants would be available starting at \$5,000, and scaling up for groups with more participating churches. Grant funds need to be used by the end of 2025. This group approach to Renovations is already underway in Great Lakes City Classis and the Regional Synod of Albany, though not specifically focused on moving to a middle assembly model.

Additional staff support is available through the Center for Church Multiplication and Ministry, whose staff can be thought partners and change management consultants.

4. Will each congregation get to choose which middle assembly they get to be part of?

It is the intent of this team that each congregation will get to choose the middle assembly to which it belongs. The initial reorganization into middle assemblies is intended to take place under the leadership of current regional synods, but regional synods should consult with all of their classes and congregations, and each congregation should have a voice regarding which middle assembly it ultimately belongs to. (See “[Potential Principle and Process Ideas for Forming Middle Assemblies](#)”] for some process suggestions regarding this initial reorganization and the BCO Chapter 1, Part II, Article 3, Sections 3-4 [2023 edition, pp. 65-66].)

5. Will the one-time reorganization into middle assemblies happen entirely within the bounds of the current regional synods, or is there a possibility for congregations to cross current regional synod lines to join a different middle assembly?

The restructuring team’s suggestion for regional synods to work together with their current classes and consistories to reorganize into middle assemblies could also involve one or more regional synods working together to create a new middle assembly that contains congregations from former classes in different regional synods. It could also mean a consistory working with its regional synod and classis to discern that the best place for that particular congregation within the new structure is a middle assembly being formed by a different regional synod, and then that new middle assembly agreeing to accept the congregation.

6. Can a classis remain as it is and not join with other bodies to form a larger middle assembly?

In general, this is NOT recommended; however, in consultation with the regional synod, a classis could choose to become a middle assembly and remain as it currently is. Please read the full report, which requests that each classis and regional synod carefully consider and potentially refine their vision and mission focus, and consider the resource capacity both in terms of finances and people, that will be needed to live into the requirements of a middle assembly in a manner that promotes flourishing for all of the ministries that are part of the middle assembly. Please see the appendix document “[Potential Principle and Process Ideas for Forming Middle Assemblies](#)” as a resource guide.

7. Who is responsible for moving congregations between middle assemblies after the one time reorganization?

The constitutional changes proposed in CO 24-4 assign the responsibility for transferring congregations between middle assemblies (classes) to the middle assemblies themselves, as long as the congregation and both the sending and receiving middle assembly are in agreement with the transfer. (See segment [h] of CO 24-4 for the specific language.) The General Synod will be responsible for forming, combining or disbanding classes, after consultation with the classes involved and upon a two-thirds majority vote. (See segment [s] of CO 24-4.)

8. If the regional synod is eliminated from the BCO, must regional synod corporations be dissolved? Is there a difference between removing the regional synod from the BCO and dissolving the corporation of the regional synod?

The proposed BCO changes would not require the dissolution of the regional synod corporations; there is a difference between removing the authority of the regional synod to act within the BCO and dissolving the corporation. Even if the regional synod is removed as a level of assembly/judicatory from the BCO, the classes which were members of that regional synod could keep its corporate status to facilitate the ownership of assets and certain ministries, such as camps. This is similar to the distinction between disbanding a congregation and dissolving that corporation - those are two very different actions.

9. What will happen to buildings and resources previously owned by regional synods?

In some cases, the corporation of the regional synod may not be dissolved, and in that case it could continue to own assets such as buildings, property, endowments, etc. In this case, it is recommended that the members of that synod carefully consider, in conjunction with counsel, whether changes to the governing documents of that corporation are required. In other cases, especially if it is decided to dissolve the corporation of a regional synod, the former corporation may transfer those assets to middle assemblies, in whatever way it finds most fair or that best serves the ministry interests of the new middle assemblies. Legal assistance may be required in order to determine how to transfer certain assets.

10. What will happen to buildings and resources owned by classes that are combined into middle assemblies?

The restructuring team encourages each classis to consult with legal counsel. It would be possible to maintain these in a separate corporate entity or they could be transferred to the middle assembly. If a separate corporate entity is maintained, the classis should consult with legal counsel to determine necessary amendments to the governing documents of the corporation.

11. Why did the team choose the name “middle assembly”? Does calling it a “middle assembly” imply a hierarchical relationship when historically our polity is not hierarchical?

We chose the term “middle assembly” because practically, this assembly will stand between the assemblies of the consistory and the General Synod. It thus reinforces the assembly nature of our polity. It is functionally the “middle” assembly; we don’t believe there is a vertical, hierarchical implication to the word “middle,” as something that is “in the middle” could also be said to be “between.” In addition, the Missional Structures Task Force from 2007 proposed this same descriptive name if regional synods were eliminated as an assembly. It is also a new term for a new vision. The new middle assemblies will be assemblies that have greater resources than our current classes and also stronger, more direct connections to congregations than our current regional synods.

12. In RF 24-2, the new formula for calculating General Synod delegations, does the current recommendation mean that a middle assembly (classis) has to have at least 2,000 members to receive delegates to General Synod?

No. Every middle assembly will receive at least 2 delegates. A middle assembly will receive one elder and one minister delegate for the first 2,000 members or portion of 2,000 members in the middle assembly. Each middle assembly will receive an additional 2 delegates for every additional 2,000 members or portion of 2,000 members. For example, a middle assembly with 500 members would receive 2 delegates (one minister and one elder) because 500 is a portion of 2,000. A middle assembly with 2,000 members would also receive 2 delegates. A middle assembly with 2,500 members would receive 4 delegates, two for the first 2,000 members and 2 more for the additional 500 members.

13. Since most of our current classes are smaller, why isn't the team proposing a smaller number as the baseline for General Synod representation?

The team considered several baseline numbers, including both 500 and 1,000. We initially were going to recommend allotting one delegate per 500 members in a middle assembly to remove any incentives to be either a small or large middle assembly. We ultimately chose to use a higher number as a way to accomplish two goals: reducing the size of the General Synod assembly—and thereby reducing the accompanying costs of General Synod—and partially rebalancing the voices of larger and smaller middle assemblies while still protecting the voice of our smallest bodies.

14. So General Synod would only meet once every three years? Won't that hurt our relationships when we are trying to improve our relationships?

General Synod would continue to meet every year if RF 24-4 is adopted. It would only meet *in person* once every three years. The other two years, it would meet virtually. While the virtual meetings would necessarily be structured somewhat differently than in-person meetings (which is something that would be further explored and fleshed out by the Commission on Church Order if RF 24-4 is adopted), the restructuring team's vision for virtual meetings includes time in break out rooms for relationship building. The team acknowledges there is a relational difference between in person and virtual meetings. However, as the world has learned to embrace virtual meetings, we believe the benefits of meeting in person less often are compelling. These benefits include the potential of increasing the pool of those able to attend by removing travel barriers, the ability to still develop some relationships through improved online meeting tools, an increased focus on emphasizing local assemblies over the General Synod (in alignment with our polity, which is not meant to be top-down), and significant cost savings.

15. Will the number of delegates be the same for the virtual General Synod meetings as the in-person General Synod meetings?

Yes. The composition of the General Synod is established in Chapter 1, Part IV, of the *Book of Church Order*. Provisions that would allow for a stated session to occur virtually would not necessarily change the composition of the delegation, but it could if the General Synod decided to make that change.

16. Why is gender not included in RF 24-5, which seeks to “ensure the ordination and reception process in the RCA is equitable and just”?

The restructuring team is attempting to address a specific presenting concern in RF 24-5; there are ever-increasing numbers of candidates for ministry and pastors who have received their formal education outside the U.S. and Canada who wish to become ordained in the RCA. In many cases, their education does not include an M.Div.; this is not because they have not received theological education, but rather because the M.Div. does not exist in many areas of the world, including the global South. Assemblies receiving candidates and ministers who received their education in other parts of the world need guidance in determining equivalency so that these candidates' and ministers' education and experience is fairly recognized. The restructuring team does not mean to suggest that this is the only area of inequity; we acknowledge that even though the RCA fully supports women in ministry, there are still gender-based inequities for candidates for ministry in many areas of the RCA, and we certainly hope that this is also something that we continue to address as a denomination as we move forward together.

17. What commissions will be eliminated?

The restructuring team is not recommending eliminating any commissions. While an earlier draft of the team's proposals did suggest a reduction in the number of commissions, after listening to feedback from the denomination and further team reflection, the team's current recommendations do not propose the elimination of any of the eleven current General Synod commissions. RF-6 does propose that the General Synod task the General Synod Council, the Commission on Nominations, and the Commission on Church Order with reviewing the membership size and requirements for the commissions.

18. Many of the recommendations seem designed to decrease denominational expenses. Why is this important right now?

From the end of 2019 through mid-February of 2024, one-quarter of the churches in the denomination have left or are in the process of leaving the denomination. When combined with churches that have closed and declining membership in other RCA congregations, this reflects 49.8% of our confessing membership. While the General Synod no longer collects assessments based on confessing membership, this decline in membership has also led to a similar steep decline in covenant shares revenue and we need to adapt to a new financial reality that includes much lower denominational income. We simply cannot afford to spend the same amount of money on staff, commissions, and General Synod as we once did. These proposals are in part an effort to live within the new means of our denomination.

19. Which of the recommendations will require classis approval to become effective?

There are several different categories of changes represented by the recommendations in the restructuring team's report (and CO 24-4, which is

coming from the Commission on Church Order at the request of the restructuring team):

A. Constitutional changes (which require adoption by a General Synod, approval by two-thirds of classes, and then ratification by a second General Synod):

- CO 24-4 segments (a) through (cc) (condensing to three assembly levels and creation of new judicatories)
- RF 24-1 (global name change to middle assemblies)
- RF 24-7 (allowing an elder to serve as supervisor of a church)

B. Bylaws changes (requires approval by two General Synods, but not the approval of two-thirds of the classes):

- CO 24-4 segments (dd) through (kk) (bylaws changes related to eliminating a level of assembly and creation of new judicatories)

C. Future Constitutional changes (these recommendations ask the Commission on Church Order to bring Constitutional amendments to a future General Synod for initial approval, which would then begin the constitutional change process):

- RF 24-2 (General Synod delegations)
- RF 24-3 (weighting votes to change the Constitution)
- RF 24-4 (frequency of in-person General Synod meetings)
- RF 24-8 (deacons as delegates to middle assemblies)

20. When will we know which Constitutional changes have received the required approval of two-thirds of classes?

Typically, the results of classis votes on proposed amendments to the Constitution are reported to the denomination through the General Synod workbook the next year (usually released at the beginning of May); classis votes are still being reported throughout the spring.

21. An earlier draft of the team's report included a proposal that would explore more fully what it means for the RCA to become a global denomination. Why is this not a part of the final report? Is the RCA still expanding into the Global South? Will these "middle assemblies" be viable restructuring options in the global South?

The RCA is expanding in the Global South. A number of classes are adopting churches from the Global South as those churches and leaders continue to seek out the RCA with a desire to join this denomination. This is an amazing outgrowth of what God is doing to shape the future of the RCA. The growth in other regions of the world in addition to the Global South, such as Europe, the Dominican Republic, and Asia, has been a growing part of the RCA over the last few years. The restructuring team's report and recommendations address one key issue related to that growth by recommending equity in the ordination process as we consider cultural differences. The larger issue of expanding in the Global South itself did not need to be addressed by the restructuring team for two reasons: first, it does not directly affect the structure the team is proposing, and second,

our Constitution does not limit RCA churches to North America. Within our polity, the authority and responsibility for adopting a church into a classis lies with the individual classis within the guidelines set by the *Book of Church Order*, regardless of where the church is physically located.

Middle assemblies certainly can be a viable structural option for the Global South for two major reasons. First, the relational and covenantal system of the middle assembly is one important quality these new leaders are seeking. Second, the educational oversight and training of leaders in Reformed doctrine and theology is what they deeply desire. Adopted churches in other countries can find much support and direction if they choose to be a part of a middle assembly.