

Potential Principle and Process Ideas for Forming Middle Assemblies

In an effort to help regional synods anticipate a process to evaluate and form middle assemblies, and since feedback to the team continues to include requests for guidance, the team has prepared the following resource. This information offered in this resource is intended to provide guidance and is not intended to mandate any decision or action taken by regional synods in consultation with their classes.

Principles:

- Regional synods are to work together with their classes to ensure that ALL congregations are consulted in the creation of middle assemblies and all congregations are given an opportunity to choose which middle assembly they will join.
- Middle assemblies should be formed keeping in mind the historical data to help determine the optimal size to complete the work given to the middle assembly, paying attention to such data as: membership, numbers of ministers of Word and sacrament as well as other office bearers, assets including income, and geographic-specific needs.
- Middle assemblies should be formed to be sustainable to lead and support mission and ministry in their defined context. Assemblies should be organized not only to complete the administrative tasks assigned to it, but also to align around a common vision and mission.
- Regional synods should develop plans that prioritize the flourishing of ministry within their bounds rather than General Synod delegate representation as a strategy to form middle assemblies.
- What resources and support do our assemblies need to empower our values and vision?

As we consider the formation of these new middle assemblies, the restructuring team offers some guidelines for regional synod conversations. In making these guidelines, we considered the ability of an assembly to hire staff to support its respective churches. In addition, we sought to have enough churches and members to support one another if a church experiences a crisis, as well as to complete the work for which the assembly is responsible. We believe middle assemblies will function best with some paid staff, and therefore note that a 1 percent covenant share assessment at the middle assembly level would likely provide at least a half-time staff member with 10 years of leadership experience in any of our current regions for the recommended size shown below.

We suggest middle assemblies think about staffing the following positions/roles:

- Middle assembly leader/executive
- Stated clerk
- Finance/treasurer (One alternative to having a staff member would be to hire a professional accountant [CPA] at a cost of only a few hours a month, as needed)

- Some of these roles may be filled through collaborative partnerships with other middle assemblies (for example, sharing a stated clerk, finance/treasurer/CPA, etc.)
- Other mission and vision-related staff position(s)

We offer the following suggestions for the consideration of the regional synods as they engage in this work.

	Churches/ Ministries	Combined Revenue of Ministries	Combined Membership of Ministries
Minimum Size	10	\$1,000,000	1,000
Recommended Size	20-60	\$5,000,000+	2,000-8,000

Process Ideas

Regional synod leadership should consult with all classis leadership within its bounds. This may happen in a variety of ways:

- Classis leadership may be invited to a retreat or summit so that as many as possible can meet in person with a trained facilitator.
- The regional synod may create a restructuring team to oversee a process, or determine that a current team, such as the executive committee/team, may act as such for the next year to ensure an expedient process that already includes elected officers from each assembly.
- Surveys may be created to ascertain the will of each classis, key leader, and/or ministry
- Classes may plan to spend extra time at their classis meetings pondering and considering their options and desires, giving feedback to regional synod leadership.
- Regional synod restructuring teams may use some of the process the denominational team has utilized, proposing draft ideas and then reassessing the ideas based on feedback.

The process should begin with Mission and Vision focus: It is important to remember that our restructuring is intended to more effectively support all our leaders and ministries to be **“Making disciples who participate in God’s reign everywhere.”**

We are all called to the work of becoming emotionally healthy and missionally engaged.

In leading a region’s discussion about forming the middle assembly, it is essential to begin with the vision. We also recommend that you design questions that ask your leaders what the specific vision would be for this new middle assembly.

- How can we better support each other to be more effective in making disciples?

- How do you discern what God is calling us to accomplish in our disciple-making efforts?
- What are some key foundational values that will form the base of our middle assembly?
- What can we learn from our current structures? And what do we want to change/improve as we live into a new structure?

Stating a vision for the middle assembly is a helpful and important starting place. After a compelling vision is established, the structuring team may then move on to asking who wants to be a part of it and asking what structure will help everyone and every ministry in the new middle assembly to live into the vision, including fulfilling all of the requirements of being a middle assembly.

Regional synods and classes will need to assess the priorities of the congregations within their bounds. The restructuring team encourages regional synods and classes to consult with each consistory or survey each congregation. Determining the will of each congregation/ministry regarding at least the following issues will be important:

- What values are most important for your congregation in a middle assembly?
- What resources are most important for your congregations in a middle assembly?
- What are the most important factors for your congregation in placement in a middle assembly?
 - Geographic proximity of congregations
 - A particular view of the interpretation of Scripture related to an issue:
 - Specific to Sexuality:
 - I/We cannot be in a middle assembly with another congregation that participates in same-sex weddings or ordains people in same-sex relationships to the offices of the church.
 - I/We cannot be in a middle assembly with another congregation that names homosexuality as a sin and discourages LGBTQ+ people from participating in the full life of the church.
 - I/We may not have similar views, but are okay with being in a middle assembly with other congregations that interpret Scripture differently on various topics, including sexuality.
 - Specific to another topic(s) of concern:
 - I/We cannot be in a middle assembly with another congregation that...
 - I/We want to be in a middle assembly that...
 - Similarity of missional focus or identity between the churches

The role of a middle assembly, similar to a classis as stated in the *Book of Church Order*, will require every ministry in its bounds working together. Middle assemblies are required to:

- Supervise churches within their bounds, including overseeing the boards of elders, the filling of pulpits, the proclamation of the Word, the administering of the sacraments, and the discipline of its members.
- Raise up candidates for ministry, oversee their process, examine and support them.
- Form and disband congregations, including teams on both ends of the spectrum to help organize, and supersede as issues arise, as well as when necessary to disband.
- Provide support and care for congregational leaders, including care for ministers and their families.
- Provide training and support for leadership development, including support for congregations in training elders and deacons
- Oversee reporting

Some other helpful resourcing for middle assemblies to provide, though not explicitly required by the *BCO*:

- Mediation team of trained mediators with ongoing training
- Training for boundary awareness and sexual ethics, some of which is required annually in some states
- Resources for renewal and revitalization
- Resources for church multiplication
- Resources for deepening discipleship
- Coordination of support networks and accountability groups
- Encourage goal setting and long-term planning for mission and vision
- Communication between congregations
- Pastoral care for leaders