

PROPOSAL

Feb 2025

IN THIS TOGETHER FOR GOOD The Upstate New York Middle Assembly

*We are in this together for good,
called by God to live in covenantal community,
embody Christ's love, and be led by the Spirit
for the flourishing of the church and the world.*

Proposal Overview

A Middle Assembly, born out of the Regional Synod of Albany, structured with localized care, seeking to maintain the covenantal commitment of the RCA churches in upstate New York to be in this together for good.

The Restructuring Plan for the Regional Synod of Albany introduces a new structure aimed at fostering stronger connections between churches, supporting localized ministry, and enhancing efficiency. This plan transitions the Synod from six separate Classes to one unified Middle Assembly, supported by Regional Care Collectives that focus on localized care and collaboration. This restructuring is designed to empower churches, streamline decision-making, and allow us to reflect God's work more effectively in a changing world while staying rooted in our Reformed tradition.

Input over the past year has clarified that not all churches currently within the bounds of the Regional Synod of Albany will desire to be part of this new Middle Assembly, therefore provisions for an Alternative Middle Assembly will be made (page 7). Additionally, there is an understanding that some churches from beyond the RSA may be incorporated into the Upstate New York Middle Assembly.

Core Principles

1. **Distributed Leadership:** This plan decentralizes responsibilities related to congregational life and ministry. Regional Care Collectives, based on geographic areas, will provide direct care for ministers, resource sharing, and mission collaboration keeping decision-making closer to the churches they serve.
2. **Jurisdiction with Flexibility:** The Middle Assembly will focus on overarching governance, such as licensure, ordination, and long-term strategic planning, while allowing local churches to retain autonomy over their ministries and programs with support from regional collectives.
3. **Task-Based Collaboration:** Work will be divided into specialized teams to focus on key areas such as leadership development, finances, and mission projects. This ensures clarity of responsibility and efficient execution, while enabling shared resources to benefit all regions.

Structure of the Upstate NY Middle Assembly

Middle Assembly

The Middle Assembly will serve as the main governing body, taking on the responsibilities currently handled by the six Classes. It will make major decisions, oversee ministers and churches, and set long-term goals for all congregations within the Middle Assembly.

Meetings:

The Middle Assembly will meet twice a year (spring and fall) to vote on key decisions, review reports, and guide regional strategy.

Representation:

Each church will send:

Ministers (pastors or commissioned pastors).
Elder delegates, with larger churches sending more representatives for proportional representation.

Committees:

An Executive Committee will handle Middle Assembly business between meetings.

Ministry Teams will be created to oversee key areas of leadership, mission, and financial management.

Ministry Teams

Ministry Teams will work across the Middle Assembly to provide leadership development, financial oversight, and mission support, ensuring expertise and consistency.

- Defined by the Middle Assembly for strategic ministry areas.
- Composed of members from each Regional Care Collective to ensure balanced representation.
- Report bi-annually to the Middle Assembly to track progress and effectiveness.

Ministry Teams Will Focus on:

1. Developing and Implementing Best Practices – Creating clear strategies for leadership training, financial management, and mission efforts.
2. Providing Support and Resources – Equipping churches and leaders with tools, training, and financial guidance.
3. Evaluating and Reporting Progress – Assessing impact and recommending improvements to the Middle Assembly.

Regional Care Collectives

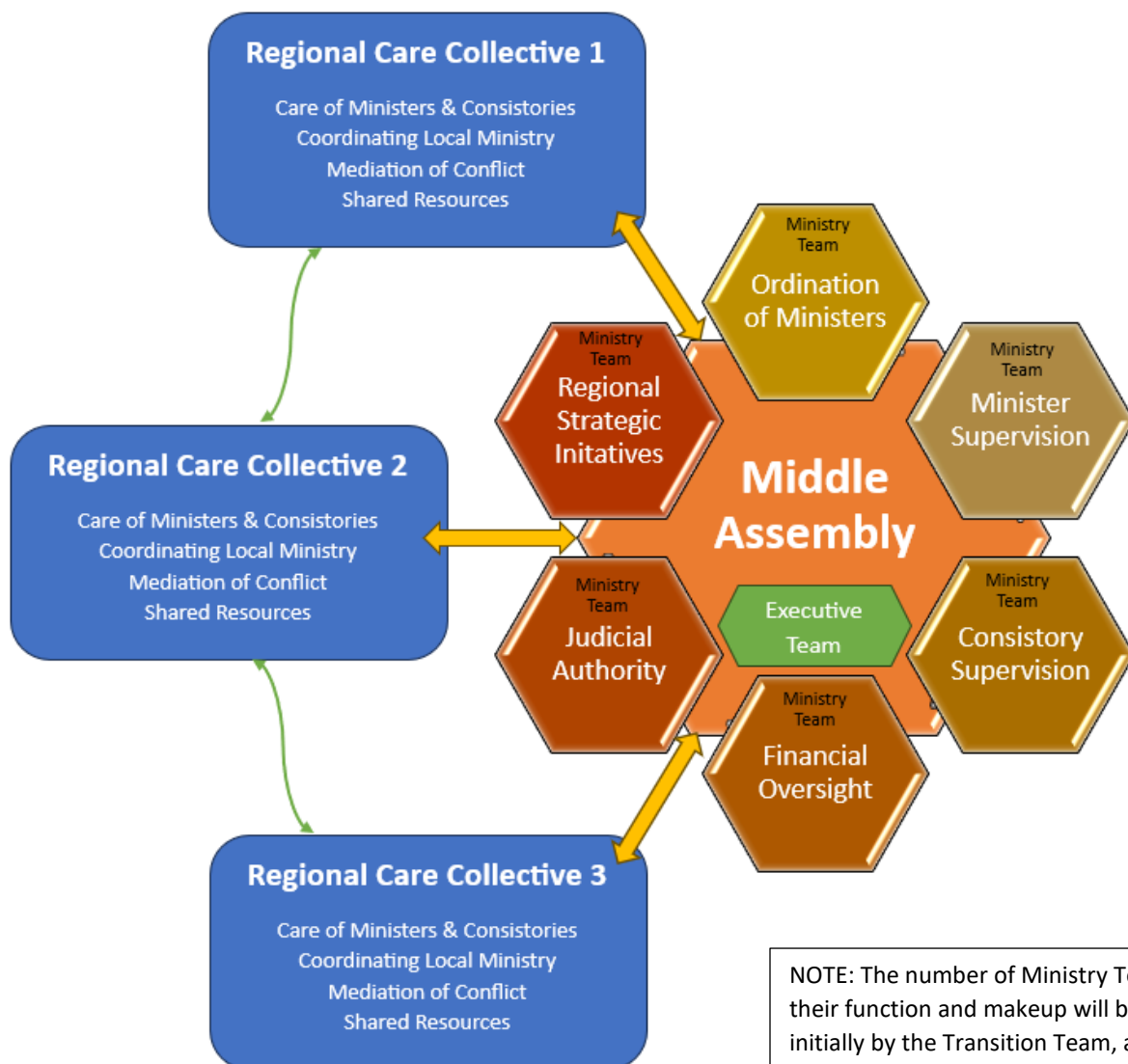
Regional Care Collectives will ensure churches receive direct, localized support while still benefiting from regional collaboration.

Three geographic regions will be identified for more personalized support and collaborative ministry.

Each region elects a Regional Care Coordinator (an elder, deacon, or minister) to serve as a liaison between local churches and the Middle Assembly.

Collectives will focus on pastoral care, congregational care, conflict mediation, shared resources, and mission coordination at the local level.

The desire is that this structure will ensure that, while decision-making is streamlined at the Middle Assembly level, churches still receive hands-on support and flexibility through Regional Care Collectives and Ministry Teams.



Responsibilities

Middle Assembly - Centralized

1. Supervision of pastors, commissioned pastors, and consistories for accountability.
2. Licensure and ordination of new ministers.
3. Judicial authority (appeals, complaints, discipline).
4. Strategic initiatives and regional mission goals.
5. Formation and oversight of new or disbanded churches.
6. Transferring congregations between Middle Assemblies.

Regional Care Collectives- Localized

1. Develop and define makeup and function by the consistories within its bounds.
2. Care for church leaders and consistories.
3. Coordination of local mission projects and outreach.
4. Mediation of conflicts within or between churches.
5. Facilitation of shared use of resources, such as facilities or staff.

Why This Plan?

Positive Change and Practical Benefits:

1. **Enhanced Collaboration:** By centralizing governance and decentralizing care, the plan fosters greater collaboration across regions while allowing for local flexibility.
2. **Efficient Use of Resources:** Shared financial and human resources will better equip churches to engage in meaningful ministry and mission.
3. **Encouraging Innovation:** The structure's flexibility allows for creative approaches to ministry, fostering a Spirit-led response to the changing needs of churches and communities.

Differences from Current Structure:

While this plan essentially makes the Regional Synod of Albany the Middle Assembly, it is distinct in that it introduces:

- **Localized Care Collectives:** These ensure churches have direct support and practical collaboration at a regional level. Classis boundaries and identity will cease to exist, and newly formed Regional Care Collectives within the Middle Assembly will arise.
- **Task-Based Ministry Teams:** These streamline responsibilities and prevent redundancy by focusing on key areas of ministry across the Middle Assembly. These Ministry Teams will tie together churches in different Care Teams.
- **Proportional Representation:** Delegates are selected based on congregational size, ensuring fair representation.

Key Features of the Plan

1. **Digital Tools:** Platforms like Slack and Zoom will facilitate communication and reduce travel needs, while an online portal will centralize reports, resources, and event planning.
2. **Rotating Leadership:** Leaders will serve term-limited roles to prevent burnout and bring fresh perspectives, with staggered terms to maintain continuity.
3. **Renewing Covenant:** Living into a covenant that provides a framework for navigating theological and ethical differences while maintaining shared commitment to mission, ministry and mutual respect. (See Addendum 2)

Asset Allocation

Regional Synod and Classis assets will become part of the Middle Assembly.

If handled well, this approach can reflect our commitment to fairness, stewardship, and supporting churches in their ministry work within the Kingdom of God.

Ensuring Fair Distribution of Resources

As we transition into the new Upstate NY Middle Assembly, we are committed to an equitable distribution of resources currently held by the Regional Synod of Albany (RSA) and each Classis. These currently held assets will be allocated to support the Middle Assembly, Ministry Teams, Regional Care Collectives, as well as churches that choose to be part of a different Middle Assembly (see Alternative Option below).

Once the Middle Assembly is up and running, each Regional Care Collective will receive an annual budgeted amount from the Middle Assembly to support the work of their local ministry.

Transition Team for the Upstate NY Middle Assembly

To ensure a smooth and orderly transition, an initial Executive Committee and Transition Team will be established. This team will be composed of the clerk and president from each Classis and the Regional Synod, providing a strong foundation for leadership and legal processes.

Their primary responsibilities will include:

- Serving as the founding board for filing necessary paperwork with New York State to officially establish the Middle Assembly.
- Ensuring a structured and well-organized transition from the current governance model to the new Middle Assembly framework.
- Identifying key leaders within our churches who can help develop and sustain the new structure.

This team brings together experienced leaders who understand our churches and governance, ensuring that the transition is carried out with wisdom, order, and a shared vision for the future.

Alternative Middle Assembly

Provisions for Churches Opting Out

The Regional Synod of Albany has a distinct culture, approach to ministry, and direction in which it is heading. As mentioned in the introduction, it is recognized that there are churches who will choose a different path than the trajectory of a Middle Assembly born out of the current Regional Synod of Albany.

While the default of this plan is for all congregations within the Regional Synod of Albany to transition into the Upstate NY Middle Assembly, churches wishing to form or join an alternate Middle Assembly are encouraged to do so. The desire is for all RCA congregations to be in a Middle Assembly which matches their understanding of ministry and connects them with a support system that is truly supportive.

The initial formation of Middle Assemblies will take place following General Synod 2025. After this period, any new Middle Assemblies must first be officially recognized by the General Synod (GS), which may take time. Because of this, we are looking at a plan to accommodate the creation of an Alternative Middle Assembly for churches in the region that do not see the Upstate NY Middle Assembly as the best fit.

Funding an Alternative Middle Assembly

Churches opting to be part of a different Middle Assembly will receive their proportional share of Synod and Classis assets, calculated by dividing total assets by the number of churches at the time of restructuring. This amount will then be transferred to the chosen Middle Assembly. No funds will go directly to churches, only RCA Middle Assemblies.

NOTE: If a church chooses to leave the RCA entirely, it will not receive a share of these assets, as they are designated for RCA Middle Assemblies. However, under the grace-filled separation agreements set by the General Synod, departing churches will retain their buildings and other assets.

This plan seeks to ensure that every church has the resources needed to move forward confidently, whether they remain in the Upstate Middle Assembly or transition to another RCA Middle Assembly.

Conclusion

This restructuring plan offers a way to navigate change faithfully and creatively, empowering churches to engage in God's mission with renewed energy and purpose. By adopting this structure, we can better equip our churches, foster collaboration, and remain rooted in our Reformed tradition while responding to the realities of a changing world. Through this plan, we trust that the Spirit will guide us toward a future of abundant life and faithful ministry.

Let us step forward together, confident in God's grace and the work of the Spirit among us.

Upstate New York Middle Assembly - FAQ

What is the Upstate New York Middle Assembly?

The Upstate NY Middle Assembly is a new structure replacing the six current Classes of the Regional Synod of Albany. It strengthens church connections, streamlines decision-making, and provides localized care through Regional Care Collectives.

How will decisions be made?

The Middle Assembly will meet twice a year for major decisions, with an Executive Committee overseeing operations between meetings. Churches will send ministers and elder delegates based on congregation size.

What are Ministry Teams?

Ministry Teams will focus on leadership development, finances, and mission efforts across all regions to ensure consistency and expertise.

How will local churches be supported?

Churches will be grouped into Regional Care Collectives to provide pastoral care, conflict resolution, and resource sharing.

What happens to church assets?

- The Regional Synod and Classis assets will transfer to the Middle Assembly.
- Each Regional Care Collective will receive a budget for local ministry.
- If a church joins another Middle Assembly, its proportional share of assets will transfer there.

What if a church wants to join another Middle Assembly?

Churches can choose a different Middle Assembly or coordinate with other churches to form a new Middle Assembly according to guidance provided by General Synod. Provisions will be developed to ensure a smooth transition and gracious support.

Who will lead the transition?

A Transition Team made up of the clerks and presidents of each Classis and the Regional Synod will oversee the legal and organizational process.

Addendum 1:

Staffing Considerations in the Restructured Synod

As we progress toward implementing the proposed restructuring of the Regional Synod of Albany, we understand that clarifying staffing roles and responsibilities is essential. This addendum provides an overview of how staffing might be addressed within the new structure, including paid positions, elected roles, and potential opportunities for expanded staff involvement. The framework presented here is intended as a starting point to spark ideas and guide further discussion as we shape the future of our Synod.

Staffing in the New Structure

1. Clerk of the Middle Assembly:

- The **Clerk of the Middle Assembly** will be a paid, elected position. This role will be responsible for maintaining accurate records, preparing meeting agendas, managing correspondence, and ensuring compliance with governance standards. The clerk will also support communication between the middle assembly, regional care collectives, and local churches.

2. Regional Care Coordinators:

- While **Regional Care Coordinators** are elected positions, these roles may also involve significant responsibilities that require consistent time and attention. The Middle Assembly may consider providing a stipend or part-time compensation for these positions to ensure individuals are supported in their work. Coordinators will act as liaisons between the churches in their region and the middle assembly, providing pastoral care, conflict mediation, and logistical support.

3. Ministry Team Support:

- The restructuring plan introduces **specialized ministry teams** (e.g., Leadership Development, Finance and Property, Mission and Outreach). These teams will require coordination and communication. While team leaders will likely be volunteer positions, the Middle Assembly could explore hiring a part-time **Ministry Support Administrator** to assist with scheduling, resource distribution, and communication between teams and the middle assembly.

4. Digital and Administrative Support:

- To leverage the proposed digital tools and platforms (e.g., Slack, Zoom, online portals), the Middle Assembly could hire a **Digital Communications Coordinator** to manage these systems. This role could be part-time, focusing on maintaining the Middle Assembly's online presence, organizing virtual meetings, and ensuring reports and resources are accessible to churches and teams.

Staffing Flexibility and Future Opportunities

As the new structure takes shape, staffing needs may evolve. The Synod will remain flexible, evaluating the following options as needs arise:

- **Event Planning and Coordination:**
For middle assembly meetings and larger Synod-wide events, consider hiring or contracting with a part-time **Event Coordinator** to manage logistics, venue arrangements, and communication with participants.
- **Resource Development Staff:**
If the Synod seeks to expand its offerings (e.g., educational resources, grant programs), a **Resource Development Specialist** could be added to focus on creating, curating, and distributing materials to support churches and regional teams.

Staffing Philosophy

The staffing approach in this new structure is guided by three principles:

1. **Sustainability:** Staffing decisions will align with the financial realities of the Synod, ensuring that paid roles are sustainable and add clear value to the mission.
2. **Equity:** Compensation will reflect the time, expertise, and commitment required for each role, recognizing the importance of fairness across positions.
3. **Collaboration:** Paid staff will work closely with elected leaders and volunteers, fostering a culture of shared responsibility and mutual support.

Addendum 2:

Example of Covenantal Framework of Life Together

As part of this proposal, we affirm and incorporate these principles regarding marriage, human sexuality, and church unity. These principles provide a framework for navigating theological and ethical differences while maintaining a shared commitment to mission, ministry, and mutual respect.

1. **Affirming Historical Teaching:** We recognize the historical Christian teaching on marriage and human sexuality as the normative model for Christian discipleship, while acknowledging the enduring relevance of these teachings across time and cultures.
2. **Respecting Variance:** We affirm the integrity and faithfulness of members who, through theological reflection and pastoral care, embrace newer interpretations and practices regarding human sexuality and marriage.
3. **Recognizing the Spirit's Work:** We acknowledge the fruit of the Spirit's work in the ministries of those holding both traditional and newer interpretations and commit to listening humbly and prayerfully for the Spirit's guidance.
4. **Unity in Christ:** The unity of the church is grounded in our shared baptism and communion in Christ, not uniformity in discipleship. We affirm our mutual welcome in God's covenantal family, even amidst theological differences, as we pursue our shared mission of reconciliation and Gospel healing.
5. **Commitment to Respect:** We commit to respecting one another's pastoral and theological discernment regarding human sexuality, affirming local pastoral authority in decisions about marriage and leadership, and refraining from judicial actions on these differences.
6. **A Witness to Unity:** Maintaining the visible unity of the church in the face of disagreement is a faithful witness to the Gospel, a commitment to listening to the Spirit, and a biblical way to advance the mission of the Reformed Church in America.
7. **Posture of Humility and Love:** We adopt this posture with humility, love, and continued submission to one another and to the Constitution and Polity of the Reformed Church in America, seeking God's guidance and correction as we move forward together.