



***Renewing***  
**Classis Grand Rapids East**

**September, 2008, Proposals**  
**Classis Grand Rapids East Renewal Team**

Dear Colleagues:

September, 2008

This report contains the results of our work as a classis, guided by the Classis Grand Rapids East Renewal Team. We pray that God will use these proposed actions to help our classis continue to renew what we do through classis, in our congregations, and as disciples seeking to follow our Lord's bidding.

In 1992 Christian Reformed Home Missions and the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee launched an initiative to help classes renew themselves as agents in the Kingdom of God. In 1996 a denominational Classis Renewal Ministry Team was formed to guide this effort. Since then, benchmarks of a healthy classis have been identified and many classes have re-imagined, restructured, and renewed themselves.

In September 2006, Classis Grand Rapids East mandated its own Classis Renewal Team to "design and implement a process for discerning God's expected mission in southeast Grand Rapids over the next 20 years." Four representatives (a pastor, an elder, a deacon, and another leader) from each congregation met three times to accomplish this purpose.

On April 19, 2007 the congregations met to discern the purpose of Classis. On February 21, 2008 the congregations met to identify expected results of Classis. Finally, on April 17, 2008 the congregations met to explore strategies for achieving the expected results. A list of the 54 individuals who participated in this process concludes this report.

The Classis Renewal Team has organized the decisions from these meetings as elements of a "Vision Tree." We use the image of a "Vision Tree" to organize our efforts, avoid typical differences in planning terminology, and help us retain a common focus. The Vision Tree has:

- Fruit – results Classis is expected to produce
- Twigs and leaves – Classis actions that produce the fruit
- Major branches – The ministry themes or general directions of Classis
- A Trunk – The purpose and mission of Classis; its reason for existence
- Roots – This Plan is grounded in our core values

Aspects of our proposed Vision Tree are explained in more detail in the pages that follow.

We recommend that Classis approve this plan in concept and appoint a committee to present implementation recommendations.

Classis Renewal Team  
Fran Baker, Tom Bulten, Thea Leunk, Del Nykamp, and Naiji Umran

## Overview to Essential Elements

The **roots** (core values) of Classis Grand Rapids East are:

- an extended church community
- authentic passionate faith
- discipleship
- being good neighbors
- social justice
- diversity

The **trunk** (mission) of Classis Grand Rapids East is:

*“Classis GR East is a community of vibrant congregations  
who love and follow Jesus together  
by encouraging and equipping one another  
for worship, discipleship, and mission.”*

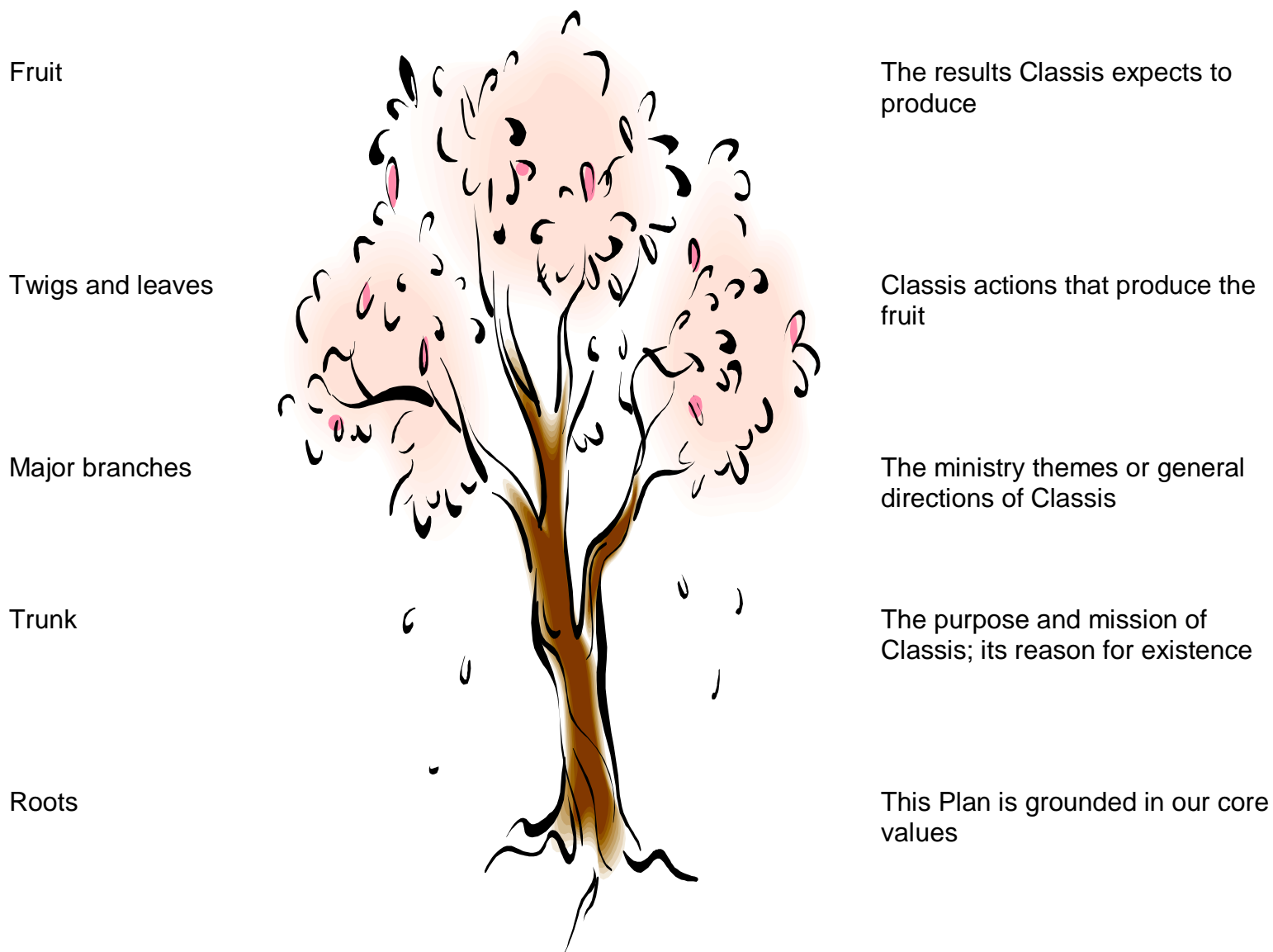
**Major branches** (priority areas of service) on the tree are:

- Developing leaders
- Worshiping and praying together
- Thriving in our neighborhoods
- Breaking down barriers
- Shepherding generations X, Y, and Z
- Pressing on together
- Partnering ecumenically

On each branch there are twigs and leaves (actions to be taken) that bear fruit. Fruits include sufficient qualified leaders, congregations that worship and fellowship together, an increase in spiritual growth and discipleship, an increased number of youth who profess their faith, continued commitment from people in their 20s, 30s, and 40s, congregations increasingly committed to the parish, people who were marginalized are equipped for leadership, and twenty active ministry partnerships to bring healing and growth.

All aspects of the Vision Tree are explained further in the pages that follow.

# Classis Grand Rapids East Vision Tree



## Implementation

To implement this Classis Plan and obtain the expected fruit requires organizational changes. Some changes are recommended in the twigs and leaves (action steps) that follow. Key recommendations are summarized here:

### **Congregation coordination**

Congregations have expressed a desire to coordinate and collaborate with other congregations. Cooperation occurs best in small neighborhood or interest clusters. How coordination is accomplished is best defined by those who are involved. We urge church staffs to remain in close contact with one another.

Congregations are invited to form congregation clusters as necessary. Classis will assist congregations by:

1. promoting and supporting existing congregational programs
2. mobilizing resources for programs which a congregation identifies as beneficial to the community and which the church is willing to lead in a broader community, and
3. convening, at the request of a congregation, an ad hoc team to explore the development of a classis-wide ministry.

### **Classis organizational structure**

A Classis Ministry Committee serves as a leadership committee for classis. It replaces the Classis Interim Committee and is assisted by a Stated Clerk, a Treasurer, a Classis Pastor, and an administrative assistant as necessary.

A Classis team structure accomplishes the mission of Classis. The Classis Ministry Committee coordinates the Classis team structure. Some teams are “standing” teams. Some teams are ad hoc teams that mobilize for a period or for a specific task in response to the interests of Classis members.

Teams meet as necessary in team clusters for mutual learning and joint planning. They present annual plans, annual budgets, and annual reports to Classis. These reports should provide consistent structure for Classis’ agenda.

The next pages develop each Vision Tree aspect more fully.

## **Roots** **(Core Values)**

### **An Extended Church Community**

God's gospel is reflected best in congregational life when, like the early church's Koinonia, we develop long-term relationships that sacrificially enfold people into our family. We must be God's instruments of healing and growth. We also work through CRCNA agencies, classis, the denomination, other denominations, and parachurch organizations. We hold each other accountable as we act as God's voice of justice and hand of mercy.

### **Authentic, Passionate Faith**

We value the faith of children, old people, and everyone in between. To pass our faith to the next generation, we must know, grow in, and experience God's grace in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Church health requires us to live with integrity. We look for God to revive and reform us and expect to be malleable in God's hands.

### **Discipleship**

To grow we need mentors who authentically speak of their faith, testify to God's actions in their lives, showing what it means to follow Jesus. In turn, we must help children and adults with new faith from the Holy Spirit develop their faith, using teaching, discipline, accountability, and forgiveness. God holds us accountable for our growth and what we do to help others grow. Let us be and make disciples.

### **Being Good Neighbors**

God expects us to be salt and light in our neighborhoods and city. God challenges us to implement divine mercy, justice, and righteousness, thereby transforming our neighborhoods. As we do so we will find brothers and sisters in Christ who will be the neighborhood's future leaders. If we do not focus on our neighborhoods, we fail to obey God's command to love our neighbor.

### **Social Justice**

The church must pursue justice for the poor and oppressed. We must fight complicated systems that favor us at the expense of the poor. Pursuit of justice, holiness, and spiritual maturity are intimately intertwined. We must overcome our lethargy, apathy, sense of entitlement, contentment with the status-quo, selfishness, and ignorance. We must understand, give priority to, and address the needs of those with fewer resources and more disadvantages.

### **Diversity**

God put dazzling diversity into this creation. We commit ourselves to value the diversity of people from different jobs and professions, religious perspectives, ethnicities, and cultural regions. The church cannot bring about a perfect society, but must be the best model possible with no outsiders who have been consciously or unconsciously excluded.

## **Trunk**

### **(Mission or Purpose Statement)**

*“Classis GR East is a community of vibrant congregations who love and follow Jesus together by encouraging and equipping one another for worship, discipleship, and mission.”*

## **Major Branches**

### **(Priority Areas of Service)**

Vision Trees naturally sprout many branches which emerge from the trunk. But trees with too many branches are unwisely crowded: branches compete for nourishment from the soil and sunshine, trees quickly become unhealthy.

Representatives of congregations invested hours selecting and pruning branches they found to be most important to their congregations and the classis. Those branches are:

- Developing leaders
- Worshiping and praying together
- Thriving in our neighborhoods
- Breaking down barriers
- Shepherding generations X, Y, and Z
- Pressing on together
- Partnering ecumenically

Pages 7-15 identify the twigs and leaves (action steps) that are expected to bear fruit.

## Twigs, Leaves, and Fruit

### Developing leaders

Twigs and Leaves	Arborists
Establish a Developing Leaders Team	Classis
Establish sub-teams, as necessary, including Classis Ministry Leadership Team and Leadership Development Fund Team	Developing Leaders Team
Present an annual plan for the coming year to Classis	Developing Leaders Team
Request an annual budget allocation	Developing Leaders Team
Coordinate opportunities for Classis to examine candidates for ministry. A Classis contracta should be convened if necessary. "If a classis contracta is necessary because of justifiable circumstances to be determined in consultation with [synodical] deputies, a contracted classis shall never be convened with fewer than half the churches represented. A quorum for a classis contracta shall be half the church of a classis plus one." <sup>4</sup>	Developing Leaders Team Stated Clerk Synodical Deputies
Authorize grants for developing leaders	Developing Leaders Team
Coordinate training opportunities for church leaders, coordinating an orientation for new classis delegates prior to each class meeting, coordinating at least one annual training event for church leaders, and encouraging participation in training opportunities sponsored by other organizations such as V.I.S. and CR Home Missions	Developing Leaders Team
Help congregations create cultures of leadership development, coordinate leader mentoring and coaching, access training opportunities, and provide consultation	Developing Leaders Team
Submit an annual report to Classis	Developing Leaders Team

These actions are expected to bear two primary **fruits**:

1. Congregations have sufficient, qualified persons willing to be leaders in the church.
2. Twenty (20) additional ethnic minority leaders are active in Classis congregations by 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Acts of Synod 2000, p. 668.

## Worshipping and praying together

<b>Twigs and Leaves</b>	<b>Arborists</b>
<i>To make prayer a priority <b>between</b> Classis meetings</i>	
Establish a Worship and Prayer Team	Classis
Present an annual plan for the coming year to Classis	Worship and Prayer Team
Request an annual budget allocation	Worship and Prayer Team
Recruit a classical prayer-coordinator who will contact persons in each congregation and help form clusters of prayer contact people and/or members of congregations who are interested in gathering to pray together or be engaged in prayer-walking	Worship and Prayer Team
Solicit monthly praise and petition items, including updates from previous months, from each congregation, communicating them to churches via email and the website	Worship and Prayer Team.
Arrange for annual education events or spiritual growth retreats to provide training in spiritual disciplines for interested members and pastors, key leaders, and prayer coordinators	Worship and Prayer Team
Report on activities and progress via columns and articles on the Classis website	Worship and Prayer Team
<i>To make prayer a priority <b>during</b> Classis meetings</i>	
Set aside and use 30 minutes for prayer and worship at each Classis meeting	Worship and Prayer Team
Present from each church at least one praise item to celebrate together and one petition item; use in small prayer-clusters	Worship and Prayer Team
Distribute all praise and petition items to all churches the week following the meeting	Classis Prayer Coordinator

The **fruit** is that congregations and members of classis are equipped and encouraged to pray for each others' needs.

<b>Twigs and Leaves</b>	<b>Arborists</b>
<i>Two Classis-wide Worship Gatherings each year</i>	
Hold services on Sunday afternoons (3 p.m.) at an available large facility	Worship and Prayer Team
Include a \$1,000 line item in the Classis budget for facilities and speakers	Worship and Prayer Team
Schedule 1 service in February or the 1 <sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent and 1 in the summer	Worship and Prayer Team
Ask individual churches to adapt their evening worship schedule and encourage their members to attend	Classis Prayer-Coordinator
<i>Rotating involvement</i>	
Help available congregations prepare to lead the Classis-wide worship events (use prayer requests and praise items; link themes to the liturgical year and/or current classical ministries)	Classis Prayer Coordinator, Worship and Prayer Team
Submit an annual report to Classis	Worship and Prayer Team

The **fruit** is that member congregations worship and fellowship together, developing a sense of unity and mutual support.

## Thriving in our neighborhoods

<b>Twigs and Leaves</b>	<b>Arborists</b>
Establish a Thriving in Our Neighborhoods Team	Classis
Present an annual plan for the coming year to Classis	Thriving in our Neighborhoods Team
Request an annual budget allocation	Thriving in our Neighborhoods Team
Encourage congregations to recognize and commit to parish boundaries	Thriving in our Neighborhoods Team Congregation deacons
Equip congregations to establish a prayer walk (focused on a specific block)	Thriving in our Neighborhoods Team Congregational Teams of two volunteers
Equip congregations to partner with public schools for activities such as tutoring, mentoring, games, and providing supplies	Thriving in our Neighborhoods Team Congregational teachers, coaches, and other volunteers
Monitor real estate markets in church parishes and encourage church members to reside in the parish of the church	Thriving in our Neighborhoods Team
Equip congregations to partner with other churches and with businesses in our parishes to make the neighborhood a better place to work, live, play, and worship	Thriving in our Neighborhoods Team Congregational Networkers
Convene deacons and others annually for mutually learning and encouragement	Thriving in our Neighborhoods Team
Authorize annual grants to congregations for evangelism and community development	Thriving in our Neighborhoods Team
Submit an annual report to Classis	Thriving in our Neighborhoods Team

The **fruits** are that:

- congregations are increasingly seen as committed to the parish and
- the number of members residing within a half mile radius is increased 10% by 2015.

## Breaking down barriers

Twigs and Leaves	Arborists
Establish a Breaking Down Barriers Team	Classis
Present an annual plan for the coming year to Classis	Breaking Down Barriers Team
Request an annual budget allocation	Breaking Down Barriers Team
Equip congregations to select people with knowledge and skill to identify and break down barriers and to work with people who are marginalized	Breaking Down Barriers Team Church officers
Equip congregations to define the margins for persons who are being marginalized	Breaking Down Barriers Team Church officers
Equip congregations to identify barriers (racial, socio-economic, etc.) that prevent people from full participation in church life	Breaking Down Barriers Team Church officers
Equip congregations to prepare and implement training that increases congregational understanding of the barriers and that helps people to overcome those barriers without losing their uniqueness	Breaking Down Barriers Team Church officers
Compile and distribute congregation plans for breaking down barriers	Breaking Down Barriers Team
Submit an annual report to Classis	Breaking Down Barriers Team

The expected **fruit** is that each congregation has a plan for embracing people who are marginalized and equipping them for increased participation and leadership within the church.

## Shepherding generations X, Y, and Z

<b>Twigs and Leaves</b>	<b>Arborists</b>
<i>Assessment</i>	
Appoint a Shepherding Team	Classis
Present an annual plan to Classis	Shepherding Team
Request an annual budget allocation	Shepherding Team
Identify criteria and benchmarks for youth development curricula and procedures and to evaluate available resources	Shepherding Team
Identify and recommend curricula and procedures shown to be most effective in leading to professions of faith	Shepherding Team
<i>Development</i>	
Help congregations evaluate spiritual development of 4 <sup>th</sup> -5 <sup>th</sup> graders and 11 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> graders	Shepherding Team
Hold churches accountable for encouraging authentic professions of faith from significant numbers of the two designated age groups	Church visitors Shepherding Team
Select and designate at least one mentor-mentee pair to provide input and assistance in preparing and holding motivational events	Church officers
Prepare for and hold annual motivational events for parents and mentors of pre-teens (October) and pre-graduates (November), using either public lectures and/or worship services and materials	Shepherding Team
Encourage cooperative networking and sharing of shepherding resources among Classis congregations	Shepherding Team
Identify and organize youth-leaders and resources to provide high quality Classis-wide fellowship and service events	Shepherding Team
Develop, schedule, and promote classis-wide fellowship and service events	Shepherding Team

The expected **fruit** is that an increased number of youth profess their faith, participate in programs, and seriously consider ministry or ordination.

<b>Twigs and Leaves</b>	<b>Arborists</b>
<i>Singles, Couples, and Families in 20s, 30s, and 40s</i>	
Identify leaders in their 20s, 30s, and 40s	Shepherding Team
Solicit input from churches on available resources and activities	Shepherding Team
Design, develop, and promote fellowship and service events for the 20s, 30s, and 40s to encourage participation, multiplication, and “cross-pollination” among these people	Shepherding Team
Submit an annual report to Classis	Shepherding Team

Expected **fruit** is that people in their 20s, 30s, and 40s remain active in the CRC and/or other churches.

## Pressing on together

### Benchmarks for congregational health and discipleship

Twigs and Leaves	Arborists
Establish a Discipleship Team	Classis
Present an annual plan for the coming year to Classis	Discipleship Team
Request an annual budget allocation	Discipleship Team
Equip congregations to designate a congregation person or group to be [a] leader[s] in discipleship	Discipleship Team Church officers
Increase discipleship leaders' knowledge and appreciation of discipleship	Discipleship Team Congregation discipleship leaders
Promote regular study of the Bible, financial stewardship, use of gifts, and evangelism	Discipleship Team Denominational experts in the relevant area(s)
Identify and share models for using Sunday evenings or other forums to engage in spiritual disciplines of prayer and adult faith formation	Discipleship Team Congregation discipleship leaders
Three times per year, bring churches together for prayer conference	Prayer Coordinator
Share and get feedback on spiritual practices within the church to discover strengths and weaknesses	Church visitors
Send elders and deacons to training conferences	Experts in relevant area(s)
Authorize annual grants to congregations for discipleship and congregational health	Discipleship Team
Submit an annual report to Classis	Discipleship Team

The **fruits** are:

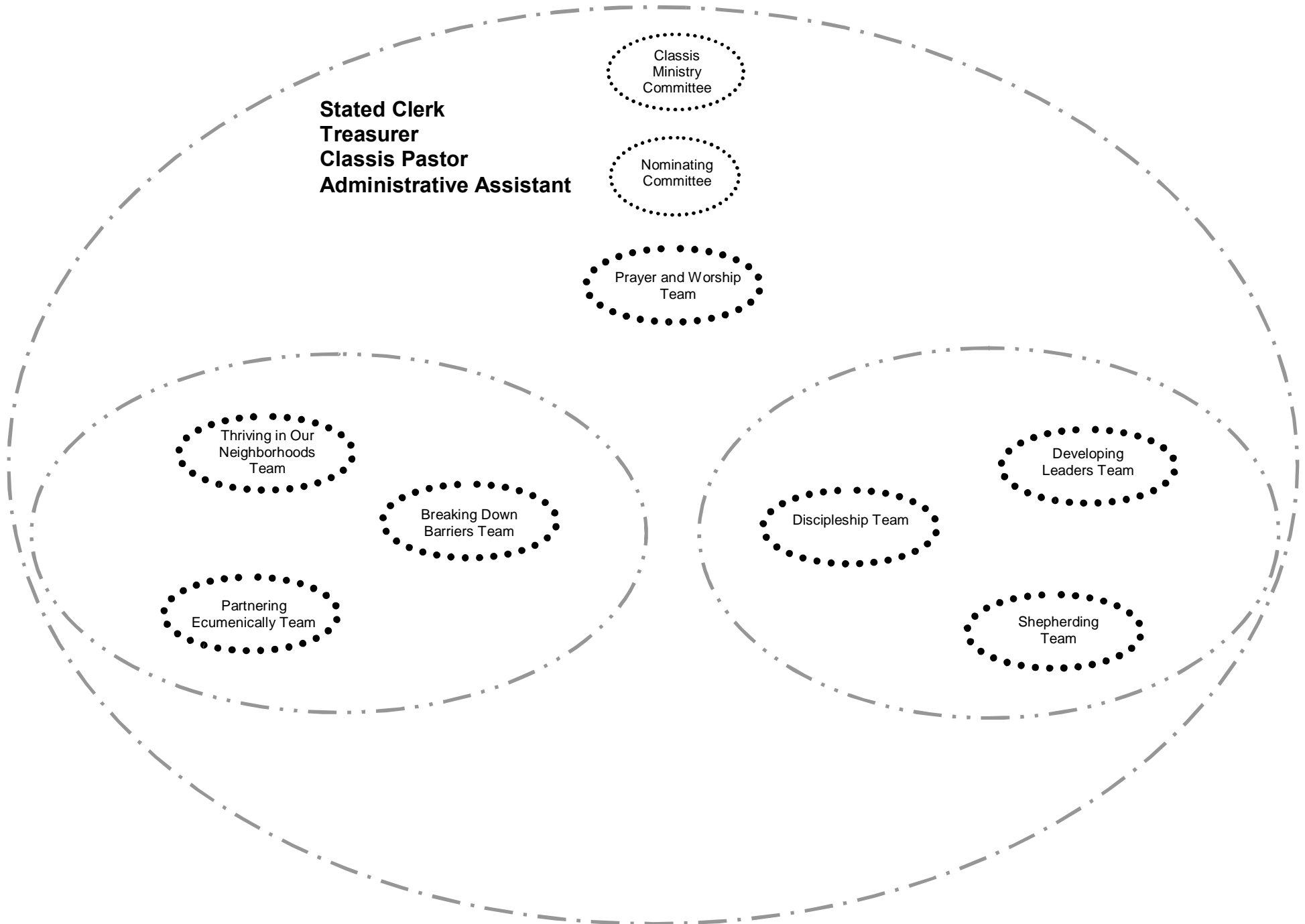
- increased spiritual growth and discipleship in each congregation,
- churches initiate and evaluate their spiritual health, and
- churches support each other as congregations.

## Partnering ecumenically

<b>Twigs and Leaves</b>	<b>Arborists</b>
Establish a Ecumenical Partnership Team	Classis
Present an annual plan to Classis	Ecumenical Partnership Team
Request an annual budget allocation	Ecumenical Partnership Team
Equip congregations to develop a sister church relationship of ministry partnership with a neighboring non-CR churches. Congregations will report at Classis GR East every other year	Ecumenical Partnership Team
Authorize "seed" funding for four justice and mercy ministries by 2015 in partnership between churches of Classis GR East and non-CR churches	Ecumenical Partnership Team
Authorize annual grants for local parachurch organizations	Ecumenical Partnership Team
Develop or cultivate ongoing working relationships with four area judicatories	Ecumenical Partnership Team
Ask GRACE for a Classis GR East board seat	Ecumenical Partnership Team
Submit an annual report to Classis	Ecumenical Partnership Team

The expected **fruit** is that Classis has twenty active ministry partnership that bring healing and growth to the city with other Christian traditions, congregations, and organizations by 2015.

# Possible Classis Organization Structure



## Classis Renewal Process Participants

<b>Boston Square CRC</b>	Alan DeVries	Linda Haveman		
<b>Calvin CRC</b>	Lora Copley	Gert Bokhout	Steve Zrimec	Irene Wiersma
<b>Church of the Servant CRC</b>	Jack Roeda	Beth Lantinga	Holly Boonstra	Mark Muller
<b>Eastern Avenue CRC</b>	Thea Leunk	Judy Willink	Pam Hoekwater	Fred Sterenberg
<b>First CRC</b>	William deVries	Joy Anema	Jim Koop	Gayle DeVries
<b>Fuller Avenue CRC</b>	George Vander Weit	Case Ter Haar	Barb Straatsma	Diane Calsbeek
<b>Grace CRC</b>	Bob Tigchelaar	Chris Overvoorde	Roger Wagonmaker	Helen Brent
<b>Madison Square CRC</b>	David Beelen	Victoria Gibbs	Terri Van Tongeren	Kris Vander Stelt
<b>Neland Avenue CRC</b>	Len Kuyvenhoven	Kathy Bakker	Ben Van Hof	Jeff Bouman
<b>Oakdale Park CRC</b>	Bill VandenBosch	Joel VanderMeyden		
<b>Plymouth Heights CRC</b>	Chris Schoon	Tom VanWingerden	Judy Block	Bruce Gilman
<b>Seymour CRC</b>	Carl Kammeraad	Peter Roth	Marv Huizingh	
<b>Shawnee Park CRC</b>	Ben Van Aragon	Mary Stegink	Greta Hoekstra	Lori Wiersma
<b>Sherman Street CRC</b>	David Kromminga	Susan Matheson	Paul Meeter	Kris Buth
<b>Woodlawn CRC</b>	Peter Jonker	Shirley Verspoor	Del Nykamp	