Process for Navigating Conversations about the RSA Restructure

The Albany Synod Mediation Team offers this process as a tool to help leaders in churches navigate conversations about the restructuring of the Regional Synod of Albany and her classes.

This is a significant change in how our regional church will organize its work and support congregations. Conversations about structural change can bring a wide range of emotions and perspectives. Some may feel hopeful or curious. Others may feel uncertain, concerned, or even skeptical.

These reactions are normal.

We also recognize that no tool is one size fits all. Feel free to adapt this process so that it better fits your context. This process is designed to help set the stage for a thoughtful, respectful conversation where all voices can be heard and all values are included. It does not provide easy answers; rather, it is intended to support values-driven, collaborative reflection and decision-making.

As church leaders, decision-making is an important part of the work God calls you to do. At appropriate times you will make decisions regarding the restructure of Albany Synod and her classes, and the part your congregation plays in these bodies. This document's reflective process is intended to assist congregations to listen well to one another and to the Spirit before decisions are made.

For more information about the restructuring process, visit: https://www.albanysynod.org/restructure

An Important Note

It is important to remember that there is not necessarily a decision that every church must make right away.

In many cases, a default Middle Assembly will already exist within a Classis. Congregations may simply remain within that structure without needing to take additional action immediately. We discourage hasty decisions and encourage good discernment through healthy conversations.

Churches may also choose to wait and see how the new structures develop. If a different partnership or assembly makes sense later, that change can always be explored in the future.

Sometimes the most faithful step is simply to remain where you are, continue learning, and pay attention to how the Spirit is moving over time.

Facilitating the Conversation

1. Open with Prayer

Begin with prayer, asking for God's guidance during your time together. Structural change in the church can feel unsettling, but our hope rests in God, who continues to guide the church in every generation.

2. Assign a Note-Taker

Ask someone to take notes on a large piece of paper or whiteboard that everyone can see. If meeting online, use a shared document or chat window so everyone can follow along.

This helps ensure that ideas are captured and that all voices are heard.

3. Pause and Check In

Invite everyone to take a deep breath and quietly check in with themselves.

How are you feeling as you enter this conversation?

You may be feeling worried, uncertain, hopeful, curious, or even skeptical. Sometimes we feel several things at once. Simply notice what emotions or physical sensations are present.

4. Share Where You Are

Ask participants to respond to this question:

On a scale of 1–10, how anxious or uncertain do you feel about the restructuring of the Regional Synod and the classes of Albany Synod?

Invite everyone to share only their number.

This allows everyone to name how they are entering the conversation and helps the group recognize that people may be experiencing this moment very differently.

5. Create a Statement of Values

Before discussing details, it is helpful to ground the conversation in shared values.

This is not a time to make quick, anxiety-driven decisions or to give in to pressure. Instead, the goal is to identify what matters most.

a. Individual Reflection

Invite participants to spend 10–15 minutes reflecting quietly on this question:

If you could name one or two things you value most about how the church supports ministry across our region, what would they be?

Participants may draw from the values list at the end of this document or choose other words that come to mind.

b. Share Values

Invite everyone to share their value words.
Write them where everyone can see them.

c. Notice Patterns

Ask participants what they notice about the words that have been shared.

What values appear more than once?
What similarities do you see?
Are there any tensions between values?

Remind the group that no value is right or wrong. Values simply reflect what matters most to people.

d. Write a Statement of Values

Work together to create a simple statement that reflects the group's shared values.

Examples:

We value supporting healthy congregations and pastors across our region.
We value collaboration and shared leadership.
We value stewarding our resources wisely for the sake of ministry.
We value maintaining meaningful connections between churches.

e. Use the Statement as a Guide

Agree together that the Statement of Values will guide your conversation.

When considering questions about restructuring, ask:

Does this align with our values?

6. Gather Information

Once everyone has had the opportunity to be heard and values have been named, the group can turn to the available information.

Discuss:

What changes are being proposed?
What decisions have already been made?
What questions remain open?
How will churches continue to be supported?

Use official sources whenever possible, such as:

https://www.albanysynod.org/restructure

7. Consider What This Means for Your Church

Reflect together on the following questions:

What opportunities might this change create?
What concerns or questions do we have?
What support might our congregation need?
How can we remain connected to the wider church during this transition?

The goal is not to resolve every question immediately, but to begin thinking together.

8. Return to Your Values

Before concluding the conversation, return to the Statement of Values that was created earlier.

Ask:

How do our hopes and concerns connect with the values we named?

Grounding the conversation in shared values helps keep the discussion focused on what matters most rather than reacting only to uncertainty.

Closing the Conversation

As you conclude your time together, take a moment to acknowledge the work you have done. Naming values, sharing hopes and concerns, and listening to one another are important steps in faithful discernment.

Remember that the church has always lived through seasons of change. While structures may shift, the calling of the church remains the same: to follow Christ, to care for one another, and to participate in God's work in the world.

You do not need to solve everything today. Faithful leadership often involves patience, curiosity, and continued conversation. What matters most is that you remain grounded in your shared values, attentive to one another, and open to the Spirit's guidance as the future unfolds.

Consider closing your time together in prayer, giving thanks for the opportunity to reflect together and asking for wisdom, humility, and courage in the days ahead.

Potential Values

Adaptability
Calmness
Collaboration
Connection
Consideration
Creativity
Dependability
Diversity
Faithfulness
Freedom
Hospitality
Inclusivity
Integrity
Learning
Open-mindedness
Participation
Patience
Service
Stewardship
Trust
Wisdom