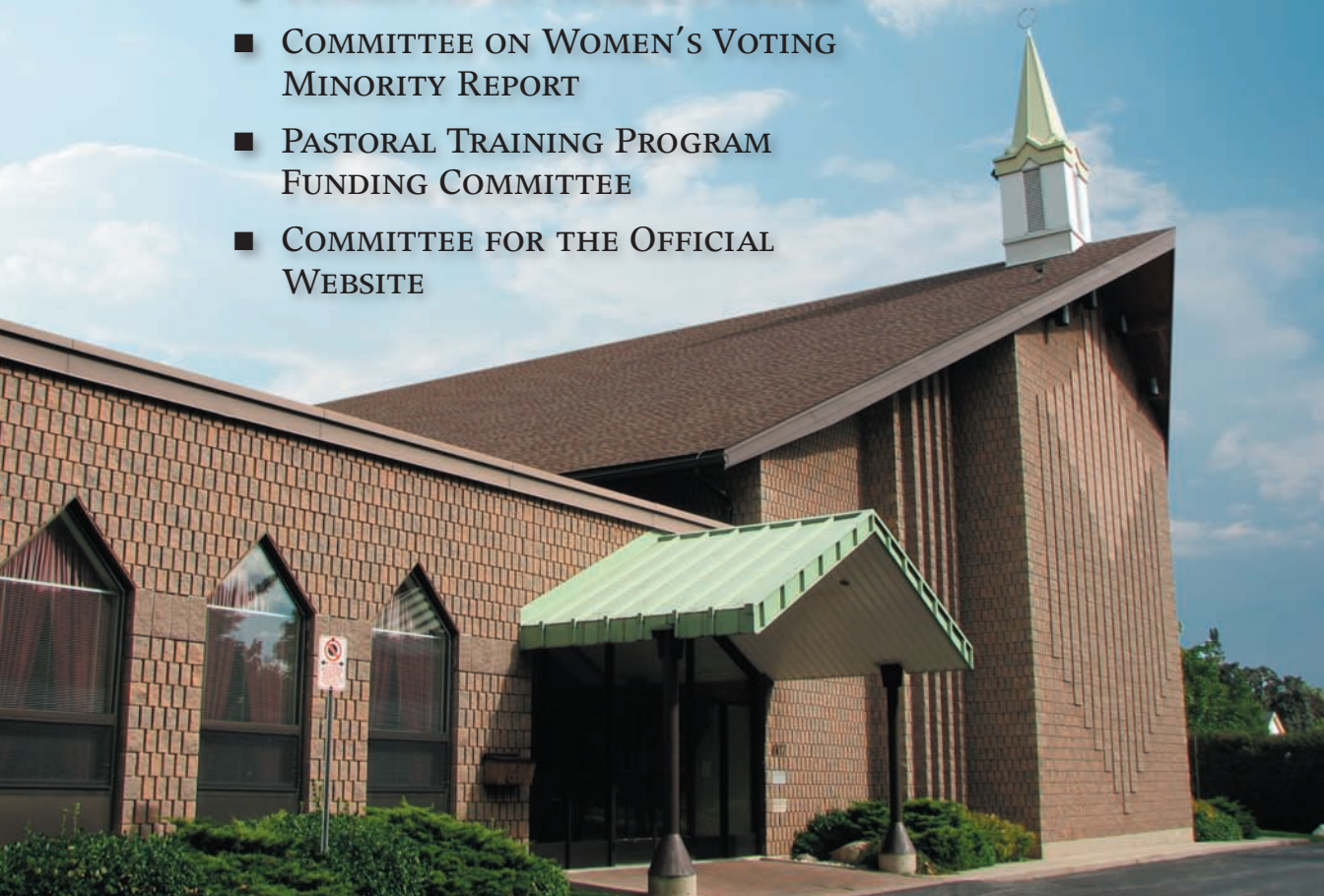


REPORTS TO GENERAL SYNOD BURLINGTON-EBENEZER 2010

VOLUME I

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**Reports to
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2010**

Ecclesiastical Unity Coordinators

REPORT ECCLESIASTICAL UNITY COORDINATORS TO GENERAL SYNOD BURLINGTON 2010

1. Mandate

1.1 Mandate given by Smithers 2007

General Synod Smithers 2007 appointed two ecclesiastical unity coordinators to facilitate contact with the CERCU of the URCNA, and mandated these coordinators:

1. To represent the four committees in meetings with CERCU and to respond to invitations to major assemblies.
2. To coordinate responses to questions from the URCNA, and to receive their response to the Framework Hypothesis question.
3. To make themselves available upon request for local assistance. (Acts GS 2007, Art 98, 4.3.)

1.2 Mandate in light of Schererville 2007

General Synod Smithers gave us a mandate as coordinators, the changes brought about by Synod Schererville led to a change in our work. After the URCNA Synod of Schererville 2007 we were requested to approach the CERCU about these decisions and their consequences for our relationship. Although we realized this was not part of our specific mandate as coordinators, yet we agreed to this request so that the concerns of the churches could be addressed. The subcommittees could approach their counterparts with questions related to their specific work, but who would bring the questions and concerns of our churches about the decisions of Schererville to the URCNA? We took it upon ourselves to do this.

2. Activities

Meeting with CERCU on October 30 and 31, 2008

Meeting with delegation of CERCU on August 17, 2009

Meeting with CERCU on October 29, 2009

Rev. D.G.J. Agema and br.G.Nordeman (member of Church Order Subcommittee) were delegated to attend Synod Schererville 2007 as fraternal delegates.

We met as coordinators seven times.

3. Correspondence

3.1 Letters from four churches concerning the statements of Schererville, especially statement six. The sentiments expressed in these letters range from seeking clarification on these statements to asking that as part of any further unity discussions this statement be retracted. We used these letters to present our concerns to the CERCU.

- 3.2 A letter from Church Order Subcommittee. The Subcommittee, in dealing with the input received from the churches about the PJCO, discussed the matter of incorporation. The Subcommittee decided to bring this matter to our attention. We asked the CERCU about it at our meeting in October 2008.
- 3.3 Initiatives by individuals and churches
 - 1. A proposal for a symposium “addressing the misunderstandings that may exist within, and between the URCNA and the CanRC, because of perceived differences in our understanding of the covenant.” We supported this initiative, but the symposium did not materialize.
 - 2. A proposal “to establish and host an electronic forum where councils of the federations could submit their questions/ concerns about unity and the other’s federations.” We supported this, but it did not materialize either.
 - 3. Proposal by Lincoln’s council to create and opportunity for face to face meetings between the delegates of our respective synods and representatives of our respective federations. We will elaborate on this proposal later in this report.

4. Synod Schererville 2007

4.1 As to the matters that involve our contact via the four committees we report the following:

- 1. The Synod took over the recommendations of the Joint Church Order Committee, much like Synod Smithers 2007 did. The churches will now have an opportunity to study this Proposed Joint Church Order and submit their reactions to the Committee.
- 2. With regard to the Common Songbook Committee the decisions were a bit more ambiguous. While affirming commitment to continue dialoguing with the CanRC regarding a common song book, Synod decided to mandate its Songbook Committee to produce a new song book specifically for the URCNA. The Songbook Committee had recommended that the Common Song Book would be the official Song Book of the United Federation. This recommendation was not accepted.
- 3. With regard to the matter of Theological Education, Synod affirmed the six points of agreement arrived at by the URCNA and CanRC committees (See Acts Smithers, Art. 103 sub 3.3, page 86). Synod also affirmed the position of the URCNA Theological Education Committee, that a federally-controlled seminary is not biblically mandated. Synod encouraged the subcommittee to continue its work with the Canadian Reformed committee in order to draft proposals for theological education to our respective Synods in preparation for an eventual plan of union.
- 4. Synod clarified the mandate for the Liturgical Forms and Confessions Committee (URCNA) in order for it to work in conjunction with the recently appointed corresponding committee of the CanRC.

4.2 Changes to the Church Order

Synod made various changes to the Church Order of the URCNA. All these changes have to be ratified by the churches.

Article 11

Previous reading:

If, for reasons other than such as warrant ecclesiastical discipline, either a minister of the Word or the congregation he is serving desires to dissolve their pastoral relationship, that dissolution shall occur only upon mutually satisfactory conditions and only with the concurring advice of the classis. If the released minister desires to receive a call to serve another congregation, the council from whose service he is being released shall announce his eligibility for call, which eligibility shall be valid for no more than two years, whereafter he shall be honorably released from office. If the minister released from his congregation desires to leave his office in order to seek non-ministerial labor, he must receive the approval of the classis before doing so.

New reading:

When for weighty reasons and in exceptional circumstances a pastoral relationship has been irreconcilably broken, and a minister of the Word or the council of the congregation he is serving desires to dissolve their pastoral relationship, that dissolution may occur only when all the following conditions have been met:

- a. this dissolution shall not occur for delinquency in doctrine or life, which would warrant church discipline;
- b. this dissolution shall occur only when attempted reconciliation, with the involvement of both the church visitors and the classis, has been unsuccessful, resulting in an intolerable situation;
- c. this dissolution shall occur only with the concurring advice of the classis;
- d. the council's provision for the adequate congregational support of the minister and his family shall require the concurring advice of the classis.

The council of the congregation with which the pastoral relationship is dissolved shall announce his eligibility for call. This eligibility shall be valid for no more than two years, whereafter he shall be honorably discharged from office.

Article 36

Previous reading:

The federation may enter into ecumenical relations with other federations by synodical decision. Such a decision must be ratified by a majority of the Consistories.

New reading:

The federation may enter into ecumenical relations with other federations by synodical decision. Such a decision with respect to ecclesiastical fellowship shall require ratification by a majority of the synodically-approved Consistories in the federation. Such a decision with respect to church union shall require a two-thirds vote of a synod and shall require ratification by two-thirds of the synodically-approved Consistories in the federation.

Article 44

Previous reading:

Persons coming from other denominations shall be admitted to communicant membership only after the Consistory has examined them concerning doctrine and life. The Consistory shall determine in each case whether public profession of faith shall be required. Their names shall be announced to the congregation two weeks prior to reception, in order that the congregation may have opportunity, if necessary, to bring lawful objections to the attention of the Consistory.

New reading:

Persons coming from denominations other than those with which we have ecclesiastical fellowship shall be admitted to communicant membership only after the Consistory has examined them concerning doctrine and life. The Consistory shall determine in each case whether public profession of faith shall be required. Their names shall be announced to the congregation two weeks prior to reception, in order that the congregation may have opportunity, if necessary, to bring lawful objections to the attention of the Consistory.

Article 48

Previous reading:

Consistories shall instruct and admonish those under their spiritual care who are considering marriage to marry in the Lord. Christian marriages should be solemnized with appropriate admonitions, promises and prayers, under the regulation of the Consistory, with the use of the appropriate liturgical form. Ministers shall not solemnize marriages in conflict with the Word of God.

New reading:

Scripture teaches that marriage is designed to be a lifelong, monogamous covenantal union between one man and one woman. Consistories shall instruct and admonish those under their spiritual care who are considering marriage to marry in the Lord. Christian marriages shall be solemnized with appropriate admonitions, promises, and prayers, under the regulation of the Consistory, with the use of the appropriate

liturgical form. Ministers shall not solemnize marriages that conflict with the Word of God.

Article 66

Previous reading:

These articles, relating to the lawful order of the church, have been so drafted and adopted by common consent, that they ought to be observed diligently. If it be found that God may be more honored and the churches better served by changing any article, this shall require a two-thirds vote of a synod and shall be ratified by two-thirds of the Consistories prior to the next synodical meeting, after which meeting they shall take effect.

New reading:

These articles, relating to the lawful order of the church, have been so drafted and adopted by common consent, that they ought to be observed diligently. If it be found that God may be more honored and the churches better served by changing any article, this shall require a two-thirds vote of a synod and shall be ratified by two-thirds of the synodically-approved Consistories of the federation prior to the next synodical meeting, after which meeting they shall take effect.

4.3 Contact with other federations

1. OCRC : Synod Schererville re-extended the invitation to the OCRC federation made by Synod Hudsonville 1999, namely to invite the OCRC federation officially to unite with the URCNA in federative union on the basis of the Three Forms of Unity and the Church Order.
2. OPC Synod Schererville decided to establish Ecclesiastical Fellowship - Phase 2 with the OPC.
3. Synod Schererville decided to add the Korean American Presbyterian Church and the Heritage Reformed Congregations to the churches in ecumenical dialogue.

4.4 Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity

The URCNA's relationships with other federations are governed by its Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity, which includes three phases.

- * Phase One - Corresponding Relations. This phase calls for correspondence and dialogue between the URCNA and another federation, so that mutual understanding and appreciation might grow between them.
- * Phase Two - Ecclesiastical Fellowship. The intent of this phase is to recognize and accept each other as true and faithful churches of the Lord Jesus Christ, in preparation for and commitment to eventual federative church unity. This phase includes pulpit exchange, receiving each other delegates at major assemblies and admitting members of to Lord's Supper.

* Phase Three - Church Union. This phase calls for movement into full integration between the two federations.

Synod Schererville had to deal with two overtures which sought to alter these phases. The first overture wanted to change Phase Two by removing the phrase "in preparation for and commitment to eventual integrated church unity." The second overture called for Phase Three to become a multi-step process of preparing for and entering into full unity. After discussion Synod 2007 amended its rules for Phase Two by replacing the contested phrase. The rules for Phase Two now declare that: "The intent of this phase is to recognize and accept each other as true and faithful churches of the Lord Jesus, in acknowledgement of the desirability of eventual integrated federative church unity, by establishing ecclesiastical fellowship. ..." The rules for Phase Three then were amended to create two steps. Step A is called Develop the Plan of Ecclesiastical Union. "Having recognized and accepted each other as true and faithful churches, the federations shall make preparations for and a commitment to eventual integrated federative church unity. They shall construct a plan of ecclesiastical union. ..." Step B is called Implementation of the Plan of Ecclesiastical Union. Ratification by the consistories, according to Church Order Art. 36, would be required to begin both of the steps in Phase Three.

Having adopted these changes, Synod 2007 then addressed a point of possible confusion. The URCNA has several committees which are working to lay the groundwork for eventual union with the CanRC. Under the new rules, the work of those committees properly belongs to the first step of Phase Three – yet the URCNA have only approved Phase Two relations with the CanRC. To clarify the relationship and safeguard the work of the committees, Synod 2007 approved an exception to the newly adopted guidelines to allow the current unity committees to continue working with their corresponding CanRC committees while the two federations continue to function in Phase Two. This work would then pave the way for the federations when the URCNA do move to Phase Three.

4.5 Federal Vision

Synod had to deal with an overture to adopt the RCUS statement on the teachings of what is called the "Federal Vision" and the teachings of Dr. Norman Shepherd. Synod did not accede to this request but did appoint a committee to study the matter and come with a clear statement concerning this matter to the next General Synod. In the meantime it adopted nine statements, which it termed pastoral advice to the churches. We quote from the Acts (Article 72) :

Synod affirms that the Scriptures and confessions teach the doctrine of justification by grace alone, through faith alone and that nothing

that is taught under the rubric of covenant theology in our churches may contradict this fundamental doctrine. Therefore Synod rejects the errors of those:

1. who deny or modify the teaching that “God created man good and after His own image, that is, in true righteousness and holiness,” able to perform “the commandment of life” as the representative of mankind (HC 6, 9; BC 14);
2. who, in any way and for any reason, confuse the “commandment of life” given before the fall with the gospel announced after the fall (BC 14, 17, 18; HC 19, 21, 56, 60);
3. who confuse the ground and instrument of acceptance with God before the fall (obedience to the commandment of life) with the ground (Christ who kept the commandment of life) and instrument (faith in Christ) of acceptance with God after the fall;
4. who deny that Christ earned acceptance with God and that all His merits have been imputed to believers (BC 19, 20, 22, 26; HC 11-19, 21, 36-37, 60, 84; CD I.7, RE I.3, RE II.1);
5. who teach that a person can be historically, conditionally elect, regenerated, savingly united to Christ, justified, and adopted by virtue of participation in the outward administration of the covenant of grace but may lose these benefits through lack of covenantal faithfulness (CD, I, V);
6. who teach that all baptized persons are in the covenant of grace in precisely the same way such that there is no distinction between those who have only an outward relation to the covenant of grace by baptism and those who are united to Christ by grace alone through faith alone (HC 21, 60; BC 29);
7. who teach that Spirit-wrought sanctity, human works, or cooperation with grace is any part either of the ground of our righteousness before God or any part of faith, that is, the “instrument by which we embrace Christ, our righteousness” (BC 22-24; HC 21, 60, 86);
8. who define faith, in the act of justification, as being anything more than “leaning and resting on the sole obedience of Christ crucified” or “a certain knowledge” of and “a hearty trust” in Christ and His obedience and death for the elect (BC 23; HC 21);
9. who teach that there is a separate and final justification grounded partly upon righteousness or sanctity inherent in the Christian (HC 52; BC 37).

5. Meetings with CERCU

5.1 October 2008

The EU Coordinators met with the CERCU on October 30 and 31, 2008. Here follows the report of the meeting. This report was officially adopted by both committees.

5.1.1 Face-to-Face: Canadian Reformed – United Reformed Dialogue

The apostle John wrote: I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. (III John 13-14)

On the evening and morning of October 30-31, 2008, members of the ecumenical committees of the Canadian Reformed Churches and United Reformed Churches met at the Rehoboth United Reformed Church building in Hamilton, Ontario. It is the second time the two committees sat around the table together since the two federations entered into a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship (Phase 2) in 2001. Chaired by Rev. John Bouwers, pastor of Immanuel URC in Jordan, Ontario, the meeting was characterized by a warm, frank, and brotherly exchange of questions and concerns. As the chairman pointed out from II and III John, it is helpful for brothers in the Lord to come face-to-face.

While the committees discussed unity between the two federations from a variety of angles – fellowship between consistories, congregations and classes, the common songbook, liturgical forms, the proposed Joint Church Order, theological education – most of the time was spent discussing our confessional unity in light of present-day controversies over the Federal Vision movement and the decisions of Synod Schererville 2007. Each committee brought to the table a set of questions/concerns which have been raised among consistories and members of both federations about one another’s confessional integrity, as well as continued commitment to unity. Within the United Reformed Churches is the concern that the Canadian Reformed are open to aspects of Federal Vision teaching which are contrary to Scripture and our confessions. Synod Smithers (2007) of the Canadian Reformed Churches instructed their unity committee to coordinate answers to these concerns. Some Canadian Reformed members feel that the actions of Synod Schererville (2007), especially the adoption of the Nine Points of pastoral advice, threaten our ecclesiastical fellowship by way of extra-confessional binding, that is, requiring more of one another than the confessions require. The exchange of concerns was, we believe, fruitful, and we report our discussion to all the churches with the prayer that it will bear fruit among us for the progress of our unity in the truth of Christ.

Is Commitment Reduced to Desire?

Among the changes made by Synod Schererville to the URCNA guidelines for ecumenicity was the wording that describes the level of commitment to a sister federation in a

Phase 2 relationship. The guidelines adopted by Synod Hudsonville in 1999 stated that Phase 2, Ecclesiastical Fellowship, is a stage of preparation for and commitment to eventual, integrated federative church unity. Synod Schererville revised that to say that Phase 2 is a stage in which we acknowledge the desirability of eventual integrated federative church unity. Has our commitment to the Canadian Reformed changed mid-stream by this revision? This concern was raised by the Canadian Reformed brothers.

The United Reformed brothers recognize that the new wording softens the language of commitment to federative unity. The URC is in ecclesiastical fellowship with more than one federation (besides the Canadian Reformed Churches, also the Reformed Church in the United States and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church) and the prospect of federative unity differs with each one. The new language reflects such diversity. Most importantly, however, the URC, through its synod, has not done away with the commitment to federative unity. Such unity is still acknowledged to be desirable. Furthermore, the mandate that governs the guidelines remains unchanged: *With a view toward complete church unity, the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity shall pursue and make recommendations regarding the establishment of ecumenical relations with those Reformed and Presbyterian federations selected by synod and in keeping with Article 36 of the Church Order.* The United Reformed brothers noted that the URC has not changed its commitment to the Canadian Reformed Churches midstream, even though we acknowledge that the pathway to organic union is not as simple as many had hoped.

Although we were able to find agreement on committee level this will need to be confirmed by future synods. Do our federations remain committed to the goal of federative unity?

Federal Vision or Federal Confusion?

Especially in Canada, United Reformed and Canadian Reformed congregations know one another well and live side-by-side in growing harmony. In some areas of both federations, however, Canadian Reformed and United Reformed church members are strangers to one another. Distance allows questions to go unanswered, unanswered questions morph into suspicions and assumptions, and thus is it became necessary to have an open conversation about the Nine Statements of Synod Schererville and to answer questions raised among the United Reformed Churches regarding the Canadian Reformed response to what has become known as "Federal Vision." The purpose of this dialogue was not to bind anyone to specific

theological formulations but to see how we can talk about issues within the confines of the Three Forms of Unity.

The area of greatest concern has to do with what it means to be a member of the covenant of grace and the language used in the Nine Statements. The Canadian Reformed suggested that the Nine Statements of Schererville lack clarity. They wished to have clarified what is covenant theology? Against whom are these statements directed? Are not all the children in the covenant in the same way? Do they not have the same promises and the same obligations even though not all members respond to the covenant relationship in the same way? Indeed, some in the covenant go the way of Esau and, in rebellion against God as covenant breakers, never appropriate what is promised but does this mean that they have not received the same promises and obligations? The Canadian Reformed brothers pointed out that for many Canadian Reformed people Point 6 of the Nine Statements is especially troublesome. It states: *Synod rejects the error of those who teach that all baptized persons are in the covenant of grace in precisely the same way such that there is no distinction between those who have only an outward relation to the covenant of grace by baptism and those who are united to Christ by grace alone through faith alone (HC Q&A 21, 60; BC 29).* This statement seems to be in conflict with the Reformed view of the covenant that was upheld by the Liberation of 1944 in the Netherlands. They reminded the brothers of the “Statement of Agreement” between the Committees of the URCNA and the Canadian Reformed on the doctrine of the covenant (as contained in reports to our respective Synods in 2001).

The brothers of the United Reformed Churches indicated that the nine statements were in response to the proponents of Federal Vision who speak as though in baptism a person is granted every spiritual gift, including justification and eternal election. These gifts can then be lost through his unfaithfulness to God’s covenant. The statements were made to uphold the doctrine that a man is justified through faith alone and God will never reverse His gracious declaration concerning the believing sinner. God’s decree of election is eternal and unchangeable, and does not include all who are legally united to Him in His covenant. The United Reformed brothers spoke of an important and necessary distinction within the covenant of grace between those who have received the promises, and those who possess by faith what is promised in baptism. Not all who are in the covenant are in the covenant in exactly the same way. How do we account for this distinction? Various wording has been used by Reformed people. Some distinguish

between being legally in the covenant and vitally in the covenant. Others speak of being outwardly in the covenant and inwardly in the covenant. Still others make a distinction between children who receive the promise and children of the promise. Some say that the covenant is objectively real for all in the true church who are baptized, but subjectively realized only in those who believe.

Regarding Point 6 of the Nine Statements of Schererville, the United Reformed brothers pointed out that this point does not deny that that all baptized persons are in the covenant of grace. What Point 6 denies is that all baptized persons are in the covenant in precisely the same way such that no distinction is made between those who have the promises and those who receive by faith what is promised. It should be read in the context of Point 5 which rejects the error that *a person can be historically, conditionally elect, regenerated, savingly united to Christ, justified, and adopted by virtue of participation in the outward administration of the covenant of grace but may lose these benefits through lack of covenantal faithfulness* (underline added). Our confessions state that the outward administration of the sacraments do not have the power to confer upon God's covenant people the gracious realities which they represent. (QA 72, 78). The Belgic Confession uses a similar outward/inward distinction when, speaking of the members of the Church, it distinguishes between those who are of the church and those who are not of, though externally in the church. (Article 29)

Both the Canadian Reformed and the United Reformed brothers agreed that in the outward washing of baptism, all children of believers receive the promises of the forgiveness of sins through Christ's blood and of the Holy Spirit who produces faith. However, there is an important distinction to be made between receiving the promises and receiving what is promised. Those who have the outward washing must receive the promised salvation with a believing heart. Thus, only in the way of true faith is a baptized person justified, and by confessing that faith publicly, is welcomed to the Lord's Table. Paedocommunion is contrary to what we confess in subjection to Scripture. The Canadian Reformed brothers stated that the practice of paedocommunion is contrary to Scripture and our confessions, and is not promoted within their churches.

The Power of the Points

The Canadian Reformed brothers wondered about the procedure followed by Synod Schererville to adopt the 9 points of Pastoral Advice. Did these points come from a Consistory or

Classis, or did Synod spring this on the churches out of the blue? The United Reformed brothers acknowledged that while the action taken by the synod was somewhat unusual, the 9 Points were part of Synod's answer to an overture presented by Classis Michigan, and contain much of the substance included in that overture. They noted that in both federations synods are viewed as deliberative assemblies which often come out with a response that does not reiterate precisely the appeals or overtures under consideration.

The United Reformed brothers agreed that there is some ambiguity in the status of the 9 points. On the one hand they were presented to the churches as pastoral advice, while on the other hand they were formulated as a rejection of errors. On balance, however, the status of the 9 Points in the United Reformed Churches is clear. They are binding on the churches as a decision of Synod, but they are not extra-confessional statements to which officebearers must subscribe. We subscribe only to the teachings of Scripture as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity. These points are helpful in alerting us to doctrinal errors which deviate from our doctrinal standards. If a minister asserts what they deny he should be asked to explain himself further to see whether his convictions fit within the confessions, but any charge leveled against an officebearer must be adjudicated only in terms of Scripture and the confessions. In fact, the same synod chose to remind and encourage individuals and churches that, if there are officebearers suspected of deviating from or obscuring the doctrine of salvation as summarized in our confessions, they are obligated to follow the procedure prescribed in the Church Order (Articles 29, 52, 55, 61, 62) for addressing theological error. (Minutes: Article 67)

The Canadian Reformed brothers believe that this last decision, without the addition of the 9 Points, would have been a sufficient response to the overture of Classis Michigan.

The United Reformed brothers assured the Canadian Reformed committee that the intent of the 9 points is not to tie anyone down to a particular theological formulation but to raise underlying concerns in order to help us remain faithful to our subscription.

The Covenant of Works

A letter from Classis Southwest of the United Reformed Churches asked for clarification on the Canadian Reformed position on what is known as the covenant of works. The Canadian Reformed have questioned the terminology "covenant of works" when referring to the bond the Lord made

with Adam at creation, and with all his descendants in him. They stress that the covenant God established with Adam in the garden is a covenant of God's favour, wherein Adam received life and righteousness as a free gift of God. The use of the term "works" in this covenant is downplayed. The United Reformed also see God's covenant with Adam as a free gift of God, but some wonder whether in Canadian Reformed thinking enough importance is placed upon works in the covenant made with Adam. Adam is a type of the One who was to come, and we are saved through the obedient work of Christ. If Adam's works count for little, what is the value of Christ's obedience?

The Canadian Reformed brothers explained: in the beginning man was created good, that is in true righteousness and holiness. He was fully capable of knowing and loving God and of living with Him in eternal blessedness (Lord's Day 3). Man, however, by his disobedience broke the covenant and plunged himself and all his descendants into death and darkness. But God in His mercy provided a covenant Mediator, Jesus Christ, who, by his passive and active obedience to God, merited for us justification and sanctification to restore us to God's favour. Now, through faith in Jesus Christ, we walk with God as righteous and holy, offering our lives in covenant faithfulness as a sacrifice of praise.

Moving Forward

The discussion around the council room table at Rehoboth United Reformed Church manifested yet again our common commitment to the Scriptures as Canadian Reformed and United Reformed federations. To be sure, different historical developments, theological accents and ecclesiastical backgrounds give to each federation its own shape and texture in God's providence, but we rejoice that we may sit together, freely challenge one another, and grow together as sister churches in the Lord Jesus. As believers, congregations, classes and synods of both federations, let us find ways to come face-to-face – not just to exchange pleasantries in coffee-shop ecumenism, but with love and patience teaching, questioning, challenging, rebuking and encouraging one another in the defense of the faith once for all delivered to the saints. This is the only way we will grow in the true unity for which our Lord Jesus prayed. If we through interchange in doctrine and life see each other's faith more clearly we will be able to move ahead in our ecumenical relations with increasing confidence. Let us be devoted to this for the sake of the Gospel of Christ and to silence its opponents, as the apostle wrote: Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of

you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. (Philippians 1:27-28) While the committees sought as much as possible in the meeting to reflect the mind of the churches they represent, their views are not the official position of our respective synods. The committees invite consistories, councils and classes to communicate to them further concerns and questions they might have. The two committees plan to meet again in October, 2009 to continue the dialogue.

5.1.2 Other items

1. The CanRC delegates asked further information about the incorporation of the URCNA. The CERCU members informed us that incorporation is necessary for contact between the government of the USA and the churches in light of their charitable status, to allow the ministers to solemnize marriages, for money to come across the border and for eventual publication of a Song Book.
2. We discussed ways in which contact between churches and classes can be improved.
3. It was noted that the general synods of both federations made changes to the church orders and entered into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with other federation without involving the other. The rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship require consultation when entering into relations with third parties.
4. Other theological concerns: the CERCU promised to submit an answer to the question about the Framework Hypothesis at the next meeting in October 2009. The CanRC brothers were asked whether there was any push for paedocommunion within the CanRC. We answered that this was not the case.

5.2 August 2009

We met with four members of CERCU to finalize the report of our previous meeting. We also discussed our mandates and made preparations for the October 2009 meeting.

5.3 October 2009

Another meeting with CERCU has been scheduled for the end of October. If deemed necessary we may submit a supplementary report to the churches.

6. Considerations

- 6.1 With thankfulness we consider that within the URCNA there is a continued willingness to be faithful to Scripture and confession.

6.2 Re change in Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity (see above 4.4)

We are thankful for the answer of the CERCU that the URCNA has not changed its commitment to the CanRC midstream. Nevertheless, we regret that these changes to our relationship were made without any consultation. Although Schererville allowed the work of the four committees of our respective federations to continue, changes have occurred that have hampered some of the work. The Phase we are currently in no longer acknowledges commitment to federative unity. Furthermore, we question the propriety of adding another ratification vote and making this decision without consulting the CanRC. If, as the CERCU maintains, the URCNA's commitment has not changed, we believe it would be beneficial to our relationship if the URCNA would indicate an unequivocal commitment to the agreement both federations accepted in 2001. It is our recommendation that this be requested of the URCNA. In addition to these specific concerns, we also have a more general concern about the revised Guidelines. The change in the Guidelines makes federative unity less urgent. Federations can have pulpit exchange and receive each others members at the Lord's Supper, without there being a stated commitment to federative unity.

6.3 Re Nine Statements adopted by Schererville (see above 4.5)

We share the concerns of the churches that wrote us, especially when it comes to statement six. The statements lack clarity and their status is uncertain. Having said this we also note that the next Synod of the URCNA (London 2010) will deal with an extensive report on Federal Vision. This Synod may clarify the decision of Schererville or even take it back. We believe that it would be more beneficial to deal with these matters in the light of the decisions of the next Synod of the URCNA. Synod Burlington could give the deputies for contact with the URCNA the mandate to deal with the decisions of the next URCNA Synod.

6.4 Questions from the URCNA

Synod Smithers 2007 instructed us to coordinate answers to questions from the URCNA Classis Southwest of the URCNA had submitted questions to the CanRC before Synod Smithers. We found this a difficult part of our mandate. Synod Smithers alluded to the difficulty as well in consideration 3.6. of Article 98. Who can speak on behalf of the CanRC as to how they regard the Federal Vision? Is there a unified approach to the Federal Vision? Or, how can we answer the question what is the dominant covenant theology of the CanRC is? We bind each other to the Three Forms of Unity, but do not have stated positions on specific theological issues of the day. We did support a few proposals that sought to address these questions, but they never materialized. At the same time our silence has led to uncertainty, perhaps even suspicion on the side of the URCNA. We are not unwilling to discuss questions

of concern or explain where we stand on certain issues, but we are reluctant in that some could perceive us to be speaking on behalf of the federation.

The Council of the church at Lincoln submitted a proposal to us which perhaps could overcome some of these obstacles. Lincoln proposed to create an opportunity for face to face meetings between the delegates of our respective synods and representatives of our respective federations, where the concerns and questions could be presented, and responses could be provided. We believe Lincoln's proposal deserves further attention and this is why we present it to your assembly and via this report to the churches. Lincoln suggests that the councils of the CanRC be invited to formulate questions that they have about the doctrine and life of the URCNA, and that the URCNA be invited to send representatives to Synod Burlington 2010 for a public discussion of these questions and the URCNA responses. The same would apply to the other side, the URCNA councils could formulate questions and representatives of our churches would answer them in a public discussion when Synod London 2010 meets. We do not want to pre-empt Synod's discussions and decision on this proposal, but at the same time realize that if this proposal is accepted Synod Burlington needs to have the input from the churches. Therefore, in order to speed up the process, we suggest to the churches who deal with this report that they submit their questions to Synod Burlington, so that if Synod agrees to this proposal of Lincoln, it has the questions right there.

6.5 Re Framework Hypothesis

CERCU has promised to give a response. We hope to receive it in October of this year.

6.6 Rules of Ecclesiastical Fellowship

Synod Smithers entered into relationship with third parties without consulting the URCNA, yet this is part of the rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship. We need to keep these rules in mind as major assemblies when dealing with proposals and recommendations for relationships with third parties.

6.7 Mandate

As indicated in the beginning of the report, we found ourselves faced with, or perhaps overwhelmed by a task somewhat different than Synod Smithers had anticipated. This also meant that at times were uncertain about our task towards the URCNA. If Synod decides to continue deputies for contact with the URCNA it will be helpful to formulate a clear mandate for the deputies keeping in mind the changes and hurdles outlined in this report. This mandate will also determine the amount of deputies and their expertise.

6.8 From the above it is clear that our progress toward federative unity with the URCNA is not going as well we had hoped. We believe that this is to a great extent due to the decisions of Schererville. Our last GS made several major concessions to indicate our willingness and commitment to federative unity. Synod Schererville, however, took a few steps back. Are the URCNA hesitant about federative union? If so, why? It is due to lack of knowing each other? Is it due to doctrinal or church political concerns? Are there other concerns? These are questions only the URCNA can answer. A clear answer would help us in our relationship.

In 2001 we entered Phase Two with gratitude to the Lord. As churches we were convinced that the Lord Jesus requires of us to seek federative union. Now that we meet hurdles we should not give up on this. Our commitment will show in that we continue to reach out to the URCNA. Our commitment to federative unity should not diminish. Nor should we take back the concessions we made in 2007. We have to go back to the promises made in 2001 and re-assure the URCNA officially of our willingness to obey the Head of the church, our Lord Jesus Christ. It would help if we could get the same assurance from the URCNA. We suggest to General Synod that as CanRC we ask the URCNA in an open and brotherly way about their commitment to federative unity. As coordinators we suggest that this be done more directly than via deputies, e.g. in a letter directly from Synod to Synod.

7. Recommendations

As coordinators we recommend that Synod Burlington 2010 decide:

- 7.1 To continue Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the URCNA under the adopted rules.
- 7.2 To request the URCNA return to the agreement both federations accepted in 2001.
- 7.3 To implement the proposal of Lincoln.
- 7.4 To acknowledge that we should have consulted the URCNA before entering in relationship with third parties.
- 7.5 To address Synod London 2010 in writing, pledging our commitment to seeking federative unity; asking whether the URCNA in word and deed is committed to do the same; that if the URCNA has hesitations to seeking federative unity they indicate what these are.
- 7.6 To appoint deputies for Ecclesiastical Unity and give them a clear mandate.

Respectfully submitted,

Douwe G.J. Agema and Peter G. Feenstra,
Ecclesiastical Unity Coordinators

**Reports to
General Synod Burlington-Ebenezer
2010**

Church Order Committee

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R E P O R T
Church Order Committee
to
GENERAL SYNOD BURLINGTON 2010

A. Mandate

The committee, reappointed by Synod Smithers 2007, received the following mandate (Acts of General Synod Smithers, 2007, Article 99, p. 51):

- 4.4.1 To work closely with the committee re. church order appointed by the URCNA synod.
- 4.4.2 To receive, collate, and evaluate all official communications regarding the Proposed Church Order.
- 4.4.3 To propose Regulations for General Synod should the URCNA committee receive such a mandate from the next URCNA synod.
- 4.4.4 To prepare a revised Proposed Church Order for Synod 2010, including proposed Regulations for General Synod, sending it to the churches six months prior to synod.
- 4.4.5 To arrange for regional information and review conferences throughout the federations as time and opportunity permits.

B. The Committee and its activities

The committee members are Dr. Gijsbert Nederveen, Mr. Gerard J. Nordeman, Rev. John VanWoudenberg (convener), and Dr. Art Witten. Since Synod Smithers 2007 the committee met seven times by itself and four times with the committee re: church order of the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA).

The URCNA committee members are Dr. Nelson D. Kloosterman, Rev. William Pols, Rev. Ronald Scheuers, Rev. Raymond J. Sikkema, and Mr. Harry VanGurp.

The committee enjoyed an excellent working relationship both internally as well as with the brothers of the URCNA.

C. Mandate 4.4.1

The committee continued to work closely with the committee re: church order appointed by the Synod Escondido 2001 (and continued by Synod Calgary 2004 and Synod Schererville 2007) of the URCNA. Since Synod Smithers, the combined committees met twice in Burlington, Ontario (a one day meeting and a two day meeting), once in Chino, California (a three day meeting), and once in Dutton, Michigan (a three day meeting). Most often there was full attendance. At these meetings br. Kloosterman functioned as chairman, br. Nordeman prepared the Press Releases, br. VanWoudenberg recorded the minutes, and br. Nederveen kept track of the changes adopted to the Proposed Joint Church Order (PJCO) since 2007. A single set of minutes was kept and common press releases published. Each meeting could be concluded with thanks and praise to our

heavenly Father for the brotherly manner in which the combined committee could proceed with its work.

D. Mandate 4.4.2

On October 25, 2007 the committee sent a letter to the Canadian Reformed Churches to encourage feedback that has been processed through the consistories, and to remind them of the March 1, 2009 deadline for input. The joint committee received fifty-two submissions regarding PJCO 2007 as submitted to General Synod Smithers and General Synod Schererville. Thirty five of these submissions came from Canadian Reformed Churches. By far the majority of these came directly from the consistories; a few were submissions authored by individuals but “passed along” by their consistories as worthy for consideration by the committee. Seven of the thirty-five submissions were received after the March 1, 2009 deadline set by Synod Smithers 2009.

Input was received from the following Canadian Reformed churches:

Abbotsford	Aldergrove	Ancaster
Attercliffe	Barrhead	Burlington Ebenezer
Burlington Fellowship	Calgary	Carman East
Carman West	Chatham	Cloverdale
Coaldale	Dunnville	Elora
Fergus Maranatha	Grand Valley	Grassie
Guelph	Hamilton Cornerstone	London
Lynden	Orangeville	Owen Sound
Smithville	Spring Creek	St. Albert
Surrey	Taber	Toronto
Willoughby Heights	Winnipeg Redeemer	Yarrow

The OPC (via the CEIR Committee) also reviewed the PJCO and gave valuable input.

In order to evaluate the input received the joint committee decided that the United Reformed brothers would make recommendations to the joint-committee regarding input from the United Reformed Churches in North America, and the Canadian Reformed brothers would make recommendations to the joint-committee regarding input from the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Submissions received after the March 1, 2009 deadline were reviewed to see if any issues brought up in them had not yet been considered when dealing with the input that was received on time.

Attached to this report is a document called “Comments on PJCO 2010” in which the committee offers explanatory comments regarding input received and changes made to the PJCO since 2007. Included in this are a couple of key formulations drafted by the joint committee after much deliberation regarding the important issues of the nature of the authority of broader assemblies, and the rationale for regional synod and deputies.

E. Mandate 4.4.3

This part of the mandate was not completed because of time constraints and because the joint committee, upon further reflection, considered it premature to develop such a document prior to the adoption of a church order.

F. Mandate 4.4.4

After reviewing all the input from the churches, received both via correspondence and via the regional conferences, the joint committee was able to revise PJCO 2007 and craft a new document which we have labelled PJCO 2010. As already stated above, a proposal for Regulations for General Synod has not yet been crafted.

Regarding PJCO Article 36, Psalms and Hymns, General Synod Smithers expressed a strong preference for the majority position while General Synod Schererville expressed a strong preference for the minority position. Unfortunately the general synods of 2007 both received a minority report without receiving a majority report on this matter. To rectify this matter a majority report has been included with this submission, and the minority report is once again enclosed.

G. Mandate 4.4.5

The joint committee arranged for four sets of regional conferences, seeking to give as many churches of the federations as possible the opportunity to attend a conference.

The first conference was held in Ancaster, Ontario, Canada on April 18, 2008.

The second set of conferences was held in Western Canada: on October 25, 2008 in Abbotsford, British Columbia; on October 27, 2008 in Edmonton, Alberta; on October 28, 2008 in Lethbridge, Alberta; and October 29, 2008 in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

The third set of conferences was held in Iowa-Michigan, USA: on March 11, 2009 in Rock Valley, Iowa; on March 12, 2009 in Lynwood, Illinois; on March 13, 2009 in Wyoming, Michigan.

The fourth set of conferences was held in California, USA: March 23, 2009 in Visalia; and March 24, 2009 in Chino.

At each of these conferences the committee took the opportunity to highlight and explain significant provisions of the PJCO to the churches. The joint committee deliberately did not get into a "defence mode," but instead sought to listen to and record the sentiments expressed. This proved to be a very beneficial mode of operation.

Though the attendance of the regional conferences was not always as significant as hoped, the joint committee received much positive feedback

from attendees about holding these conferences, and received much valuable input with which to work.

To facilitate the dissemination of the PJCO and the 4 column comparison document to the churches, the committee set up a web site to which it also posted the Press Releases and some other matters. The address of this website is <http://sites.google.com/site/churchorderpjco/> . On this website there is also a link to a bookstore which from time to time carries the very important 1941 Church Order Commentary written by Idzerd VanDellen and Martin Monsma. The joint committee has found this English commentary very helpful particularly because of how it provides historical context and background. The committee encourages the consulting of this commentary to aid in the understanding and evaluation of the PJCO.

H. Miscellaneous

As the committee did its work it discussed how incorporation of churches could impact Church Polity. The committee did not do too much work on this issue since it does not really appear to be part of our mandate. We felt, however, that we should at least alert synod to this matter, and therefore have enclosed a brief report drawn up on this issue by one of our members.

I. Conclusion

The committee thanks the Lord for the work that could be done, and for the ongoing spirit of brotherly harmony and growing understanding between the brothers from the United Reformed Churches and the brothers from the Canadian Reformed Churches. We pray that the Lord will bless our work as we move forward as federations towards full unity.

With a sense of humble gratitude to the Lord for blessing our efforts we present to General Synod Burlington 2010:

1. The revised Proposed Joint Church Order called PJCO 2010;
2. A two-column document comparing PJCO 2010 to PJCO 2007;
3. Comments on PJCO 2010;
4. The Majority Report re. PJCO Article 36, Psalms and Hymns;
5. The Minority Report re. PJCO Article 36, Psalms and Hymns;
6. A report on the matter of incorporation.

J. Recommendations

In concert with the Church Order Committee of the URCNA, the committee recommends that:

1. Synod thank the committee for the work it has completed;

The Proposed Joint Church Order (Synod 2010)

Introduction

Biblical and Confessional Basis

We Reformed believers maintain that the standard for personal, public, and ecclesiastical life is God's Word, the inspired, infallible, and inerrant book of Holy Scripture. As a federation of churches we declare our complete submission and obedience to that Word of God. We also declare that we are confessional churches, in that we believe and are fully persuaded that the Three Forms of Unity, the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort, summarize and do fully agree with the Word of God. Therefore, we fully agree with these Reformed Confessions.

Both the Word of God and these Reformed Confessions demand that in our ecclesiastical structure and rule we openly acknowledge Jesus Christ to be the supreme and only Head of the church. Christ exercises His headship in the churches by His Word and Spirit through the ordained offices, for the sake of purity of doctrine, holiness of life, the spread of the gospel, and order in the churches (1 Corinthians 14:40). The churches of our federation, although distinct, willingly display their unity and accountability, both to each other and especially to Christ, by means of our common Confessions and this Church Order. Congregations manifest this unity when their delegates meet together in the broader assemblies.

Historical Background

Our Church Order has its roots in the continental European background of the Protestant Reformation. The Reformed churches desired to be faithful to God's Word in practice and life as well as in doctrine. Therefore, as early as the mid-sixteenth century, and even in the midst of persecution, the Reformed churches set down the foundation of the Church Order at various ecclesiastical assemblies beginning in 1563, including those in Wezel, the Netherlands (1568), and in Emden, Germany (1571). For the most part, the decisions of the assemblies in this period leaned heavily on the church orders already in place and used by the Reformed churches in France and Geneva.

The Church Order adopted at Emden was revised at the Synods of Dordrecht (1574 and 1578), Middelburg (1581), and The Hague (1586), before being adopted by the well-known Synod of Dordrecht (1618-1619). Our Church Order follows the principles and structure of the Church Order of Dordrecht.

Foundational Statements

The following list of foundational statements, though not exhaustive, provides a clear biblical basis for and source of our Church Order.

1. The church is the possession of Christ, who is the Mediator of the New Covenant.

Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:25-27

2. As Mediator of the New Covenant, Christ is the Head of the church.
Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:23-24; Colossians 1:18
3. Because the church is Christ's possession and He is its Head, the principles governing the church are determined not by human preference, but by biblical teaching.
Matthew 28:18-20; Colossians 1:18; II Timothy 3:16-17
4. The catholic or universal church possesses a spiritual unity in Christ and in the Holy Scriptures.
Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 2:20, 4:3-4; I Timothy 3:15; II John 9
5. In its subjection to its heavenly Head, the universal church is governed by Christ from heaven by means of His Word and Spirit with the keys of the kingdom, which He has given to the local church for that purpose. Therefore, no church may lord it over another church.
Matthew 16:19; 23:8; John 20:22-23; Acts 14:23; 20:28-32
6. The offices of minister, elder, and deacon are local in authority and function. The Lord gave no permanent universal, national, or regional offices to His church by which the churches are to be governed. Therefore, no office-bearer may lord it over another office-bearer.
Acts 14:23; 16:4; 20:17, 28; Ephesians 4:11-16; Titus 1:5
7. In order to manifest our spiritual unity, churches should seek contact with other faithful, confessionally Reformed churches for their mutual edification and as an effective witness to the world.
John 17:21-23; Ephesians 4:1-6
8. The exercise of a federative relationship is possible only on the basis of unity in faith and in confession.
I Corinthians 10:14-22; Galatians 1:6-9; Ephesians 4:16-17
9. Although churches exist in certain circumstances without formal federative relationships, the well-being of the church requires that such relationships be entered wherever possible. Entering into or remaining in such relationships should be voluntary; there is however a spiritual obligation to seek and maintain the federative unity of the churches by formal bonds of fellowship and cooperation.
Acts 11:22, 27-30; 15:22-35; Romans 15:25-27; I Corinthians 16:1-3; Colossians 4:16; I Thessalonians 4:9-10; Revelation 1:11, 20
10. Member churches meet together in broader assemblies to manifest ecclesiastical unity, to guard against human imperfections, and to benefit from the wisdom of many counselors. The decisions of such assemblies are settled and binding among the churches unless they are contrary to Scripture, the Reformed Confessions, or the adopted Church Order.
Proverbs 11:14; Acts 15:1-35; I Corinthians 13:9-10; II Timothy 3:16-17

11. The church is mandated to exercise its ministry of reconciliation by proclaiming the gospel to the ends of the earth and by administering the sacraments in the congregation.
Matthew 26:26-30; Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; Acts 2:38-39;
I Corinthians 11:17-34; II Corinthians 5:18-21
12. Christ cares for and governs His church through the office-bearers, namely, ministers, elders, and deacons, whom He chooses through the congregation.
Acts 1:23-26; 6:2-3; 14:23; I Timothy 3:1, 8; 5:17
13. The Scriptures require that ministers, elders, and deacons be properly qualified for the suitable discharge of their respective offices.
I Timothy 3:2-9; 4:16; II Timothy 2:14-16; 3:14; 4:1-5
14. Being the chosen and redeemed people of God, the church, under the supervision of the consistory, is called to worship Him in reverence and awe according to the scriptural principles governing worship.
Leviticus 10:1-3; Deuteronomy 12:29-32; Psalm 95:1-2, 6; Psalm 100:4; John 4:24; Hebrews 12:28-29; I Peter 2:9
15. Since the church is the pillar and ground of the truth, it is called through its teaching ministry to build up the people of God in faith.
Deuteronomy 11:19; Ephesians 4:11-16; I Timothy 4:6; II Timothy 2:2; 3:16-17
16. The church's evangelistic and missionary calling consists of preaching and teaching the Word of God to the unconverted at home and abroad with the goal of establishing new churches or expanding existing churches. This calling is fulfilled by ministers of the Word ordained to be missionaries, and by equipping the congregation to be the light of the world.
Matthew 5:14-16; Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; Ephesians 4:11-13; Philippians 2:14-16;
I Peter 2:9-12; I Peter 3:15-16
17. Christian discipline, arising from God's love for His people, is exercised in the church to correct and strengthen the people of God, to maintain the unity and the purity of the church of Christ, and thereby to bring honor and glory to God's name.
I Timothy 5:20; Titus 1:13; Hebrews 12:7-11
18. The exercise of Christian discipline is first of all a personal duty of every church member, but when official discipline by the church, to whom the keys of the kingdom are entrusted, becomes necessary, it must be exercised by the consistory of the church.
Matthew 18:15-20; John 20:22-23; Acts 20:28; I Corinthians 5:13; I Peter 5:1-3

Church Order

Article 1

The Purpose and Divisions of the Church Order

For maintaining proper ecclesiastical order, the Church Order must regulate the offices; the assemblies; the supervision of doctrine, worship, sacraments, and ceremonies; and the discipline. Therefore we order our ecclesiastical relations and activities under the following divisions:

- | | |
|--|------------------|
| I. Offices | (Articles 2-20) |
| II. Assemblies | (Articles 21-33) |
| III. Worship, Sacraments, and Ceremonies | (Articles 34-48) |
| IV. Discipline | (Articles 49-59) |

I. OFFICES

Article 2

The Three Offices

The offices of the church are the minister of the Word, the elder, and the deacon. No one shall exercise an office without having been lawfully called to it with the cooperation of the congregation and without subscribing to the Three Forms of Unity.

Article 3

The Duties of the Minister

The duties belonging to the office of minister of the Word consist of continuing in prayer and in the ministry of the Word, administering the sacraments, visiting the members in their homes, comforting the sick with the Word of God, catechizing and instructing the youth in the doctrines of Scripture, watching over his fellow office-bearers, and finally, together with the elders shepherding the congregation, exercising church discipline, and ensuring that everything is done decently and in good order.

Article 4

Preparation for the Ministry

A. Theological Education

Competent men shall be encouraged to study for the ministry of the Word. A man aspiring to the ministry must be a member of a church in the federation and must evidence genuine godliness to his consistory, who shall ensure that he receives a thoroughly reformed theological education. This consistory with the deacons shall also help him ensure that his financial needs are met, if necessary with the assistance of the churches of classis.

The JCO considers this article incomplete; see our report to Synods

B. Licensure

A man aspiring to the ministry shall seek licensure to exhort in the churches. Such licensure shall be granted only after the student has completed at least one year of theological education, and has sustained

the prescribed Licensure Examination as conducted by his classis. Classis shall give license only to one who is preparing for the ministry, and only for the duration of his theological training. All his work as a licentiate shall be conducted under the supervision of the consistory where the work is performed.

C. Candidacy

At the conclusion of his training a student shall ask his consistory to request classis to conduct the prescribed Candidacy Examination. Upon sustaining this examination, the classis, with the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod, shall declare him eligible for call among the churches of the federation.

D. Exceptional Circumstances

Only under circumstances of general tribulation or severe persecution which make the completion of regular theological education impossible, may a consistory request that an exceptionally gifted brother be presented to classis for the prescribed Candidacy Examination. In such a situation, his consistory and the classis should also have assurance of his godliness, humility, modesty, understanding, wisdom, discretion, and public speaking ability.

Article 5

Calling a Candidate

The lawful calling to the office of minister of those who have not previously been in that office shall consist of:

First, the election by the consistory with the deacons of a man who has been declared a candidate after sustaining the prescribed Candidacy Examination, after having prayed and having received the advice of the congregation and of the counselor appointed by classis.

Second, the prescribed Ordination Examination which shall be conducted to the satisfaction of the classis to which the calling church belongs.

Third, the public ordination before the congregation shall take place with proper instructions, admonitions, and prayers, followed by the laying on of hands by the minister(s), with the use of the synodically approved liturgical form.

Article 6

Calling a Minister Within the Federation

A minister within the federation shall be called in a lawful manner by the consistory with the deacons. Any minister receiving a call shall consult with his current consistory with the deacons regarding that call. He may accept the call only with their consent.

The classis shall ensure the good order of the calling process by verifying the issuance of written ecclesiastical testimonies from:

- a. the consistory of the church from which he is leaving concerning his doctrine and life, his ministerial service, and his honorable release from his service in that church;
- b. the classis within which he last served concerning his honorable release from that classis;

- c. the consistory of the church which he is joining concerning proper announcements made to the congregation for its approbation of the call.

Upon verification of these documents, the church shall install him with the use of the synodically approved liturgical form and he shall subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity by signing the Form of Subscription.

The advice of classis shall be required for a second call to the same minister regarding the same vacancy.

Article 7

Calling a Minister from Outside the Federation

A minister from a church with whom the federation maintains ecclesiastical fellowship shall be admitted to serve a church within the federation, and only after sustaining the examination as prescribed in the relevant section of the Ecclesiastical Examination for ministers from outside the federation, whereupon he may be declared eligible for call.

A minister from a church with whom the federation does not maintain ecclesiastical fellowship shall be admitted to serve a church within the federation only after an adequate period of consistorial supervision and only after becoming a member of a congregation in the federation, only after an adequate period of consistorial supervision determined by his consistory, and only after sustaining the examination as prescribed in the relevant section of the Ecclesiastical Examination for ministers from outside the federation, whereupon he may be declared eligible for call.

Article 8

Bound to a Particular Church

No one shall serve in the ministry of the Word unless he is bound to a particular church, either as a minister of the congregation or as one charged with some other ministerial task, such as chaplains and professors of theology. Each minister shall remain bound to the Church Order.

Article 9

Bound for Life

A minister of the Word once lawfully called is bound to the service of the churches for life and shall at all times remain subject to the call of the congregation. He may leave this vocation only for weighty reasons, upon the approval of his consistory with the deacons and with the approval of classis and the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod.

Article 10

Support and Emeritation of Ministers

Each church shall provide honorably for its minister and his family while he is serving that church, and shall contribute toward the retirement and disability needs of its minister. In the event of the minister's death, adequate provision shall be made for the support of his dependent wife and children.

A minister who is unable to perform the duties of his office due to age, sickness, or other personal disabilities, shall retain the honor and title of Minister of the Word, and shall retain his official bond with the church he last served, which shall provide honorably for his support, with the assistance of the churches if necessary.

The emeritation of a minister shall take place with the approval of the consistory with the deacons, and with the concurring advice of classis and of the deputies of regional synod.

**Article 11
Temporary Release**

If because of illness or other substantial reasons, a minister requests a temporary release from his service to the congregation, he shall receive the same only with the approval of the consistory with the deacons. If the duration of the release is greater than one year, the consistory shall obtain the concurring advice of classis. He shall at all times remain subject to the call of the congregation.

**Article 12
Exceptional Release of a Minister**

When for weighty reasons and exceptional circumstances a pastoral relationship has been irreconcilably broken, a consistory with the deacons may release its minister from his call only under all of the following conditions:

- a. This release shall not occur for delinquency in doctrine or life, which would warrant church discipline;
- b. This release shall occur only when attempted reconciliation, with the involvement of classis, has been unsuccessful, resulting in an intolerable situation;
- c. This release shall occur only with the approval of classis and the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod;
- d. This release requires the approval by classis of the provision for the adequate congregational support of the minister and his family for up to two years.

The church from whose service he has been released shall announce his eligibility for call. This eligibility shall be valid for two years, whereafter he shall be honorably discharged from office. Upon the request of the consistory that released the minister, classis may extend his eligibility for call for no more than two additional years.

**Article 13
The Nomination and Election of Elders and Deacons**

The consistory with the deacons shall provide for the instruction and training of elders and deacons. The procedure for the lawful calling of elders and deacons shall consist of the following:

First, the consistory with the deacons shall nominate only male communicant members who meet the biblical requirements for office, and who indicate their willingness to sign the Form of Subscription. Prior to nominating,

the congregation may be invited to direct attention to suitable men. Ordinarily, the number of nominees shall be twice the number of vacancies.

Second, after announcing the names of the nominees to the congregation on two Sundays, and with public prayer, elders and deacons shall be elected by the congregation according to the local regulations adopted for that purpose.

Third, the consistory with the deacons shall appoint the elders and deacons, and shall announce their names to the congregation on the two Sundays prior to entering office, in order that the congregation may have opportunity to bring lawful objections to the attention of the consistory.

Article 14

The Term and Ordination of Elders and Deacons

Elders and deacons, having been elected in accordance with local regulations to a specified term, and having been appointed by the consistory with the deacons, shall be ordained with the use of the synodically approved liturgical form.

Article 15

Subscription to the Confessions

Each office-bearer shall subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity by signing the Form of Subscription. Anyone refusing to subscribe shall not be ordained or installed in office. Anyone in office refusing to subscribe shall, because of that very fact, be immediately suspended from office by the consistory, and if he persists in his refusal, shall be deposed from office.

Article 16

Parity Among Office-bearers

Among the office-bearers, parity shall be maintained with respect to the duties of their respective offices and in other matters as far as possible, according to the judgment of the consistory and, if necessary, of classis.

Article 17

The Duties of Elders

The duties belonging to the office of elder consist of shepherding and ruling the church of Christ according to the principles taught in Scripture, in order that purity of doctrine and holiness of life may be practiced. The elders, together with the minister, shall watch over their fellow office-bearers, and ensure that they faithfully discharge their offices. They are to maintain the purity of the Word and Sacraments, persist in praying for the congregation, assist in catechizing the youth in the congregation, and promote schooling at all levels that is in harmony with the Word of God as summarized the Three Forms of Unity. Moreover, they shall visit the members of the congregation according to need, engage in annual home visits, preserve and promote concord and unity among the members and between the congregation and its office-bearers, exercise discipline in the congregation, promote the work of evangelism and missions, and ensure that everything is done decently and in good order.

**Article 18
Protecting Doctrinal Purity**

To protect the congregation from false teachings and errors which endanger the purity of its doctrine and conduct, ministers and elders shall use the means of instruction, refutation, warning, and admonition, in the ministry of the Word, in Christian teaching, and in family visiting.

**Article 19
The Duties of Deacons** The duties belonging to the office of deacon consist of performing and supervising works of Christian mercy in the congregation. The deacons shall do this by acquainting themselves with congregational needs, exhorting members of the congregation to show mercy, gathering and managing the offerings of God’s people in Christ’s name, distributing these offerings according to need, continuing in prayer, and encouraging and comforting with the Word of God those who receive the gifts of Christ’s mercy. Needs of those outside the congregation, especially of other believers, should also be considered.

The deacons shall ordinarily meet monthly to transact the business pertaining to their office, and they shall render a regular account of their work to the consistory. The deacons may invite the minister to visit their meetings in order to acquaint him with their work and request his advice.

**Article 20
The Civil Authorities**

As the task of civil government includes protecting the freedom of the Christian church, so it is the responsibility of the church to respect the government as instituted by God. In order that the church of Christ may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness, and that the witness of the gospel may be protected and advanced, the office-bearers must lead the congregation by their admonition and example. They shall ensure that prayers for the government are regularly offered and that members render due honor and lawful obedience to the civil authorities, thereby living as good citizens under Christ and promoting the true welfare of the land in which they live.

II. ASSEMBLIES

**Article 21
Ecclesiastical Assemblies**

- A. Identification:
Among the churches of the federation, four assemblies shall be recognized: the consistory, the classis, the regional synod, and the general synod. The terms classis and synod designate either ecclesiastical assemblies or ecclesiastical regions. As assemblies, classes and synods are deliberative in nature, and exist only for the duration of their meetings.
- B. Convening
Regulations for broader assemblies shall delineate the function of the convening church and/or of the designated clerk serving the convening churches.

C. Delegation

Those delegated to the broader assemblies shall be issued proper credentials by their delegating body, thereby receiving authorization to deliberate and decide upon all the matters properly placed before them. A delegate shall not vote on any matter in which he himself or his church is particularly involved.

D. Jurisdiction

In all assemblies only ecclesiastical matters shall be transacted, and only in an ecclesiastical manner. Matters once decided on may not be proposed again unless they are substantiated by new grounds. The broader assemblies shall exercise jurisdiction exclusively relating to matters properly before them. Only those matters shall be considered in the broader assemblies that could not be settled in the narrower assemblies, or that pertain to the churches in common. All matters that pertain to the churches in common must originate with a consistory and must receive the support of the narrower assembly before being considered by the broader assembly.

E. Decisions

All decisions of ecclesiastical assemblies shall be received with respect and shall be considered settled and binding, unless proven to be in conflict with Scripture, the Three Forms of Unity, or the Church Order.

F. Proceedings

The proceedings of all assemblies shall begin and end with prayer. In every assembly there shall be a chairman, a vice-chairman, and a clerk. It is the chairman's duty to state and explain clearly the business to be transacted, to ensure that the stipulations of the Church Order are followed, and to ensure that every member observes proper order and decorum. It is the vice-chairman's duty to assist the chairman. It is the clerk's duty to keep an accurate record of the proceedings for approval by the assembly. These assembly duties shall cease when the assembly itself ceases.

G. Censure

Admonition shall be given to those who demonstrate unworthy behavior, either during the meeting or regarding a decision of a narrower assembly.

H. Archives

Each ecclesiastical assembly shall ensure the proper preservation of its archives.

I. Press Release

Each broader assembly shall approve for publication a press release regarding its proceedings.

Article 22**The Consistory**

In each church there shall be a consistory composed of the minister(s) of the Word and the elders, which shall ordinarily meet at least once a month. The consistory is the only assembly which exercises authority within the congregation, since the consistory receives its authority directly from Christ.

Article 23
Small Number of Office-bearers

Where the number of elders is small, they may perform their duties with the advice of the deacons. This shall invariably be done where the number of elders is fewer than three. Where the number of deacons is small, they may perform their duties with the advice of the elders. This shall invariably be done where the number of deacons is fewer than three.

Article 24
Instituting a New Church

A church shall be instituted with its first consistory only under the supervision of a neighboring consistory and with the concurring advice of the classis.

Article 25
Classis

- A. Composition
A classis shall consist of neighboring churches whose consistories shall delegate two members, ordinarily a minister and an elder, with proper credentials to meet at a time and place determined at the previous classis. Ordinarily a classis shall consist of between eight and twelve churches.
- B. Frequency
A classis shall be held every four months, unless the convening church, in consultation with the neighboring church, concludes that no matters have been sent in by the churches that would warrant the convening of a classis. Cancellation of a classis shall not be permitted to occur twice in succession.
- C. Convening
The churches shall take turns convening classis. The assembly shall choose one of its members to preside. The same person shall not function as chairman twice in succession. Each classis shall appoint a convening church and determine the time and place of the next classis.
- D. Mutual Oversight
The classis shall inquire of each church whether consistorial and diaconal meetings are regularly held; the Word of God is purely preached; the sacraments are faithfully administered; church discipline is diligently exercised; the poor are adequately cared for; and confessionally Reformed schooling is promoted. The classis shall also inquire whether the consistory needs the advice or the assistance of classis for the proper government of the church, and whether the decisions of the broader assemblies are being honored.
- E. Delegation to Regional and General Synod
The last classis before regional synod shall choose delegates to that synod. If the regional synod consists of three classes, each classis shall delegate three ministers and three elders. If the regional synod consists of four or more classes, each classis shall delegate two ministers and two elders. The second last classis before general synod shall choose delegates to that synod. Each classis shall delegate two ministers and two elders.

F. Classis Contracta

A minimum of three churches may convene as a *classis contracta* exclusively to approbate a call, or to release a minister who has accepted a call, and to appoint a counselor for the ministerial vacancy.

Article 26

Church Visitors

Every two years classis shall appoint a number of its more experienced and competent ministers or elders to visit all the churches of the classis once during that period. At each church visit at least one of the visitors shall be a minister.

These visitors shall inquire whether the office-bearers perform their duties in harmony with the Word of God, adhere to sound doctrine, observe the Church Order, and properly promote, by word and deed, the edification of the whole congregation. Moreover, they shall fraternally encourage the office-bearers to fulfill their offices faithfully, and they shall admonish those who have been negligent, so that by their advice and assistance the visitors may help direct all things to the peace, edification, and profit of the churches. Upon the request of a consistory, they may also be called to assist in cases of special difficulty.

The church visitors shall submit a written report of their work to the next classis.

Article 27

Counselors

The consistory of a church with a ministerial vacancy shall request classis to appoint the minister specified by that consistory to serve as counselor. His task is to help the consistory follow the provisions of the Church Order, particularly in the matter of calling a minister. Along with the consistory with the deacons, he also shall sign the letter of call.

Article 28

Regional Synod

A regional synod, consisting of three or more classes, shall ordinarily meet once per year. If it appears necessary to convene a regional synod before the appointed time, the convening church shall determine the time and place with the advice of its classis.

A regional synod shall deal only with matters properly placed on its agenda by the churches by way of the classes, with lawful appeals of classical decisions, and with the reports of its deputies. It shall also determine the time and place for the next regional synod, and designate a convening church.

The chairman, vice-chairman, and clerk shall be chosen at the meeting to facilitate the work of the synod.

Article 29

Deputies of Regional Synod

In order that proper unity, good order, and sound doctrine be safeguarded, each regional synod shall appoint two deputies and an alternate for each

classis, who shall assist the classes in all cases provided for in the Church Order. Upon the request of a classis, they may also be called to assist in cases of special difficulty.

In cases of disagreement between the deputies, the decision of classis shall stand. In cases where the deputies cannot give concurring advice, the classis may request a judgment from regional synod.

The regional deputies shall keep a proper record of their actions. They shall submit a written report of their actions to the next regional synod and, if so required, they shall further explain those actions. The deputies shall serve until they are discharged from their duties by their regional synod.

**Article 30
General Synod**

A general synod, consisting of those delegated by the classes, shall meet once every three years. If it appears necessary to convene a general synod before the appointed time, the convening church shall determine the time and place with the advice of its regional synod.

A general synod shall deal only with matters properly placed on its agenda by the churches by way of the classes and the regional synods, with lawful appeals, and with reports which were mandated by the previous synod. It shall also determine the time and place for the next general synod, and designate a convening church.

The chairman, vice-chairman, and clerk(s) shall be chosen at the meeting to facilitate the work of the synod.

**Article 31
Appeals and Procedure**

When all avenues for settling a dispute with the consistory have been exhausted, and a member is convinced that an injustice has been done to him by a decision of his consistory, he may appeal the decision to classis for its judgment. The judgment of the broader assembly shall be reached by majority vote, received with respect, and considered settled and binding unless proven to be in conflict with Scripture, the Three forms of Unity, or the Church Order.

Any appeal to a broader assembly must provide written grounds, and the broader assembly shall provide adequate grounds for its decision to sustain or not sustain an appeal. If an assembly does not sustain an appeal, the appellant may appeal the decision of the narrower assembly to the next broader assembly. If a general synod does not sustain that appeal, the appellant may appeal synod's decision only once and that to the next general synod.

A member who desires to object to a decision of general synod regarding a matter pertaining to the churches in common, shall bring the matter to his consistory and urge it to appeal the decision to the next general synod.

A consistory which is convinced that a decision of a broader assembly conflicts with the Scripture, the Three Forms of Unity, or the Church Order, shall appeal the decision to the broader assembly next in order as soon as feasible.

Article 32**Ecumenical Relations****A. Local ecumenical relations**

The churches of the federation are encouraged to pursue ecumenical relations with congregations outside of the federation which manifest the marks of the true church and faithfully demonstrate allegiance to Scripture as summarized in the Reformed Confessions. Each church shall give account to classis of its ecumenical activities with churches not in ecclesiastical fellowship. Since local ecumenical relations aim at federative unity, each church must receive the approbation of classis before such ecumenical relations progress to include preaching exchange and fellowship at the Lord's Supper.

B. Ecclesiastical fellowship

The churches as a federation may enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with other federations by a synodical decision of two-thirds majority. Ecclesiastical fellowship with churches abroad that faithfully uphold the Reformed Confessions shall be regulated and maintained by general synod. Churches abroad shall not be rejected on the basis of minor differences of ecclesiastical polity or practice.

Article 33**Admitting a Church**

A church shall be admitted into the federation by the nearest classis with the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod, only upon recommendation from a consistory, and provided that its office-bearers subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity and agree to abide by the Church Order. If one of these office-bearers is a minister, he shall be examined as prescribed in the relevant section of the Ecclesiastical Examination for ministers from outside the federation.

III. WORSHIP, SACRAMENTS, AND CEREMONIES**Article 34****Regular Worship Services**

The consistory shall call the congregation together for public worship twice each Lord's Day.

The consistory shall regulate the worship services, which shall be conducted according to the principles taught in God's Word, namely, that the preaching of the Word have the central place, confession of sins be made, praise and thanksgiving in song and prayer be given, and gifts of gratitude be offered.

At one of the services each Lord's Day, the minister shall ordinarily preach the Word of God as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism by treating its Lord's Days in sequence, and may give such attention also to the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort.

**Article 35
Special Worship Services**

Each year the churches shall, in the manner decided upon by the consistory, commemorate the birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In addition special worship services may be called in connection with prayer for crops and labor, Thanksgiving Day, the turning of the new year, and times of great distress or blessing.

**Article 36
Psalms and Hymns**

The 150 Psalms shall have the principal place in the singing of the churches. In the worship services, the congregation shall sing faithful lyrical renditions of the Psalms, and hymns which faithfully and fully reflect the teaching of Scripture in harmony with the Three Forms of Unity, provided they are approved by general synod.

**Article 37
Admission to the Pulpit**

Consistories shall permit men to preach the word and administer the sacraments only according to the following stipulations:

- a. The consistory must give its consent before any minister may preach the Word or administer the sacraments in the congregation. Such consent shall be given only to ministers of churches within the federation and to ministers of churches in ecclesiastical fellowship. Any exception to this requirement shall be granted to any church only occasionally for a minister who subscribes to the Reformed Confessions, and only with prior approbation of classis.
- b. The consistory must give its consent before any licentiate or candidate may exhort in the congregation. Such consent shall be given only to licentiates and candidates within the federation and to licentiates and candidates of churches in ecclesiastical fellowship.

**Article 38
Administration of the Sacraments**

The sacraments shall be administered under the authority of the consistory in a public worship service by a minister of the Word with the use of the synodically adopted liturgical forms.

**Article 39
Baptism of Covenant Children**

The consistory shall ensure that God's covenant is signified and sealed by holy baptism to the children of communicant members in good standing. Parents shall present their children for baptism as soon as feasible.

**Article 40
Public Profession of Faith**

Baptized members who have been instructed in the faith and who have come to the years of understanding shall be encouraged to make public

profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Those who wish to profess their faith shall be examined by the consistory concerning their motives, doctrine and life, and their public profession shall occur in a public worship service after adequate announcements to the congregation and with the use of the appropriate liturgical form. Thereby the baptized members become communicant members and not only shall they be obligated to persevere in the fellowship of the church and in hearing God's Word, but also in partaking of the Lord's Supper.

Article 41

Baptism of Adults

Adults who have not been previously baptized shall be engrafted into the Christian church by holy baptism upon their public profession of faith.

Article 42

Administration of the Lord's Supper

At least once every three months the Lord's Supper shall be administered in a service of public worship, under the supervision of the consistory, according to the teaching of God's Word, and in a manner most conducive to the edification of the congregation.

Article 43

Admission to the Lord's Supper

The consistory shall supervise participation at the Lord's Supper. To that end, the consistory shall admit to the Lord's Supper only those members who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life. Visitors may be admitted to the Lord's Supper provided that the consistory has secured confirmation, by means of letter of testimony or interview regarding their proper profession of faith, their godly walk of life, and their biblical church membership.

Article 44

The Church's Mission Calling

Each church shall fulfill its mission calling, which is to preach the Word of God to the unconverted at home and abroad with the goal of establishing churches. This shall be carried out by missionaries who are ministers of the Word set apart for this labor by being called, supported, and supervised by their respective consistories for this task. Such missionaries shall proclaim the Word of God, and administer the sacraments to those who have been converted to the faith. They shall also institute church offices according to the provisions of the Church Order. The consistory shall promote the involvement of church members in service that assists in fulfilling this mission calling. If necessary, a calling church shall invite churches within its classis or regional synod to cooperate by agreement regarding the field, support, and oversight of the mission work.

Article 45

The Church's Evangelism Calling

Relying on the Holy Spirit each church shall fulfill its evangelism calling according to the Word of God, which is to make known the good news of Jesus

Christ to those within its area of life and influence. It shall seek to persuade those who do not know God or are estranged from God and His service to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, which necessarily includes being joined to His church through profession of faith.

**Article 46
Marriage**

Scripture teaches that marriage is to be a lifelong monogamous union between a man and a woman. Consistories shall instruct and exhort those under their spiritual care who are considering marriage to marry only in the Lord. The minister, as authorized by the consistory, shall solemnize only marriages that accord with Scripture, using the Form for the Solemnization of Marriage adopted by general synod.

**Article 47
Funerals**

A funeral is a family matter and shall not be conducted as a worship service.

**Article 48
The Church Records**

The consistory shall maintain accurate records which include the names of the members of the congregation and the dates of their births, baptisms, professions of faith, marriages, receptions into and departures from the church, and deaths.

IV. DISCIPLINE

**Article 49
The Nature and Purpose of Discipline**

Ecclesiastical discipline, one of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, is spiritual in nature and exempts no one from trial or punishment by the civil authorities. The purpose of ecclesiastical discipline is that God may be glorified, that the sinner may be reconciled with God, the church, and one's neighbor, and that offense may be removed from the church of Christ.

**Article 50
Consistory Involvement**

When a member's sin in doctrine or life is of a private character and does not give public offense, the rule prescribed by Christ in Matthew 18 shall be followed. A private sin from which the sinner repents after having been admonished by one person alone, or subsequently in the presence of two or three witnesses, shall not be brought to the consistory.

When a member does not repent after having been admonished in the presence of two or three witnesses concerning a private sin, or when it is alleged that a member has committed a public sin, the matter shall be brought to the consistory. Only then shall the consistory deal with any alleged sin in doctrine or life.

Article 51**The Reconciliation of a Member**

The reconciliation of a member, whose sin is public or has become public because the admonition of the church was despised, shall take place only upon evidence of genuine repentance, and in a manner which best promotes the edification of the church. The consistory shall determine whether, for the welfare of the congregation and the sinner, the member shall be required to confess the sin publicly.

Article 52**The Discipline of a Member****A. A communicant member**

A member whose sin is properly made known to the consistory, and who then obstinately rejects the repeated and loving admonitions of the consistory, shall, in agreement with the Word of God, be subject to church discipline according to the following stages:

1. Silent Discipline: a member who persists in sin shall be suspended by the consistory from participating in the sacraments, and is thereby not a member in good standing. Such suspension shall not be made public by the consistory.
2. Public Discipline: if the silent discipline and subsequent admonitions do not bring about repentance, and before proceeding to excommunication, the sinner's impenitence shall be made known to the congregation by indicating both the offense and the failure to heed repeated admonitions, so that the congregation may speak to and pray for this member. Public discipline shall be done with the use of the synodically approved liturgical form, in three steps, the interval between which shall be left to the discretion of the consistory.
 - a. In the first step, the name of the sinner shall ordinarily not be mentioned so that he may be somewhat spared.
 - b. In the second step, the consistory shall obtain the concurring advice of classis before proceeding, whereupon the member's name shall be mentioned to the congregation.
 - c. In the third step, the congregation shall be informed that unless there is repentance, the member will be excommunicated from the church on a specified date.
3. Excommunication: if these steps of public discipline do not bring about repentance, the consistory shall excommunicate the impenitent sinner, thereby excluding him from the church of Jesus Christ, using the synodically approved liturgical form.

B. A non-communicant member

A non-communicant member who is delinquent either in doctrine or life, who after repeated and loving admonitions of the consistory does not repent, shall be excluded from the church of Christ. The sinner's impenitence shall be made known to the congregation by indicating both the offense and the failure to heed repeated admonitions, so that the congregation may pray for this member. In the first public announcement the name of the sinner shall ordinarily not be mentioned so that he may be somewhat spared.

The consistory shall obtain the concurring advice of classis before proceeding, whereupon the member's name shall be mentioned to the congregation and a date set at which the excommunication shall take place, thereby excluding him from the church of Jesus Christ. The intervals between the two announcements and the excommunication shall be left to the discretion of the consistory.

The public discipline shall be done with the use of the synodically approved liturgical form.

Article 53

The Readmission of an Excommunicated Person

When someone who has been excommunicated repents and desires to be readmitted into communion with Christ and His church, the congregation shall be so informed. If no lawful objections are presented to the consistory within one month after the public announcement, readmission into the church with all its privileges shall take place, using the synodically approved liturgical form. One who has been excommunicated as a non-communicant member, shall be readmitted only upon the public profession of faith.

Article 54

No Lording it Over

No church shall lord it over other churches, and no office-bearer shall lord it over other office-bearers.

Article 55

Mutual Censure

The minister(s), elders, and deacons shall conduct mutual censure regularly, whereby they exhort and encourage one another in a loving and edifying manner regarding the discharge of their offices.

Article 56

The Suspension and Deposition of an Office-bearer

When a minister, elder, or deacon has committed a public or grievous sin, or when he refuses to heed the admonitions of his consistory, he shall be suspended from the duties of his office by his own consistory with the concurring advice of the consistories of the two neighboring churches.

Included among the sins requiring suspension from office are these: false doctrine or heresy, schism, open blasphemy, simony, desertion of office or intrusion upon that of another, perjury, adultery, fornication, theft, acts of violence, habitual drunkenness, brawling, unjustly enriching oneself; in short, all sins which would warrant the discipline of any other member.

Should he harden himself in his sin, or when the sin committed is of such a nature that he cannot effectively continue in office, he shall be deposed from his office by his consistory. In each case the concurring advice of classis is required, and in the case of a minister the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod is also required. No broader assembly may suspend or depose an office-bearer.

Suspension or deposition in itself does not necessarily require further ecclesiastical discipline.

A man once deposed may be reconsidered for office only with the involvement of the consistory which deposed him, after a sufficient period of time, and upon evidence of genuine repentance. The regular procedure for entering office shall be followed.

Article 57

The Reception and Departure of Members

A. The Reception of Members

Members from churches within the federation or churches with which the federation has ecclesiastical fellowship may be received under the spiritual care of the consistory upon receipt of a letter of testimony from their former consistory regarding their doctrine and life. Others may be admitted only after the consistory has examined them concerning doctrine and life. In such cases the consistory shall determine whether a public profession of faith shall be required. The reception of members shall be appropriately announced.

B. The Departure of Members

Members departing to a church within the federation or a church with which the federation has ecclesiastical fellowship shall submit a written request to the consistory. The consistory shall send a letter of testimony concerning their doctrine and life to such a church, requesting it to accept them under its spiritual care, and shall furnish a copy thereof to the members. The departure of members shall be appropriately announced.

Article 58

Property

All property, whether real or personal, held by a local church for the benefit of that local church, shall remain the property of that local church in accordance with its own by-laws or regulations and the governing laws of the jurisdiction in which the church is located.

All property, whether real or personal, held for the benefit of the federation by a local church, a classis or synod or a committee, trustee or trustees thereof, or otherwise, shall be held in trust as property in common of all of the churches within the federation, in accordance with the rules and regulations adopted by classes or synods of the federation. In the event a local church withdraws from the federation, unless the rules and regulations of the federation provide otherwise, the withdrawing church shall cease to have any benefit in such property.

Notwithstanding the laws of the jurisdiction in which a local church is located, the final authority for any acquisition or disposition of property by a local church, whether real or personal, shall be the consistory with the deacons of that church in accordance with the church's own by-laws or regulations, regardless of how the property is held.

Any appeals to broader assemblies with respect to property shall be governed by this article.

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Article 59

The Observance and Revision of the Church Order

These articles, relating to the lawful order of the church, having been adopted by common consent, shall be observed diligently. Only when the good order and welfare of the churches make it necessary, shall this Church Order be revised. Any proposed revision of the Church Order shall be adopted only by a majority vote of a general synod.

Ecclesiastical Examinations

The Licensure Examination

(cf. Article 4)

A theological student who is a member of a church within the federation and is preparing for the ministry of the Word and sacraments must undergo the licensure examination in order to be authorized to exhort in the churches.

A. Required Documents:

1. Proof of successful completion of at least one year of training at a seminary approved by the federation.
2. A letter from the student's consistory which
 - a. in consultation with the faculty of his seminary, gives a positive testimony regarding his doctrine and life, and
 - b. recommends that classis proceed with the examination.
3. A brief statement from the student regarding his wholehearted commitment to the Lord, His Word, and the Three Forms of Unity.

B. Procedure and Content:

1. The student's consistory shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis with the request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis.
2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda.
3. Five weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the student a sermon text.
4. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of the student's written sermon to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis.
5. The student shall deliver the sermon at classis.
6. Only if classis judges the sermon to be acceptable shall it examine him to determine if he is sufficiently competent in the following areas:
 - a. knowledge of the Three Forms of Unity (20-30 minutes);
 - b. understanding of public worship (15-25 minutes);
 - c. exegesis and homiletics (15-25 minutes).

Members of classis will be given sufficient time to ask questions after each area of the examination. After a maximum of ten minutes of questioning by classis in each area, classis will vote to signify that it has received enough information from the student to proceed to the next section of the examination. Classis may decide not to sustain a student so that a subsequent classis can re-examine him in specified areas.
7. If classis judges the student's performance to be acceptable, and he promises to teach in accordance with the Three Forms of Unity, classis shall issue him a license to exhort in the churches as long as he continues preparing for the ministry of the Word and sacraments.

Ecclesiastical Examinations

The Candidacy Examination

(cf. Articles 4 and 5)

A man aspiring to the office of minister who is a member of a church within the federation and has graduated from an approved seminary must undergo the candidacy examination in order to become eligible for call within the federation.

A. Required Documents:

1. Proof of successful completion of required training at a seminary approved by the federation.
2. Written recommendations from one or more consistories and ministers of the federation under whom the prospective candidate has labored in ministerial training for a minimum equivalent of six months of full-time work.
3. A letter from the prospective candidate's consistory which:
 - a. In consultation with his seminary, gives a positive testimony regarding his doctrine and life,
 - b. Recommends that classis proceed with the examination.
4. A medical report of health.
5. A brief statement from the prospective candidate regarding his wholehearted commitment to the Lord, His Word, and the Three Forms of Unity.

B. Procedure and Content:

1. The consistory shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis, and request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis.
2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda.
3. The convening church shall notify the deputies of Regional Synod regarding the request.
4. Six weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the applicant the following:
 - a. an Old Testament passage for examination in exegesis;
 - b. a New Testament passage for examination in exegesis; and
 - c. three sermons, one from each of the assigned scripture passages, and one from an assigned Lord's Day.
5. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of each of the applicant's written sermons to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis.
6. At classis the candidate shall deliver one of the sermons. This sermon shall not have been previously delivered.
7. Only if classis judges the sermons to be acceptable shall it examine him to determine if he is competent in the following areas:

- a. Practica: the prospective candidate's personal and spiritual life; his relationship with the Lord; his growth in faith; his background and preparation for ministry; his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking it; and his understanding of this office with respect to the theory and practice of preaching and public worship, of pastoral work among the congregation, and of evangelism and missions (at least 25 minutes).
- b. Knowledge of Scripture: the prospective candidate's doctrine of Scripture; his understanding of canonicity and hermeneutics; and primarily his familiarity with the contents of the various books of the Bible (15-20 minutes).
- c. Biblical Exegesis: the prospective candidate's ability to work with the original languages and to exegete the assigned Old Testament and New Testament passages (15-20 minutes).
- d. Knowledge of the Creeds and Confessions: the prospective candidate's knowledge of the history and content of the creeds and confessions, and his willingness to subscribe to them by signing the form of subscription (15-20 minutes).
- e. Reformed doctrine: the prospective candidate's knowledge of the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology (20-30 minutes).
- f. Church Polity: the prospective candidate's knowledge of the history and principles of Reformed Church Polity and of the Church Order (10-15 minutes).
- g. Church History: the prospective candidate's knowledge of church history in terms of major persons, heresies, and developments, with special emphasis on the Reformation and the history of the Reformed churches (15-20 minutes).
- h. Ethics: the prospective candidate's knowledge of the meaning and function of the Decalogue, including its relation both to Christian motivation and character and to contemporary moral problems (10-15 minutes).

Members of classis will be given sufficient time to ask questions after each area of the examination. After a maximum of ten minutes of questioning by classis in each area, classis will vote to signify that it has received enough information from the applicant to proceed to the next section of the examination. Classis may decide not to sustain an applicant so that a subsequent classis can re-examine him in specified areas.

- 8. Classis shall issue a written declaration, valid for two years, that the applicant is eligible for call to the churches in the federation upon:
 - a. the affirmative vote of classis,
 - b. the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and
 - c. his promise to adhere to Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity.

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9. If the candidacy exam is sustained and the candidate accepts a call within one year in the classis which examines him, the ordination exam may be waived. The classis that examined him may make such a decision.
10. If after two years the candidate has not received a call he may, with the recommendation of his consistory, request an extension of his candidacy for another year. To grant this request classis may require another examination.

Ecclesiastical Examinations

The Ordination Examination

(cf. Article 5)

A candidate who has accepted a call within the federation must undergo the ordination examination to become eligible for ordination to the ministry of the Word and sacraments in the churches.

A. Required Documents:

1. A letter of call.
2. A letter of acceptance of the call.
3. A written declaration of candidacy.
4. A letter from the candidate's consistory which:
 - a. gives a positive testimony regarding his doctrine and life, and
 - b. recommends that classis proceeds with the examination.

B. Procedure and Content:

1. The calling church shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis with the request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis.
2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda.
3. The convening church shall notify the deputies of Regional Synod regarding the request.
4. Five weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the candidate a scripture passage for examination in exegesis, from which he is also to prepare a new sermon.
5. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of the written sermon to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis.
6. At classis the candidate shall deliver the sermon. This sermon shall not have been previously delivered.
7. Only if classis judges the sermon to be acceptable, shall it examine him to determine if he is competent in the following areas:
 - a. Practica: the candidate's personal and spiritual life; his relationship with the Lord; his growth in faith; his background and preparation for ministry; his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking it; and his understanding of this office with respect to the theory and practice of preaching and public worship, of pastoral work among the congregation, and of evangelism and missions (at least 25 minutes).
 - b. Biblical Exegesis: the candidate's ability to work with the original languages and to exegete the assigned passage (15-20 minutes).
 - c. Knowledge of the Creeds and Confessions: the candidate's knowledge of the history and content of the creeds and confessions, and his willingness to subscribe to them by signing the form of subscription (15-20 minutes).

- d. Reformed doctrine: the candidate's knowledge of the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology (20-30 minutes).

Members of classis will be given sufficient time ask questions after each area of examination. After a maximum of ten minutes for each area, classis will vote to proceed to the next section without thereby indicating that the candidate has sustained this section. This period of questioning by classis may be extended by a majority vote.

- 8. Classis shall declare that the candidate has sustained his ordination examination, and is therefore eligible to be ordained as a minister of the Word and sacraments, upon:
 - a. the affirmative vote of classis,
 - b. the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and
 - c. his promise to sign the form of subscription upon ordination.
- 9. A candidate who does not sustain his examination may undergo the ordination examination again, in whole or in part, by a subsequent classis upon the request of the calling church.

**Ecclesiastical Examination for a Minister from a Church
With Whom the Federation Maintains Ecclesiastical Fellowship
(cf. Article 7 part 1)**

A. Documents:

1. A letter of call
2. A letter of acceptance

B. Procedure and Content:

1. The calling church shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis with the request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis.
2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda.
3. The convening church shall notify the deputies of Regional Synod regarding the request.
4. Five weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the applicant a scripture passage for examination in exegesis, from which he is also to prepare a new sermon.
5. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of the written sermon to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis.
6. At classis the applicant shall deliver the sermon. This sermon shall not have been previously delivered.
7. Only if classis judges the sermon to be acceptable, shall it examine him to determine if he is competent in the following areas:
 - a. Practica: the applicant's personal and spiritual life; his relationship with the Lord; his growth in faith; his background and preparation for ministry; his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking it; and his understanding of this office with respect to the theory and practice of preaching and public worship, of pastoral work among the congregation, and of evangelism and missions (at least 25 minutes).
 - b. Biblical Exegesis: the applicant's ability to work with the original languages and to exegete the assigned passage (15-20 minutes).
 - c. Knowledge of the Creeds and Confessions: the applicant's knowledge of the history and content of the creeds and confessions, and his willingness to subscribe to them by signing the form of subscription (15-20 minutes).
 - d. Reformed doctrine: the applicant's knowledge of the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology (20-30 minutes).
 - e. Church Polity: the prospective applicant's knowledge of the history and principles of Reformed Church Polity and of the Church Order (10-15 minutes).

Members of classis will be given sufficient time ask questions after each area of examination. After a maximum of ten minutes for each area, classis will vote to proceed to the next section. This period of questioning by classis may be extended by a majority vote.

8. Classis shall declare that the applicant has sustained his examination, and is therefore eligible to be installed as a minister of the Word and sacraments, upon:
 - a. the affirmative vote of classis,
 - b. the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and
 - c. his promise to sign the form of subscription upon installation.
9. An applicant who does not sustain his examination may undergo the above examination again by a subsequent classis upon the request of the calling church.

**Ecclesiastical Examination for a Minister of a Church
With Whom the Federation Does Not Maintain Ecclesiastical
Fellowship,
and who is Seeking Eligibility for Call to a Church of the Federation.
(cf. Article 7 part 2)**

A. Documents:

1. A letter from the minister requesting the examination for ministers and providing information relating to the background of the minister and the circumstances leading to this request,
2. A letter from the sponsoring consistory which:
 - a. gives a positive testimony regarding his doctrine and life, and
 - b. recommends that classis proceed with the examination.
3. Documentation relating to seminary training, and
4. A letter from the church he last served regarding his pastoral record.

B. Procedure and Content:

1. The sponsoring consistory shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis, and request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis.
2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda.
3. The convening church shall notify the deputies of Regional Synod regarding the request.
4. Six weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the applicant the following:
 - a. an Old Testament passage for examination in exegesis;
 - b. a New Testament passage for examination in exegesis; and
 - c. three sermons, one from each of the assigned scripture passages, and one from an assigned Lord's Day.
5. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of each of the applicant's written sermons to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis.
6. At classis the applicant shall deliver one of the sermons. This sermon shall not have been previously delivered.
7. Only if classis judges the sermons to be acceptable shall it examine him to determine if he is competent in the following areas:
 - a. Practica: the applicant's personal and spiritual life; his relationship with the Lord; his growth in faith; his background and preparation for ministry; his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking it; and his understanding of this office with respect to the theory and practice of preaching and public worship, of pastoral work among the congregation, and of evangelism and missions (at least 25 minutes).
 - b. Knowledge of Scripture: the applicant's doctrine of Scripture; his understanding of canonicity and hermeneutics; and primarily his familiarity with the contents of the various books of the Bible (15-20 minutes).

- c. Biblical Exegesis: the applicant's ability to work with the original languages and to exegete the assigned Old Testament and New Testament passages (15-20 minutes).
- d. Knowledge of the Creeds and Confessions: the applicant's knowledge of the history and content of the creeds and confessions, and his willingness to subscribe to them by signing the form of subscription (15-20 minutes).
- e. Reformed doctrine: the applicant's knowledge of the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology (20-30 minutes).
- f. Church Polity: the applicant's knowledge of the history and principles of Reformed Church Polity and of the Church Order (10-15 minutes).
- g. Church History: the applicant's knowledge of church history in terms of major persons, heresies, and developments, with special emphasis on the Reformation and the history of the Reformed churches (15-20 minutes).
- h. Ethics: the applicant's knowledge of the meaning and function of the Decalogue, including its relation both to Christian motivation and character and to contemporary moral problems (10-15 minutes).

Members of classis will be given sufficient time ask questions after each area of examination. After a maximum of ten minutes for each area, classis will vote to proceed to the next section. This period of questioning by classis may be extended by a majority vote.

Classis may decide not to sustain the applicant for the sake of a subsequent classis re-examining him in specified areas.

An applicant who does not sustain his examination may be reexamined by a subsequent classis in all or specific areas of the candidacy examination.

- 8. Classis shall decide whether the applicant:
 - a. has sustained the examination and need not undergo a period of testing in the work of ministry before being declared eligible for call, or
 - b. has sustained the examination and yet needs to undergo a period of testing in the work of ministry before being declared eligible for call, or
 - c. has not sustained the examination.
- 9. If classis decides that the applicant need not undergo a period of testing before declaring him eligible for call to the churches in the federation, then classis shall issue a written declaration, valid for two years, that the applicant is eligible for call to the churches in the federation upon:
 - a. the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and
 - b. the applicant's promise to adhere to Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity.

10. If Classis judges that the applicant should undergo a period of testing in the work of ministry by the sponsoring consistory before declaring him eligible for call to the churches in the federation, then Classis shall determine how long this period of testing should be, Classis shall issue the applicant a license to preach in the churches in the federation for that time period upon the applicant's promise to adhere to Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity. The sponsoring consistory, after the prescribed period of testing and upon approval of his performance, shall recommend to a subsequent classis to declare the applicant eligible for call to the churches in the federation. This subsequent classis shall issue the applicant a written declaration, valid for two years, that the applicant is eligible for call to the churches in the federation upon:
 - a. the affirmative vote of the classis,
 - b. the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and
 - c. the applicant's promise to adhere to Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity.
11. If after two years the applicant has not received a call he may, with the recommendation of his sponsoring consistory, request an extension of his eligibility for a call for another year. To grant this request classis may require another examination.

**Ecclesiastical Examination for a Minister of a Church
With Whom the Federation Does Not Maintain Ecclesiastical Fellowship,
and who, Together with his Congregation,
is Seeking Entrance into the Federation.
(cf. Article 33)**

A. Documents:

1. A letter from his congregation requesting the examination for ministers and providing information relating to the background of the minister and the congregation, the pastoral record of the minister, and the circumstances leading to this request,
2. A letter from the sponsoring consistory recommending that classis proceed with the examination,
3. Documentation relating to seminary training, and
4. A letter from the church he served prior to his present congregation regarding his pastoral record.

B. Procedure and Content:

1. The ministers' consistory shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis, and request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis.
2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda.
3. The convening church shall notify the deputies of Regional Synod regarding the request.
4. Six weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the applicant the following:
 - a. an Old Testament passage for examination in exegesis;
 - b. a New Testament passage for examination in exegesis; and
 - c. three sermons, one from each of the assigned scripture passages, and one from an assigned Lord's Day.
5. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of each of the applicant's written sermons to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis.
6. At classis the applicant shall deliver one of the sermons. This sermon shall not have been previously delivered.
7. Only if classis judges the sermons to be acceptable shall it examine him to determine if he is competent in the following areas:
 - a. Practica: the applicant's personal and spiritual life; his relationship with the Lord; his growth in faith; his background and preparation for ministry; his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking it; and his understanding of this office with respect to the theory and practice of preaching and public worship, of pastoral work among the congregation, and of evangelism and missions (at least 25 minutes).

- b. Knowledge of Scripture: the applicant's doctrine of Scripture; his understanding of canonicity and hermeneutics; and primarily his familiarity with the contents of the various books of the Bible (15-20 minutes).
- c. Biblical Exegesis: the applicant's ability to work with the original languages and to exegete the assigned Old Testament and New Testament passages (15-20 minutes).
- d. Knowledge of the Creeds and Confessions: the applicant's knowledge of the history and content of the creeds and confessions, and his willingness to subscribe to them by signing the form of subscription (15-20 minutes).
- e. Reformed doctrine: the applicant's knowledge of the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology (20-30 minutes).
- f. Church Polity: the applicant's knowledge of the history and principles of Reformed Church Polity and of the Church Order (10-15 minutes).
- g. Church History: the applicant's knowledge of church history in terms of major persons, heresies, and developments, with special emphasis on the Reformation and the history of the Reformed churches (15-20 minutes).
- h. Ethics: the applicant's knowledge of the meaning and function of the Decalogue, including its relation both to Christian motivation and character and to contemporary moral problems (10-15 minutes).

Members of classis will be given sufficient time ask questions after each area of examination. After a maximum of ten minutes for each area, classis will vote to proceed to the next section. This period of questioning by classis may be extended by a majority vote.

Classis may decide not to sustain the applicant for the sake of a subsequent classis re-examining him in specified areas.

An applicant who does not sustain his examination may be reexamined by a subsequent classis in all or specific areas of the above examination.

- 8. Classis shall declare that the applicant has sustained the examination for ministers, and is therefore eligible to be admitted as minister of his congregation in the federation, upon:
 - a. the affirmative vote of classis,
 - b. the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and
 - c. the applicant's promise to sign the Form of Subscription.

Credential Form

CLASSICAL CREDENTIAL

The Consistory of _____ (*church*) at _____ (*place*)
has on _____ (*date*) delegated the following brothers:

Delegates	Alternate delegates (in order)
	1
	2

to the Classis _____ (*region*) which is to be held on
_____ (*date*) at _____ (*place*).

These brothers have been authorized to deliberate and decide upon all matters that have been legitimately brought to this Classis. They are to do this in total submission to the Word of God, in faithful adherence to the Confessions of the Church, and with loyal observance of the adopted Church Order.

The Consistory with the Deacons, on their part, promise to abide by all decisions which have been taken in accordance with the above conditions.

Wishing your assembly the wisdom from above through the guidance of the Holy Spirit,

With fraternal greetings,

For the Consistory

Chairman: _____

Clerk: _____

Credential Form

REGIONAL SYNOD CREDENTIAL

The Classis _____ (region) of the _____
 (federation) held _____ (date) has delegated the following brothers:
 to the Regional Synod _____ (region) which is to be held on

Delegates		Alternate delegates (in order)	
Ministers	Elders	Ministers	Elders
		1	1
		2	2
		3	3
		4	4

_____ (date) at _____ (place),
 in accordance with Article 25e of the Church Order.

These brothers have been authorized to deliberate and decide upon all matters that have been legitimately brought to this Regional Synod. They are to do this in total submission to the Word of God, in faithful adherence to the Confessions of the Church, and with loyal observance of the adopted Church Order.

Wishing your assembly the wisdom from above through the guidance of the Holy Spirit,

With fraternal greetings,

For the Classis on _____ (date)

Chairman: _____

Clerk: _____

Credential Form

GENERAL SYNOD CREDENTIAL

The Classis _____ (region) of the _____
(federation) held _____ (date) at _____ (place)

has delegated the following brothers:

Delegates		Alternate delegates (in order)	
Ministers	Elders	Ministers	Elders
		1	1
		2	2

to the General Synod which is to be held on _____ (date)
at _____ (place), in accordance with Article
25e of the Church Order.

These brothers have been authorized to deliberate and decide upon all matters that have been legitimately brought to this General Synod. They are to do this in total submission to the Word of God, in faithful adherence to the Confessions of the Church, and with loyal observance of the adopted Church Order.

Wishing your assembly the wisdom from above through the guidance of the Holy Spirit,

With fraternal greetings,

For the Classis on _____ (date)

Chairman: _____

Clerk: _____

PJCO - 2007**PJCO - 2010**

Note to the Reader:

In this two-column document you find the changes that the Church Order Committees made since Synod 2007. In the left hand column there are two types of strikeout: regular and raised.

A regular strikeout will have an equivalent change recorded in the right hand column marked by thick underlining.

A raised strikeout indicates that these words have been deleted from the PJCO.

The Proposed Joint Church Order
(August 2006)

Introduction

Biblical and Confessional Basis

We Reformed believers maintain that the standard for personal, public, and ecclesiastical life is God's Word, the inspired, infallible, and inerrant book of Holy Scripture. As a federation of churches we declare our complete subjection and obedience to that Word of God. We also declare that we are confessional churches, in that we believe and are fully persuaded that the Three Forms of Unity, the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort, summarize and do fully agree with the Word of God. Therefore, we fully agree with these Reformed Confessions.

Both the Word of God and these Reformed Confessions demand that in our ecclesiastical structure and rule we openly acknowledge Jesus Christ to be the supreme and only Head of the church. Christ exercises His headship in the churches by His Word and Spirit through the ordained offices, for the sake of purity of doctrine, holiness of life, and order in the churches. The churches of our federation, although distinct, willingly display their unity and accountability, both to each other and especially to Christ, by means of our common Confessions and this Church Order. Congregations manifest this unity when their delegates meet together in the broader assemblies.

Historical Background

Our Church Order has its roots in the continental European background of the Protestant Reformation. The Reformed churches desired to be faithful to God's Word in practice and life as well as in doctrine. Therefore, as early as the mid-sixteenth century, and even in the midst of persecution, the Reformed churches set down the foundation of the Church Order at various ecclesiastical assemblies beginning in 1563, including those in Wezel, the

The Proposed Joint Church Order
(Synod 2010)

Introduction

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Both the Word of God and these Reformed Confessions demand that in our ecclesiastical structure and rule we openly acknowledge Jesus Christ to be the supreme and only Head of the church. Christ exercises His headship in the churches by His Word and Spirit through the ordained offices, for the sake of purity of doctrine, holiness of life, the spread of the gospel, and order in the churches (1 Corinthians 14:40). The churches of our federation, although distinct, willingly display their unity and accountability, both to each other and especially to Christ, by means of our common Confessions and this Church Order. Congregations manifest this unity when their delegates meet together in the broader assemblies.

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Netherlands (1568), and in Emden, Germany (1571). For the most part, the decisions of the assemblies in this period leaned heavily on the church orders already in place and used by the Reformed churches in France and Geneva. The Church Order adopted at Emden was revised at the Synods of Dordrecht (1574 and 1578), Middelburg (1581), and The Hague (1586), before being adopted by the well-known Synod of Dordrecht (1618-1619). Our Church Order follows the principles and structure of the Church Order of Dordrecht.

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Foundational Principles

Foundational Statements

The following list of foundational principles, though not exhaustive, provides a clear biblical basis for and source of our Church Order.

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1. The church is the possession of Christ, who is the Mediator of the New Covenant.
Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:25-27
2. As Mediator of the New Covenant, Christ is the Head of the church.
Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:23-24; Colossians 1:18
3. Because the church is Christ's possession and He is its Head, the principles governing the church are determined not by human preference, but by biblical teaching.
Matthew 28:18-20; Colossians 1:18; II Timothy 3:16-17
4. The catholic or universal church possesses a spiritual unity in Christ and in the Holy Scriptures.
Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 2:20; I Timothy 3:15; II John 9
5. In its subjection to its heavenly Head, the universal church is governed by Christ from heaven by means of His Word and Spirit with the keys of the kingdom, which He has given to the local church for that purpose. Therefore, no church may lord it over another church.
Matthew 16:19; 23:8; John 20:22-23; Acts 14:23; 20:28-32
6. The offices of minister, elder, and deacon are local in authority and function. The Lord gave no permanent universal, national, or regional offices to His church by which the churches are to be governed. Therefore, no office-bearer may lord it over another office-bearer,
Acts 14:23; 16:4; 20:17, 28; Ephesians 4:11-16; Titus 1:5

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Acts 14:23; 16:4; 20:17, 28; Ephesians 4:11-16; Titus 1:5

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7. In order to manifest our spiritual unity, churches should seek contact with other faithful, confessionally Reformed churches for their mutual edification and as an effective witness to the world.
John 17:21-23; Ephesians 4:1-6
8. The exercise of a federative relationship is possible only on the basis of unity in faith and in confession.
I Corinthians 10:14-22; Galatians 1:6-9; Ephesians 4:16-17
9. Although churches exist in certain circumstances without formal federative relationships, the well-being of the church requires that such relationships be entered wherever possible. Entering into or remaining in such relationships should be voluntary; there is however a spiritual obligation to seek and maintain the federative unity of the churches by formal bonds of fellowship and cooperation.
Acts 11:22, 27-30; 15:22-35; Romans 15:25-27; I Corinthians 16:1-3; Colossians 4:16; I Thessalonians 4:9-10; Revelation 1:11, 20
10. Member churches meet together in broader assemblies to manifest ecclesiastical unity, to guard against human imperfections, and to benefit from the wisdom of many counselors. The decisions of such assemblies are settled and binding among the churches unless they are contrary to Scripture, the Reformed Confessions, or the adopted Church Order.
Proverbs 11:14; Acts 15:1-35; I Corinthians 13:9-10; II Timothy 3:16-17
11. The church is mandated to exercise its ministry of reconciliation by proclaiming the gospel to the ends of the earth and by administering the sacraments in the congregation.
Matthew 26:26-30; Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; Acts 2:38-39; I Corinthians 11:17-34; II Corinthians 5:18-21
12. Christ cares for and governs His church through the office-bearers, namely, ministers, elders, and deacons, whom He chooses through the congregation.
Acts 1:23-26; 6:2-3; 14:23; I Timothy 3:1, 8; 5:17
13. The Scriptures require that ministers, elders, and deacons be properly qualified for the suitable discharge of their respective offices.
I Timothy 3:2-9; 4:16; II Timothy 2:14-16; 3:14; 4:1-5

PJCO - 2010

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8. The exercise of a federative relationship is possible only on the basis of unity in faith and in confession.
I Corinthians 10:14-22; Galatians 1:6-9; Ephesians 4:16-17
9. Although churches exist in certain circumstances without formal federative relationships, the well-being of the church requires that such relationships be entered wherever possible. Entering into or remaining in such relationships should be voluntary; there is however a spiritual obligation to seek and maintain the federative unity of the churches by formal bonds of fellowship and cooperation.
Acts 11:22, 27-30; 15:22-35; Romans 15:25-27; I Corinthians 16:1-3; Colossians 4:16; I Thessalonians 4:9-10; Revelation 1:11, 20
10. Member churches meet together in broader assemblies to manifest ecclesiastical unity, to guard against human imperfections, and to benefit from the wisdom of many counselors. The decisions of such assemblies are settled and binding among the churches unless they are contrary to Scripture, the Reformed Confessions, or the adopted Church Order.
Proverbs 11:14; Acts 15:1-35; I Corinthians 13:9-10; II Timothy 3:16-17
11. The church is mandated to exercise its ministry of reconciliation by proclaiming the gospel to the ends of the earth and by administering the sacraments in the congregation.
Matthew 26:26-30; Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; Acts 2:38-39; I Corinthians 11:17-34; II Corinthians 5:18-21
12. Christ cares for and governs His church through the office-bearers, namely, ministers, elders, and deacons, whom He chooses through the congregation.
Acts 1:23-26; 6:2-3; 14:23; I Timothy 3:1, 8; 5:17
13. The Scriptures require that ministers, elders, and deacons be properly qualified for the suitable discharge of their respective offices.
I Timothy 3:2-9; 4:16; II Timothy 2:14-16; 3:14; 4:1-5

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14. Being the chosen and redeemed people of God, the church, under the supervision of the consistory, is called to worship Him in reverence and awe according to the scriptural principles governing worship.
Leviticus 10:1-3; Deuteronomy 12:29-32; Psalm 95:1-2, 6; Psalm 100:4; John 4:24; Hebrews 12:28-29; I Peter 2:9
15. Since the church is the pillar and ground of the truth, it is called through its teaching ministry to build up the people of God in faith.
Deuteronomy 11:19; Ephesians 4:11-16; I Timothy 4:6; II Timothy 2:2; 3:16-17
16. The church's evangelistic and missionary calling consists of preaching and teaching the Word of God to the unconverted at home and abroad with the goal of establishing new churches or expanding existing churches. This calling is fulfilled by ministers of the Word ordained to be missionaries, and by equipping the congregation to be the light of the world.
Matthew 5:14-16; Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; Ephesians 4:11-13; Philippians 2:14-16; I Peter 2:9-12; I Peter 3:15-16
17. Christian discipline, arising from God's love for His people, is exercised in the church to correct and strengthen the people of God, to maintain the unity and the purity of the church of Christ, and thereby to bring honor and glory to God's name.
I Timothy 5:20; Titus 1:13; Hebrews 12:7-11
18. The exercise of Christian discipline is first of all a personal duty of every church member, but when official discipline by the church, to whom the keys of the kingdom are entrusted, becomes necessary, it must be exercised by the consistory of the church.
Matthew 18:15-20; John 20:22-23; Acts 20:28; I Corinthians 5:13; I Peter 5:1-3

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Article 1.

The Purpose and Divisions of the Church Order
For maintaining proper ecclesiastical order [†]
Corinthians 14:40, the Church Order must regulate the offices; the assemblies; the supervision of doctrine, worship, sacraments, and ceremonies; and the discipline. Therefore we order our ecclesiastical relations and activities under the following divisions:

Article 1

The Purpose and Divisions of the Church Order
For maintaining proper ecclesiastical order, the Church Order must regulate the offices; the assemblies; the supervision of doctrine, worship, sacraments, and ceremonies; and the discipline. Therefore we order our ecclesiastical relations and activities under the following divisions:
I. Offices (Articles 2-20)

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- I. Offices (Articles 2-19)
- II. Assemblies (Articles 20-32)
- III. Worship, Sacraments, and Ceremonies (Articles 33-46)
- IV. Discipline (Articles 47-58)

I. OFFICES

Article 2.**The Three Offices**

~~Christ has instituted three distinct offices in the church:~~ the minister of the Word, the elder, and the deacon. No one shall exercise an office without having been lawfully called to it with the cooperation of the congregation.

Article 3.**The Duties of the Minister**

The duties belonging to the office of minister of the Word consist of continuing in prayer and in the ministry of the Word, administering the sacraments, catechizing the youth, watching over his fellow office-bearer, and finally, together with the elders shepherding the congregation, exercising church discipline, and ensuring that everything is done decently and in good order.

Article 4.**Preparation for the Ministry**

- a. Theological Education: Competent men shall be encouraged to study for the ministry of the Word. A man aspiring to the ministry must be a member of a church in the federation and must evidence genuine godliness to his consistory, who shall ensure that he receives a thoroughly reformed theological education. ~~The council of his church shall see to it that his financial needs are met, if necessary with the assistance of the churches of classis.~~
- b. Licensure: A man aspiring to the ministry shall seek licensure to exhort in the churches. Such licensure shall be granted only after the student has completed at least one year of theological education, and has sustained a ~~licensure examination conducted by his classis as required in Appendix 4.~~ Classis shall give license only to one who is preparing for the ministry, and only for the duration of his

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- II. Assemblies (Articles 21-33)
- III. Worship, Sacraments, and Ceremonies (Articles 34-48)
- IV. Discipline (Articles 49-59)

I. OFFICES

Article 2**The Three Offices**

The offices of the church are the minister of the Word, the elder, and the deacon. No one shall exercise an office without having been lawfully called to it with the cooperation of the congregation and without subscribing to the Three Forms of Unity.

Article 3**The Duties of the Minister**

The duties belonging to the office of minister of the Word consist of continuing in prayer and in the ministry of the Word, administering the sacraments, visiting the members in their homes, comforting the sick with the Word of God, catechizing and instructing the youth in the doctrines of Scripture, watching over his fellow office-bearers, and finally, together with the elders shepherding the congregation, exercising church discipline, and ensuring that everything is done decently and in good order.

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- A. Theological Education
Competent men shall be encouraged to study for the ministry of the Word. A man aspiring to the ministry must be a member of a church in the federation and must evidence genuine godliness to his consistory, who shall ensure that he receives a thoroughly reformed theological education. This consistory with the deacons shall also help him ensure that his financial needs are met, if necessary with the assistance of the churches of classis.
The JCO considers this article incomplete; see our report to Synods
- B. Licensure
A man aspiring to the ministry shall seek licensure to exhort in the churches. Such licensure shall be granted only after the student has completed at least one year of theological education, and has sustained the prescribed Licensure Examination as conducted by his classis. Classis shall give license only to one who is preparing for the ministry, and only for the duration

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<p>theological training. All the work of the licentiate shall be conducted under consistorial supervision.</p> <p>c. <u>Candidacy</u>: At the conclusion of his training a student shall ask his consistory to request classis to conduct a candidacy examination, as required in Appendix 2. Upon sustaining this examination, the classis, with the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod, shall declare him eligible for call among the churches of the federation.</p> <p>d. <u>Exceptional Circumstances</u>: Only under circumstances of general tribulation or severe persecution which make the completion of regular theological education impossible, may a consistory request that an exceptionally gifted brother be presented to classis for a suitable candidacy examination (see Appendix 2). In such a situation, his consistory and the classis should also have assurance of his godliness, humility, modesty, understanding, wisdom, discretion, and public speaking ability.</p> <p>Article 5. Calling a Candidate</p> <p>The lawful calling to the office of minister of those who have not previously been in that office shall consist of:</p> <p>First, the election by the council of a man who has been declared a candidate according to the regulations prescribed in Appendix 2, after having prayed and having received the advice of the congregation and of the counselor appointed by classis.</p> <p>Second, the examination necessary for ordination, which shall be conducted to the satisfaction of the classis to which the calling church belongs, in accordance with the regulations adopted by the federation as set forth in Appendix 3.</p> <p>Third, the public ordination before the congregation ^{which} shall take place with proper instructions, admonitions, prayers, ^{and subscription to the Three Forms of Unity by signing the Form of Subscription,} followed by the laying on of hands by the ministers ^{who are present and by the elders of the congregation,}, with the use of the synodically approved liturgical form.</p> <p>Article 6. Calling an Ordained Minister Within the Federation</p> <p>A minister already ordained within the federation who is called to another congregation shall be called in the lawful manner by the council.</p>	<p>of his theological training. <u>All his work as a licentiate shall be conducted under the supervision of the consistory where the work is performed.</u></p> <p>C. <u>Candidacy</u></p> <p>At the conclusion of his training a student shall ask his consistory to request classis to conduct <u>the prescribed Candidacy Examination.</u> Upon sustaining this examination, the classis, with the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod, shall declare him eligible for call among the churches of the federation.</p> <p>D. <u>Exceptional Circumstances</u></p> <p>Only under circumstances of general tribulation or severe persecution which make the completion of regular theological education impossible, may a consistory request that an exceptionally gifted brother be presented to classis for <u>the prescribed Candidacy Examination.</u> In such a situation, his consistory and the classis should also have assurance of his godliness, humility, modesty, understanding, wisdom, discretion, and public speaking ability.</p> <p>Article 5 Calling a Candidate</p> <p>The lawful calling to the office of minister of those who have not previously been in that office shall consist of:</p> <p>First, the election by the <u>consistory with the deacons</u> of a man who has been declared a candidate <u>after sustaining the prescribed Candidacy Examination,</u> after having prayed and having received the advice of the congregation and of the counselor appointed by classis.</p> <p>Second, <u>the prescribed Ordination Examination</u> which shall be conducted to the satisfaction of the classis to which the calling church belongs.</p> <p>Third, the public ordination before the congregation shall take place with proper instructions, admonitions, and prayers, followed by the laying on of hands by the minister(s), with the use of the synodically approved liturgical form.</p> <p>Article 6 Calling a Minister Within the Federation</p> <p><u>A minister within the federation shall be called in a lawful manner by the consistory with the deacons. Any minister receiving a call shall consult with his current consistory with the deacons regarding that call. He may accept the call only with their consent.</u></p>
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The classis shall ensure the good order of the calling process, ~~including the issuance of written ecclesiastical testimonies of his doctrine and life, of his ministerial service, and of his honorable release from the church and classis he last served.~~

Upon receipt of these documents, the church shall install him with the use of the synodically approved liturgical form and he shall subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity by signing the Form of Subscription.

The approval of classis shall be required for a second call to the same minister regarding the same vacancy.

Article 7.**An Ordained Minister without a Congregation Entering the Federation**

~~A minister who has been ordained in a church outside the federation shall be admitted to serve a church within the federation only after an adequate period of consistorial supervision and only after sustaining an examination conducted to the satisfaction of classis, according to the regulations adopted by the federation as set forth in Appendix 4, whereupon he may be declared eligible for call.~~

Article 8.**Bound to a Particular Church**

No one shall serve in the ministry of the Word unless he is bound to a particular church, either as a minister of the congregation or as one charged with some other ministerial task. All ministers shall remain subject to the Church Order.

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The classis shall ensure the good order of the calling process by verifying the issuance of written ecclesiastical testimonies from:

- a. the consistory of the church from which he is leaving concerning his doctrine and life, his ministerial service, and his honorable release from his service in that church;
- b. the classis within which he last served concerning his honorable release from that classis;
- c. the consistory of the church which he is joining concerning proper announcements made to the congregation for its approbation of the call.

Upon verification of these documents, the church shall install him with the use of the synodically approved liturgical form and he shall subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity by signing the Form of Subscription.

The advice of classis shall be required for a second call to the same minister regarding the same vacancy.

Article 7**Calling a Minister from Outside the Federation**

A minister from a church with whom the federation maintains ecclesiastical fellowship shall be admitted to serve a church within the federation, and only after sustaining the examination as prescribed in the relevant section of the Ecclesiastical Examination for ministers from outside the federation, whereupon he may be declared eligible for call.

A minister from a church with whom the federation does not maintain ecclesiastical fellowship shall be admitted to serve a church within the federation only after an adequate period of consistorial supervision and only after becoming a member of a congregation in the federation, only after an adequate period of consistorial supervision determined by his consistory, and only after sustaining the examination as prescribed in the relevant section of the Ecclesiastical Examination for ministers from outside the federation, whereupon he may be declared eligible for call.

Article 8**Bound to a Particular Church**

No one shall serve in the ministry of the Word unless he is bound to a particular church, either as a minister of the congregation or as one charged with some other ministerial task, such as chaplains and professors of theology. Each minister shall remain bound to the Church Order.

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Article 9.

Bound for Life

A minister of the Word once lawfully called is bound to the service of the churches for life and shall at all times remain subject to the call of the congregation. He may leave this vocation only for weighty reasons, upon the approval of his ~~council~~ and with the approval of classis and the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod.

Article 10.

Support and Emeritation of Ministers

Each church shall provide honorably for ~~the~~ minister and his family while he is serving that church, and shall contribute toward the retirement and disability needs of its minister. In the event of the minister's death, adequate provision shall be made for the support of his dependent wife and children.

A minister who is unable to perform the duties of his office due to age, sickness, or other personal disabilities, shall retain the honor and title of Minister of the Word, and shall retain his official bond with the church he last served, which shall provide honorably for his support.

The emeritation of a minister shall take place with the approval of the ~~council~~, and with the concurring advice of classis and of the deputies of regional synod.

Article 11.

Temporary Release

If because of illness or other substantial reasons, a minister requests a temporary release from his service to the congregation, he shall receive the same only with the approval of the ~~council~~. If the duration of the release is greater than ~~four months~~, the ~~council~~ shall obtain the concurring advice of classis. He shall at all times remain subject to the call of the congregation.

Article 12.

Exceptional Release of a Minister

When for weighty reasons and exceptional circumstances a pastoral relationship has been irreconcilably broken, a ~~council~~ may release its minister from his call only under all of the following conditions:

- a. This release shall not occur for delinquency in doctrine or life, which would warrant church discipline;
- b. This release shall occur only when

Article 9

Bound for Life

A minister of the Word once lawfully called is bound to the service of the churches for life and shall at all times remain subject to the call of the congregation. He may leave this vocation only for weighty reasons, upon the approval of his consistory with the deacons and with the approval of classis and the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod.

Article 10

Support and Emeritation of Ministers

Each church shall provide honorably for its minister and his family while he is serving that church, and shall contribute toward the retirement and disability needs of its minister. In the event of the minister's death, adequate provision shall be made for the support of his dependent wife and children.

A minister who is unable to perform the duties of his office due to age, sickness, or other personal disabilities, shall retain the honor and title of Minister of the Word, and shall retain his official bond with the church he last served, which shall provide honorably for his support, with the assistance of the churches if necessary.

The emeritation of a minister shall take place with the approval of the consistory with the deacons, and with the concurring advice of classis and of the deputies of regional synod.

Article 11

Temporary Release

If because of illness or other substantial reasons, a minister requests a temporary release from his service to the congregation, he shall receive the same only with the approval of the consistory with the deacons. If the duration of the release is greater than one year, the consistory shall obtain the concurring advice of classis. He shall at all times remain subject to the call of the congregation.

Article 12

Exceptional Release of a Minister

When for weighty reasons and exceptional circumstances a pastoral relationship has been irreconcilably broken, a consistory with the deacons may release its minister from his call only under all of the following conditions:

- a. This release shall not occur for delinquency in doctrine or life, which would warrant church discipline;
- b. This release shall occur only when

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attempted reconciliation, with the involvement of classis, has been unsuccessful, resulting in an intolerable situation;

- c. This release shall occur only with the approval of classis and the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod;
- d. This release shall require the approval by classis of the ~~council's~~ provision for the adequate congregational support of the minister and his family for up to two years.

The ~~council~~ from whose service he has been released shall announce his eligibility for call. This eligibility shall be valid for ~~no more than~~ two years, whereafter he shall be honorably discharged from office.

Article 13.
Nomination and Election of Elders and Deacons

~~The council shall provide adequate preparation of elders and deacons by means of instruction and training regarding the duties of each office. The procedure for the lawful calling of elders and deacons shall consist of the following:~~

First, the council shall nominate only male communicant members who meet the biblical requirements for office, and who indicate their ~~agreement with the~~ Form of Subscription. Prior to nominating, the ~~council may invite the congregation to direct attention to suitable men. Ordinarily, the number of nominees shall be twice the number of vacancies.~~

Second, after public prayer, elders and deacons shall be elected by the congregation according to the regulations adopted for that purpose.

Third, the ~~council~~ shall appoint the elders and deacons, and shall announce their names to the congregation ~~two weeks~~ prior to entering office, in order that the congregation may have opportunity to bring lawful objections to the attention of the consistory.

Article 14.
The Term and Ordination of Elders and Deacons

~~Before entering upon their work,~~ elders and deacons, having been elected in accordance with local regulations to a ~~term specified~~ ^{by the consistory} and having been appointed by the ~~council~~, ^{shall subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity by signing the Form of Subscription, and} shall be ordained with the use of the synodically approved liturgical form.

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attempted reconciliation, with the involvement of classis, has been unsuccessful, resulting in an intolerable situation;

- c. This release shall occur only with the approval of classis and the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod;
- d. This release requires the approval by classis of the provision for the adequate congregational support of the minister and his family for up to two years.

The church from whose service he has been released shall announce his eligibility for call. This eligibility shall be valid for two years, whereafter he shall be honorably discharged from office. Upon the request of the consistory that released the minister, classis may extend his eligibility for call for no more than two additional years.

Article 13
The Nomination and Election of Elders and Deacons

The consistory with the deacons shall provide for the instruction and training of elders and deacons. The procedure for the lawful calling of elders and deacons shall consist of the following:

First, the consistory with the deacons shall nominate only male communicant members who meet the biblical requirements for office, and who indicate their willingness to sign the Form of Subscription. Prior to nominating, the congregation may be invited to direct attention to suitable men. Ordinarily, the number of nominees shall be twice the number of vacancies.

Second, after announcing the names of the nominees to the congregation on two Sundays, and with public prayer, elders and deacons shall be elected by the congregation according to the local regulations adopted for that purpose.

Third, the consistory with the deacons shall appoint the elders and deacons, and shall announce their names to the congregation on the two Sundays prior to entering office, in order that the congregation may have opportunity to bring lawful objections to the attention of the consistory.

Article 14
The Term and Ordination of Elders and Deacons

Elders and deacons, having been elected in accordance with local regulations to a specified term, and having been appointed by the consistory with the deacons, shall be ordained with the use of the synodically approved liturgical form.

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Article 15.

Subscription to the Confessions

Each office-bearer shall subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity by signing the Form of Subscription. Anyone refusing to subscribe shall not be ordained or installed in office. Anyone in office refusing to subscribe shall, because of that very fact, be immediately suspended from office by the consistory, and if he persists in his refusal, shall be deposed from office.

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Each office-bearer shall subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity by signing the Form of Subscription. Anyone refusing to subscribe shall not be ordained or installed in office. Anyone in office refusing to subscribe shall, because of that very fact, be immediately suspended from office by the consistory, and if he persists in his refusal, shall be deposed from office.

Article 16.

Parity Among Office-bearers

Among the office-bearers, parity shall be maintained with respect to the duties of their respective offices and in other matters as far as possible, according to the judgment of the consistory and, if necessary, of classis.

Article 16

Parity Among Office-bearers

Among the office-bearers, parity shall be maintained with respect to the duties of their respective offices and in other matters as far as possible, according to the judgment of the consistory and, if necessary, of classis.

Article 17.

The Duties of Elders

The duties belonging to the office of elder consist of shepherding and ruling the church of Christ according to the principles taught in Scripture, in order that purity of doctrine and holiness of life may be practiced. ~~They shall ensure that their fellow-elders, the minister(s), and the deacons faithfully discharge their offices.~~ They are to maintain the purity of the Word and Sacraments, persist in praying for the congregation, assist in catechizing the youth in the congregation, ~~and promote confessionally Reformed schooling at all levels.~~ Moreover, they shall visit the members of the congregation according to need, engage in family visiting, preserve and promote concord and unity among the members and between the congregation and its office-bearers, exercise discipline in the congregation, promote the work of evangelism and missions, and ensure that everything is done decently and in good order.

Article 17

The Duties of Elders

The duties belonging to the office of elder consist of shepherding and ruling the church of Christ according to the principles taught in Scripture, in order that purity of doctrine and holiness of life may be practiced. The elders, together with the minister, shall watch over their fellow office-bearers, and ensure that they faithfully discharge their offices. They are to maintain the purity of the Word and Sacraments, persist in praying for the congregation, assist in catechizing the youth in the congregation, and promote schooling at all levels that is in harmony with the Word of God as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity. Moreover, they shall visit the members of the congregation according to need, engage in annual home visits, preserve and promote concord and unity among the members and between the congregation and its office-bearers, exercise discipline in the congregation, promote the work of evangelism and missions, and ensure that everything is done decently and in good order.

Article 18.

Protecting Doctrinal Purity

To protect the congregation from false teachings and errors which endanger the purity of its doctrine and conduct, ministers and elders shall use the means of instruction, refutation, warning, and admonition, in the ministry of the Word, in Christian teaching, and in family visiting.

Article 18

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To protect the congregation from false teachings and errors which endanger the purity of its doctrine and conduct, ministers and elders shall use the means of instruction, refutation, warning, and admonition, in the ministry of the Word, in Christian teaching, and in family visiting.

Article 19.

The Duties of Deacons

The duties belonging to the office of deacon

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The Duties of Deacons

The duties belonging to the office of deacon

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consist of performing and supervising works of Christian mercy in the congregation. The deacons shall do this by acquainting themselves with congregational needs, exhorting members of the congregation to show mercy, gathering and managing the offerings of God's people in Christ's name, distributing these offerings according to need, continuing in prayer, and encouraging and comforting with the Word of God those who receive the gifts of Christ's mercy. Needs of those outside the congregation, especially of other believers, should also be considered.

The deacons shall ordinarily meet monthly to transact the business pertaining to their office, and they shall render a ~~monthly~~ account of their work to the consistory. The deacons may invite the minister to visit their meetings in order to acquaint him with their work and request his advice.

**Article 20.
The Civil Authorities**

As the task of civil government includes protecting the freedom of the Christian church, so it is the responsibility of the church to respect the government as instituted by God. In order that the church of Christ may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness, and that the witness of the gospel may be protected and advanced, the office-bearers must lead the congregation by their admonition and example. They shall ensure that prayers for the government are regularly offered and that members render due honor and lawful obedience to the civil authorities, thereby living as good citizens under Christ and promoting the true welfare of the land in which they live.

II. ASSEMBLIES

**Article 21.
Ecclesiastical Assemblies**

- a. Identification: Among the churches of the federation, four assemblies shall be recognized: the consistory, the classis, the regional synod, and the general synod. The terms classis and synod designate either ecclesiastical assemblies or ecclesiastical regions. As assemblies, classes and synods are deliberative in nature, and exist only for the duration of their meetings.
- b. Convening: Regulations for broader assemblies shall delineate the function of the convening church and/or of the designated clerk serving the convening churches.
- c. Delegation: Those delegated to the broader assemblies shall be issued proper credentials

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II. ASSEMBLIES

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Ecclesiastical Assemblies**

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- B. Convening
Regulations for broader assemblies shall delineate the function of the convening church and/or of the designated clerk serving the convening churches.
- C. Delegation
Those delegated to the broader assemblies

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<p>by their delegating body ^{as required in Appendix X}, thereby receiving authorization to deliberate and decide upon all the matters properly placed before them. ^{These assemblies shall require each delegate to indicate his agreement with the Form of Subscription.} A delegate shall not vote on any matter in which he himself or his church is particularly involved.</p> <p>d. <u>Jurisdiction</u>: In all assemblies only ecclesiastical matters shall be transacted, and only in an ecclesiastical manner. Matters once decided on may not be proposed again unless they are substantiated by new grounds. The broader assemblies shall exercise jurisdiction exclusively relating to matters properly before them. Only those matters shall be considered in the broader assemblies that could not be settled in the narrower assemblies, or that pertain to the churches in common. All such matters must originate with a consistory and must first be considered by a classis and a regional synod before they may be considered by a general synod.</p> <p>e. <u>Decisions</u>: All decisions of ecclesiastical assemblies shall be received with respect and shall be considered settled and binding, unless proven to be in conflict with Scripture, the Reformed Confessions, or the Church Order.</p> <p>f. <u>Proceedings</u>: The proceedings of all assemblies shall begin and end with prayer. In every assembly there shall be a chairman, assisted by a vice-chairman. It is the chairman's duty to state and explain clearly the business to be transacted, to ensure that the stipulations of the Church Order are followed, and to ensure that every member observes proper order and decorum.</p> <p>g. <u>Records</u>: In every assembly a clerk shall keep and distribute an accurate record of the proceedings. In all broader assemblies these functions shall cease when the assembly adjourns.</p> <p>h. <u>Censure</u>: ^{At the close of broader assemblies;} admonition shall be given to those who demonstrated unworthy behavior, either during the meeting or regarding a decision of a narrower assembly.</p> <p>i. <u>Archives</u>: Each ecclesiastical assembly shall ensure the proper preservation of its archives.</p> <p>j. <u>Press Release</u>: Each broader assembly shall approve for publication a press release regarding its proceedings.</p> <p>Article 22. The Consistory In each church there shall be a consistory</p>	<p>shall be issued proper credentials by their delegating body, thereby receiving authorization to deliberate and decide upon all the matters properly placed before them. A delegate shall not vote on any matter in which he himself or his church is particularly involved.</p> <p>D. <u>Jurisdiction</u> In all assemblies only ecclesiastical matters shall be transacted, and only in an ecclesiastical manner. Matters once decided on may not be proposed again unless they are substantiated by new grounds. The broader assemblies shall exercise jurisdiction exclusively relating to matters properly before them. Only those matters shall be considered in the broader assemblies that could not be settled in the narrower assemblies, or that pertain to the churches in common. <u>All matters that pertain to the churches in common must originate with a consistory and must receive the support of the narrower assembly before being considered by the broader assembly.</u></p> <p>E. <u>Decisions</u> All decisions of ecclesiastical assemblies shall be received with respect and shall be considered settled and binding, unless proven to be in conflict with Scripture, the <u>Three Forms of Unity</u>, or the Church Order.</p> <p>F. <u>Proceedings</u> The proceedings of all assemblies shall begin and end with prayer. In every assembly there shall be a chairman, a vice-chairman, and a clerk. It is the chairman's duty to state and explain clearly the business to be transacted, to ensure that the stipulations of the Church Order are followed, and to ensure that every member observes proper order and decorum. It is the vice-chairman's duty to assist the chairman. <u>It is the clerk's duty to keep an accurate record of the proceedings for approval by the assembly. These assembly duties shall cease when the assembly itself ceases.</u></p> <p>G. <u>Censure</u> Admonition shall be given to those who demonstrate unworthy behavior, either during the meeting or regarding a decision of a narrower assembly.</p> <p>H. <u>Archives</u> Each ecclesiastical assembly shall ensure the proper preservation of its archives.</p> <p>I. <u>Press Release</u> Each broader assembly shall approve for publication a press release regarding its proceedings.</p> <p>Article 22 The Consistory In each church there shall be a consistory</p>
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composed of the minister(s) of the Word and the elders, which shall ordinarily meet at least once a month. The consistory is the only assembly which exercises direct authority within the congregation, since the consistory receives its authority directly from Christ. The term council designates not an assembly of the church, but a meeting of the elders and minister(s) with the deacons under the authority of the consistory, at which matters are dealt with as stipulated by the Church Order or as assigned by the consistory.

**Article 23.
Small Number of Office-bearers**

Where the number of elders is small, they may perform their duties with the advice of the deacons. This shall invariably be done where the number of elders is fewer than three. Where the number of deacons is small, they may perform their duties with the advice of the elders. This shall invariably be done where the number of deacons is fewer than three.

**Article 24.
Organizing a New Congregation**

A congregation shall be organized under its first consistory only under the supervision of the neighboring consistory and with the concurring advice of the classis.

**Article 25.
The Classis**

- a. **Composition:** A classis shall consist of neighboring churches whose consistories shall delegate two members, ordinarily a minister and an elder, with proper credentials to meet at a time and place determined at the previous classis. Ordinarily a classis shall consist of between eight and twelve churches.
- b. **Frequency:** A classis shall be held every four months, unless the convening church, in consultation with the neighboring church, concludes that no matters have been sent in by the churches that would warrant the convening of a classis. Cancellation of a classis shall not be permitted to occur twice in succession.
- c. **Convening:** The churches shall take turns convening classis and providing a chairman from their delegation. The same person shall not function as chairman twice in succession. Each classis shall appoint a convening church and determine the time and place of the next classis.
- d. **Mutual Oversight:** The classis shall inquire of each church whether consistory, council, and diaconal meetings are regularly held; the Word of God is purely preached; the sacraments are

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composed of the minister(s) of the Word and the elders, which shall ordinarily meet at least once a month. The consistory is the only assembly which exercises authority within the congregation, since the consistory receives its authority directly from Christ.

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Instituting a New Church**

A church shall be instituted with its first consistory only under the supervision of a neighboring consistory and with the concurring advice of the classis.

**Article 25
Classis**

- A. **Composition**
A classis shall consist of neighboring churches whose consistories shall delegate two members, ordinarily a minister and an elder, with proper credentials to meet at a time and place determined at the previous classis. Ordinarily a classis shall consist of between eight and twelve churches.
- B. **Frequency**
A classis shall be held every four months, unless the convening church, in consultation with the neighboring church, concludes that no matters have been sent in by the churches that would warrant the convening of a classis. Cancellation of a classis shall not be permitted to occur twice in succession.
- C. **Convening**
The churches shall take turns convening classis. The assembly shall choose one of its members to preside. The same person shall not function as chairman twice in succession. Each classis shall appoint a convening church and determine the time and place of the next classis.
- D. **Mutual Oversight**
The classis shall inquire of each church whether consistorial and diaconal meetings are regularly held; the Word of God is purely preached;

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faithfully administered; church discipline is diligently exercised; the poor are adequately cared for; and confessionally Reformed schooling is wholeheartedly promoted. The classis shall also inquire whether the consistory needs the advice or the assistance of classis for the proper government of the church, and whether the decisions of the broader assemblies are being honored.

- e. Delegation to Regional and General Synod:
The last classis before regional synod shall choose delegates to that synod. If the regional synod consists of three classes, each classis shall delegate three ministers and three elders. If the regional synod consists of four or more classes, each classis shall delegate two ministers and two elders. The second last classis before general synod shall choose delegates to that synod. Each classis shall delegate two ministers and two elders.
- f. Classis Contracta: A minimum of three churches may convene as a *classis contracta* exclusively to approbate a call, or to release a minister who has accepted a call, and to appoint a counselor for the ministerial vacancy.

**Article 26.
Church Visitors**

Every two years classis shall appoint a number of its more experienced and competent ministers or elders to visit all the churches of the classis once during that period. At each church visit at least one of the visitors shall be a minister.

These visitors shall inquire whether the office-bearers perform their duties in harmony with the Word of God, adhere to sound doctrine, observe the Church Order, and properly promote, by word and deed, the edification of the whole congregation. Moreover, they shall fraternally encourage the office-bearers to fulfill their offices faithfully, that by their advice and assistance the visitors may help direct all things unto the peace, edification, and profit of the churches. Upon the request of a consistory, they may also be called to assist in cases of special difficulty.

The church visitors shall submit a written report of their work to the next classis.

**Article 27.
Counselors**

The consistory of a church with a ministerial vacancy shall request classis to appoint the minister it specifies to serve as counselor. His task is to help the consistory follow the provisions of the

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the sacraments are faithfully administered; church discipline is diligently exercised; the poor are adequately cared for; and confessionally Reformed schooling is promoted. The classis shall also inquire whether the consistory needs the advice or the assistance of classis for the proper government of the church, and whether the decisions of the broader assemblies are being honored.

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These visitors shall inquire whether the office-bearers perform their duties in harmony with the Word of God, adhere to sound doctrine, observe the Church Order, and properly promote, by word and deed, the edification of the whole congregation. Moreover, they shall fraternally encourage the office-bearers to fulfill their offices faithfully, and they shall admonish those who have been negligent, so that by their advice and assistance the visitors may help direct all things to the peace, edification, and profit of the churches. Upon the request of a consistory, they may also be called to assist in cases of special difficulty.

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Church Order, particularly in the matter of calling a minister. Along with the council members, he also shall sign the letter of call.

Article 28.**The Regional Synod**

A regional synod, consisting of three or more classes, shall ordinarily meet once per year. If it appears necessary to convene a regional synod before the appointed time, the convening church shall determine the time and place with the advice of its classis.

The regional synod shall deal only with matters properly placed on its agenda by the churches via the classes, with lawful appeals of classical decisions, and with the reports of its deputies. It shall also determine the time and place for the next regional synod, and designate a convening church.

The chairman, vice-chairman, and clerk shall be chosen at the meeting to facilitate the work of the synod.

Article 29.**The Deputies of Regional Synod**

Each regional synod shall appoint two deputies and an alternate for each classis, who shall assist the classes in all cases provided for in the Church Order. Upon the request of a classis, they may also be called to assist in cases of special difficulty.

In cases of disagreement between the deputies, the decision of classis shall stand. In cases where the deputies cannot give concurring advice, the classis may request ~~the deputies to report the matter to regional synod for decision.~~

The regional deputies shall keep a proper record of their actions. They shall submit a written report of their actions to the regional synod and, if so required, they shall further explain those actions. The deputies shall serve until they are discharged from their duties by their regional synod.

Article 30.**The General Synod**

A general synod, consisting of delegates ~~chosen by the classes,~~ shall meet ^{at least} once every three years. If it appears necessary to convene a general synod before the appointed time, the convening church shall determine the time and place with the advice of its regional synod.

The general synod shall deal only with matters properly placed on its agenda by the churches via

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the provisions of the Church Order, particularly in the matter of calling a minister. Along with the consistory with the deacons, he also shall sign the letter of call.

Article 28**Regional Synod**

A regional synod, consisting of three or more classes, shall ordinarily meet once per year. If it appears necessary to convene a regional synod before the appointed time, the convening church shall determine the time and place with the advice of its classis.

A regional synod shall deal only with matters properly placed on its agenda by the churches by way of the classes, with lawful appeals of classical decisions, and with the reports of its deputies. It shall also determine the time and place for the next regional synod, and designate a convening church.

The chairman, vice-chairman, and clerk shall be chosen at the meeting to facilitate the work of the synod.

Article 29**Deputies of Regional Synod**

In order that proper unity, good order, and sound doctrine be safeguarded, each regional synod shall appoint two deputies and an alternate for each classis, who shall assist the classes in all cases provided for in the Church Order. Upon the request of a classis, they may also be called to assist in cases of special difficulty.

In cases of disagreement between the deputies, the decision of classis shall stand. In cases where the deputies cannot give concurring advice, the classis may request a judgment from regional synod.

The regional deputies shall keep a proper record of their actions. They shall submit a written report of their actions to the next regional synod and, if so required, they shall further explain those actions. The deputies shall serve until they are discharged from their duties by their regional synod.

Article 30**General Synod**

A general synod, consisting of those delegated by the classes, shall meet once every three years. If it appears necessary to convene a general synod before the appointed time, the convening church shall determine the time and place with the advice of its regional synod.

A general synod shall deal only with matters properly placed on its agenda by the churches by

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the classes and the regional synods, with lawful appeals, and with reports which were mandated by the previous synod. It shall also determine the time and place for the next general synod, and designate a convening church.

The chairman, vice-chairman, and clerk(s) shall be chosen at the meeting to facilitate the work of the synod.

PJCO Article 55 was moved to this location and becomes Article 31.

Article 55. Appeals and Procedure

When all avenues for settling a dispute at the consistory level have been exhausted, and a member is convinced that an injustice has been done to him by a decision of his consistory, he may appeal the decision to classis for its judgment. The judgment of the broader assembly shall be reached by majority vote, received with respect, and considered settled and binding unless proven to be in conflict with Scripture, the Reformed Confessions, or the Church Order.

Any appeal to a broader assembly must provide written grounds, and the broader assembly shall provide adequate grounds for its decision to sustain or not sustain an appeal. If an assembly does not sustain an appeal, the appellant may appeal the decision of the narrower assembly to the next broader assembly. If a general synod does not sustain that appeal, the appellant may appeal synod's decision only once and that to the next general synod.

A member who desires to object to a decision of general synod regarding a matter pertaining to the churches in common, shall bring the matter to his consistory and urge it to appeal the decision to the next general synod.

A consistory which is convinced that a decision of a broader assembly conflicts with the Scripture, the Reformed Confessions, or the Church Order, shall appeal the decision to the broader assembly next in order as soon as feasible.

Article 31. Ecumenical Relations

The churches of the federation are encouraged to pursue ecumenical relations with congregations outside of the federation which manifest the marks of the true church and faithfully demonstrate allegiance to Scripture as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity. Each church shall give account to classis of its ecumenical activities with churches not in ecclesiastical fellowship. A church must

way of the classes and the regional synods, with lawful appeals, and with reports which were mandated by the previous synod. It shall also determine the time and place for the next general synod, and designate a convening church.

The chairman, vice-chairman, and clerk(s) shall be chosen at the meeting to facilitate the work of the synod.

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Any appeal to a broader assembly must provide written grounds, and the broader assembly shall provide adequate grounds for its decision to sustain or not sustain an appeal. If an assembly does not sustain an appeal, the appellant may appeal the decision of the narrower assembly to the next broader assembly. If a general synod does not sustain that appeal, the appellant may appeal synod's decision only once and that to the next general synod.

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A consistory which is convinced that a decision of a broader assembly conflicts with the Scripture, the Three Forms of Unity, or the Church Order, shall appeal the decision to the broader assembly next in order as soon as feasible.

Article 32 Ecumenical Relations

A. Local ecumenical relations
The churches of the federation are encouraged to pursue ecumenical relations with congregations outside of the federation which manifest the marks of the true church and faithfully demonstrate allegiance to Scripture as summarized in the Reformed Confessions. Each church shall give account to classis of its ecumenical activities with churches not in ecclesiastical fellowship. Since

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receive the approbation of classis before such ecumenical relations progress to include preaching exchange and fellowship at the Lord's Supper.

The churches as a federation may enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with other federations by a synodical decision of two-thirds majority. Ecclesiastical fellowship with churches abroad that faithfully uphold the Reformed Confessions shall be regulated and maintained by general synod. Churches abroad shall not be rejected on the basis of minor differences of ecclesiastical polity or practice.

**Article 32.
Admitting a Church**

A church shall be admitted into the federation by the nearest classis with the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod, only upon recommendation from a consistory, and provided that its office-bearers subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity and agree with the Church Order. If one of these office-bearers is a minister, he shall be examined according to Appendix 4.

**III. WORSHIP, SACRAMENTS,
AND CEREMONIES**

**Article 33.
The Regular Worship Services**

The consistory shall call the congregation together for public worship twice each Lord's Day.

The consistory shall regulate the worship services, which shall be conducted according to the principles taught in God's Word, namely, that the preaching of the Word have the central place, confession of sins be made, praise and thanksgiving in song and prayer be given, and gifts of gratitude be offered.

At one of the services each Lord's Day, the minister shall ordinarily preach the Word of God as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism by treating its Lord's Days in sequence, and may give such attention also to the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort.

**Article 34.
Special Worship Services**

In the manner decided by the consistory, special worship services may be called in observance of Christ's birth, death, resurrection,

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local ecumenical relations aim at federative unity, each church must receive the approbation of classis before such ecumenical relations progress to include preaching exchange and fellowship at the Lord's Supper.

B. Ecclesiastical fellowship

The churches as a federation may enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with other federations by a synodical decision of two-thirds majority. Ecclesiastical fellowship with churches abroad that faithfully uphold the Reformed Confessions shall be regulated and maintained by general synod. Churches abroad shall not be rejected on the basis of minor differences of ecclesiastical polity or practice.

**Article 33
Admitting a Church**

A church shall be admitted into the federation by the nearest classis with the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod, only upon recommendation from a consistory, and provided that its office-bearers subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity and agree to abide by the Church Order. If one of these office-bearers is a minister, he shall be examined as prescribed in the relevant section of the Ecclesiastical Examination for ministers from outside the federation.

**III. WORSHIP, SACRAMENTS,
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Regular Worship Services**

The consistory shall call the congregation together for public worship twice each Lord's Day.

The consistory shall regulate the worship services, which shall be conducted according to the principles taught in God's Word, namely, that the preaching of the Word have the central place, confession of sins be made, praise and thanksgiving in song and prayer be given, and gifts of gratitude be offered.

At one of the services each Lord's Day, the minister shall ordinarily preach the Word of God as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism by treating its Lord's Days in sequence, and may give such attention also to the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort.

**Article 35
Special Worship Services**

Each year the churches shall, in the manner decided upon by the consistory, commemorate the birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of the

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~~ascension, and the outpouring of His Holy Spirit. Special worship services may be called also in connection with prayer for crops and labor, Thanksgiving Day, the turning of the new year, and times of great distress or blessing.~~

Lord Jesus Christ, as well as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In addition special worship services may be called in connection with prayer for crops and labor, Thanksgiving Day, the turning of the new year, and times of great distress or blessing.

**Article 35.
Psalms and Hymns**

The 150 Psalms shall have the principal place in the singing of the churches. In the worship services, the congregation shall sing faithful musical renderings of the Psalms, and hymns which faithfully and fully reflect the teaching of Scripture in harmony with the Three Forms of Unity, provided they are approved by general synod.

**Article 36
Psalms and Hymns**

The 150 Psalms shall have the principal place in the singing of the churches. In the worship services, the congregation shall sing faithful lyrical renditions of the Psalms, and hymns which faithfully and fully reflect the teaching of Scripture in harmony with the Three Forms of Unity, provided they are approved by general synod.

**Article 36.
Admission to the Pulpit**

~~Consistories shall permit men to administer the Word and sacraments only according to the following stipulations:~~

**Article 37
Admission to the Pulpit**

Consistories shall permit men to preach the word and administer the sacraments only according to the following stipulations:

- a. The consistory must give its consent before any minister may preach the Word or administer the sacraments in the congregation. Such consent shall be given only to ministers of churches within the federation and to ministers of churches in ecclesiastical fellowship.
- b. The consistory must give its consent before any licentiate or candidate may exhort in the congregation. Such consent shall be given only to licentiates and candidates within the federation and to licentiates and candidates of churches in ecclesiastical fellowship.
- c. ~~Any exception to either of these requirements shall be granted only occasionally, only to ministers, licentiates, and candidates who faithfully subscribe to the Reformed Confessions, and only with prior approbation of classis.~~

- a. The consistory must give its consent before any minister may preach the Word or administer the sacraments in the congregation. Such consent shall be given only to ministers of churches within the federation and to ministers of churches in ecclesiastical fellowship. Any exception to this requirement shall be granted to any church only occasionally for a minister who subscribes to the Reformed Confessions, and only with prior approbation of classis.
- b. The consistory must give its consent before any licentiate or candidate may exhort in the congregation. Such consent shall be given only to licentiates and candidates within the federation and to licentiates and candidates of churches in ecclesiastical fellowship.

**Article 37.
The Administration of the Sacraments**

The sacraments shall be administered under the authority of the consistory in a public worship service by an ^{ordained} minister of the Word with the use of the synodically adopted liturgical forms.

**Article 38
Administration of the Sacraments**

The sacraments shall be administered under the authority of the consistory in a public worship service by a minister of the Word with the use of the synodically adopted liturgical forms.

PJCO - 2007**Article 38.****The Baptism of Covenant Children**

The consistory shall ensure that God's covenant is signified and sealed by holy baptism to the children of communicant members in good standing. Parents shall present their children for baptism as soon as feasible.

Article 39.**The Baptism of Adults**

Adults who have not been previously baptized shall be engrafted into the Christian church by holy baptism upon their public profession of faith.

Article 40.**Administration of the Lord's Supper**

At least once every three months the Lord's Supper shall be administered in a service of public worship, under the supervision of the consistory, according to the teaching of God's Word, and in a manner most conducive to the edification of the congregation.

Article 41.**Admission to the Lord's Supper**

The consistory shall supervise participation at the Lord's Supper. To that end, the consistory shall admit to the Lord's Supper only those members who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life. Visitors may be admitted to the Lord's Supper provided that, as much as possible, the consistory has secured confirmation of their biblical church membership, of their proper profession of faith, and of their godly walk of life.

PJCO - 2010**Article 39****Baptism of Covenant Children**

The consistory shall ensure that God's covenant is signified and sealed by holy baptism to the children of communicant members in good standing. Parents shall present their children for baptism as soon as feasible.

Article 40**Public Profession of Faith**

Baptized members who have been instructed in the faith and who have come to the years of understanding shall be encouraged to make public profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Those who wish to profess their faith shall be examined by the consistory concerning their motives, doctrine and life, and their public profession shall occur in a public worship service after adequate announcements to the congregation and with the use of the appropriate liturgical form. Thereby the baptized members become communicant members and not only shall they be obligated to persevere in the fellowship of the church and in hearing God's Word, but also in partaking of the Lord's Supper.

Article 41**Baptism of Adults**

Adults who have not been previously baptized shall be engrafted into the Christian church by holy baptism upon their public profession of faith.

Article 42**Administration of the Lord's Supper**

At least once every three months the Lord's Supper shall be administered in a service of public worship, under the supervision of the consistory, according to the teaching of God's Word, and in a manner most conducive to the edification of the congregation.

Article 43**Admission to the Lord's Supper**

The consistory shall supervise participation at the Lord's Supper. To that end, the consistory shall admit to the Lord's Supper only those members who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life. Visitors may be admitted to the Lord's Supper provided that the consistory has secured confirmation, by means of letter of testimony or interview regarding their proper profession of faith, their godly walk of life, and their biblical church membership.

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Article 42.

The Church's Mission Calling

Each church shall fulfill its mission calling, which is to preach the Word of God to the unconverted at home and abroad with the goal of establishing churches. This shall be carried out by missionaries who are ministers of the Word set apart for this labor by being called, supported, and supervised by their consistories for this task. Such missionaries shall proclaim the Word of God, and administer the sacraments to those who have ~~come~~ to the faith. They shall also institute church offices according to the provisions of the Church Order. The consistory shall promote the involvement of church members in ~~labor and~~ service that assist fulfilling this mission calling. If necessary, a calling church shall invite churches within its classis or regional synod to cooperate by agreement regarding the field, support, and oversight of the mission work.

Article 43.

The Church's Evangelism Calling

~~Each church shall fulfill its evangelism calling according to the Word of God and relying on the Holy Spirit,~~ which is to make known the good news of Jesus Christ to those within its area of life and influence. It shall seek to persuade those who do not know God or are estranged from God and His service to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, which necessarily includes ~~affiliating with~~ His church through profession of faith.

Article 44.

Marriage

Scripture teaches that marriage is to be a lifelong monogamous union between a man and a woman. Consistories shall instruct and ~~admonish~~ those under their spiritual care who are considering marriage to marry only in the Lord. The minister, as authorized by the consistory, shall solemnize only marriages that accord with Scripture, using the Form for the Solemnization of Marriage adopted by general synod.

Article 45.

Funerals

A funeral is a family matter and shall not be conducted as a worship service.

Article 46.

The Church Records

The consistory shall maintain accurate records which include the names of the members of the

Article 44

The Church's Mission Calling

Each church shall fulfill its mission calling, which is to preach the Word of God to the unconverted at home and abroad with the goal of establishing churches. This shall be carried out by missionaries who are ministers of the Word set apart for this labor by being called, supported, and supervised by their respective consistories for this task. Such missionaries shall proclaim the Word of God, and administer the sacraments to those who have been converted to the faith. They shall also institute church offices according to the provisions of the Church Order. The consistory shall promote the involvement of church members in service that assists in fulfilling this mission calling. If necessary, a calling church shall invite churches within its classis or regional synod to cooperate by agreement regarding the field, support, and oversight of the mission work.

Article 45

The Church's Evangelism Calling

Relying on the Holy Spirit each church shall fulfill its evangelism calling according to the Word of God, which is to make known the good news of Jesus Christ to those within its area of life and influence. It shall seek to persuade those who do not know God or are estranged from God and His service to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, which necessarily includes being joined to His church through profession of faith.

Article 46

Marriage

Scripture teaches that marriage is to be a lifelong monogamous union between a man and a woman. Consistories shall instruct and exhort those under their spiritual care who are considering marriage to marry only in the Lord. The minister, as authorized by the consistory, shall solemnize only marriages that accord with Scripture, using the Form for the Solemnization of Marriage adopted by general synod.

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Funerals

A funeral is a family matter and shall not be conducted as a worship service.

Article 48

The Church Records

The consistory shall maintain accurate records which include the names of the members of the

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congregation and the dates of their births, baptisms, professions of faith, marriages, receptions into and departures from the church, and deaths.

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IV. DISCIPLINE

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Article 47.

The Nature and Purpose of Discipline

Ecclesiastical discipline, one of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, is spiritual in nature and exempts no one from trial or punishment by the civil authorities. The purpose of ecclesiastical discipline is that God may be glorified, that the sinner may be reconciled with God, the church, and one's neighbor, and that offense may be removed from the church of Christ.

Article 49

The Nature and Purpose of Discipline

Ecclesiastical discipline, one of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, is spiritual in nature and exempts no one from trial or punishment by the civil authorities. The purpose of ecclesiastical discipline is that God may be glorified, that the sinner may be reconciled with God, the church, and one's neighbor, and that offense may be removed from the church of Christ.

Article 48.

Consistory Involvement

When a member's sin in doctrine or life is of a private character and does not give public offense, the rule prescribed by Christ in Matthew 18 shall be followed. A private sin from which the sinner repents after having been admonished by one person alone, or subsequently in the presence of two or three witnesses, shall not be brought to the consistory.

Article 50

Consistory Involvement

When a member's sin in doctrine or life is of a private character and does not give public offense, the rule prescribed by Christ in Matthew 18 shall be followed. A private sin from which the sinner repents after having been admonished by one person alone, or subsequently in the presence of two or three witnesses, shall not be brought to the consistory.

When a member does not repent after having been admonished in the presence of two or three witnesses concerning a private sin, or when it is alleged that a member has committed a public sin, the matter shall be brought to the consistory. Only then shall the consistory deal with any alleged sin in doctrine or life.

When a member does not repent after having been admonished in the presence of two or three witnesses concerning a private sin, or when it is alleged that a member has committed a public sin, the matter shall be brought to the consistory. Only then shall the consistory deal with any alleged sin in doctrine or life.

Article 49.

The Reconciliation of a Member

The reconciliation of a member, whose sin is public or has become public because the admonition of the church was despised, shall take place only upon evidence of genuine repentance, and in a manner which best promotes the edification of the church. The consistory shall determine whether, for the welfare of the congregation and the sinner, the member shall be required to confess the sin publicly.

Article 51

The Reconciliation of a Member

The reconciliation of a member, whose sin is public or has become public because the admonition of the church was despised, shall take place only upon evidence of genuine repentance, and in a manner which best promotes the edification of the church. The consistory shall determine whether, for the welfare of the congregation and the sinner, the member shall be required to confess the sin publicly.

Article 50.

The Discipline of a Member

A ^{communicant member, or a mature non-communicant} member whose sin is properly made known to the consistory, and who then obstinately rejects the

Article 52

The Discipline of a Member

A. A communicant member
A member whose sin is properly made known to the consistory, and who then obstinately rejects the repeated and loving admonitions of the

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<p>repeated and loving admonitions of the consistory, shall, in agreement with the Word of God, be subject to church discipline according to the following stages:</p> <p>a. <u>Silent Discipline</u>: a member who persists in sin shall be suspended by the consistory from all the privileges of church membership, including using the sacraments and voting at congregational meetings. Such suspension shall not be made public by the consistory.</p> <p>b. <u>Public Discipline</u>: if the silent discipline and subsequent admonitions do not bring about repentance, and before proceeding to excommunication, the sinner's impenitence shall be made known to the congregation by indicating both the member's offense and failure to heed repeated admonitions, so that the congregation may speak to and pray for this member. Public discipline shall be done with the use of the synodically approved liturgical form, in three steps, the interval between which shall be left to the discretion of the consistory.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In the first step, the name of the sinner shall ordinarily not be mentioned so that he may be somewhat spared. 2. In the second step, the consistory shall seek the concurring advice of classis before proceeding, whereupon the member's name shall be mentioned to the congregation. 3. In the third step, the congregation shall be informed that unless there is repentance, the member will be excommunicated from the church on a specified date. <p>c. <u>Excommunication</u>: if these steps of public discipline do not bring about repentance, the consistory shall excommunicate the impenitent sinner, using the synodically approved liturgical form.</p>	<p>consistory, shall, in agreement with the Word of God, be subject to church discipline according to the following stages:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>Silent Discipline</u>: a member who persists in sin shall be suspended by the consistory <u>from participating in the sacraments, and is thereby not a member in good standing</u>. Such suspension shall not be made public by the consistory. 2. <u>Public Discipline</u>: if the silent discipline and subsequent admonitions do not bring about repentance, and before proceeding to excommunication, the sinner's impenitence shall be made known to the congregation by indicating both the offense and <u>the</u> failure to heed repeated admonitions, so that the congregation may speak to and pray for this member. Public discipline shall be done with the use of the synodically approved liturgical form, in three steps, the interval between which shall be left to the discretion of the consistory. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. In the first step, the name of the sinner shall ordinarily not be mentioned so that he may be somewhat spared. b. In the second step, the consistory shall <u>obtain</u> the concurring advice of classis before proceeding, whereupon the member's name shall be mentioned to the congregation. c. In the third step, the congregation shall be informed that unless there is repentance, the member will be excommunicated from the church on a specified date. 3. <u>Excommunication</u>: if these steps of public discipline do not bring about repentance, the consistory shall excommunicate the impenitent sinner, <u>thereby excluding him from the church of Jesus Christ</u>, using the synodically approved liturgical form. <p>B. <u>A non-communicant member</u> A non-communicant member who is delinquent either in doctrine or life, who after repeated and loving admonitions of the consistory does not repent, shall be excluded from the church of Christ. The sinner's impenitence shall be made known to the congregation by indicating both the offense and the failure to heed repeated admonitions, so that the congregation may pray for this member. In the first public announcement the name of the sinner shall ordinarily not be mentioned so that he may be somewhat spared.</p> <p>The consistory shall obtain the concurring advice of classis before proceeding, whereupon the member's name shall be mentioned to the congregation and a date set at which the</p>
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PJCO - 2007**PJCO - 2010****Article 51.****The Readmission of an Excommunicated Person**

When someone who has been excommunicated repents and desires to be readmitted into communion with Christ and His church, the congregation shall be so informed. If no lawful objections are presented to the consistory within one month after the public announcement, readmission into the church with all its privileges shall take place, using the synodically approved liturgical form. One who has been excommunicated as a non-communicant member, shall be readmitted only upon the public profession of faith.

Article 52.**No Lording it Over**

No church shall lord it over other churches, and no office-bearer shall lord it over other office-bearers.

Article 53.**Mutual Censure**

The minister(s), elders, and deacons shall conduct mutual censure regularly, whereby they exhort one another in a loving and edifying manner regarding the discharge of their offices.

Article 54.**The Suspension and Deposition of an Office-bearer**

When a minister, elder, or deacon has committed a public or grievous sin, or when he refuses to heed the admonitions of his consistory, he shall be ^{temporarily} suspended from the duties of his office by his own consistory with the concurring advice of the consistories of the two neighboring churches.

Included among the sins requiring suspension from office are these: false doctrine or heresy, schism, open blasphemy, simony, desertion of office or intrusion upon that of another, perjury, adultery, fornication, theft, acts of violence, habitual drunkenness, brawling, unjustly enriching oneself; in short, all sins which would warrant the discipline

excommunication shall take place, thereby excluding him from the church of Jesus Christ. The intervals between the two announcements and the excommunication shall be left to the discretion of the consistory.

The public discipline shall be done with the use of the synodically approved liturgical form.

Article 53**The Readmission of an Excommunicated Person**

When someone who has been excommunicated repents and desires to be readmitted into communion with Christ and His church, the congregation shall be so informed. If no lawful objections are presented to the consistory within one month after the public announcement, readmission into the church with all its privileges shall take place, using the synodically approved liturgical form. One who has been excommunicated as a non-communicant member, shall be readmitted only upon the public profession of faith.

Article 54**No Lording it Over**

No church shall lord it over other churches, and no office-bearer shall lord it over other office-bearers.

Article 55**Mutual Censure**

The minister(s), elders, and deacons shall conduct mutual censure regularly, whereby they exhort and encourage one another in a loving and edifying manner regarding the discharge of their offices.

Article 56**The Suspension and Deposition of an Office-bearer**

When a minister, elder, or deacon has committed a public or grievous sin, or when he refuses to heed the admonitions of his consistory, he shall be suspended from the duties of his office by his own consistory with the concurring advice of the consistories of the two neighboring churches.

Included among the sins requiring suspension from office are these: false doctrine or heresy, schism, open blasphemy, simony, desertion of office or intrusion upon that of another, perjury, adultery, fornication, theft, acts of violence, habitual drunkenness, brawling, unjustly enriching oneself; in short, all sins which would warrant the discipline of any other member.

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of any other member.

Should he harden himself in his sin, or when the sin committed is of such a nature that he cannot effectively continue in office, he shall be deposed from his office by his consistory. In each case the concurring advice of classis is required, and in the case of a minister the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod is also required.

Suspension or deposition in itself does not necessarily require further ecclesiastical discipline.

A man once deposed may be reconsidered for office only after a sufficient period of time, only upon evidence of genuine repentance, and only through the regular procedure for entering office.

Article 55 is now Article 31

**Article 56.
The Reception, Departure, ~~and Withdrawal~~ of
Members**

- a. The Reception of Members: Members from churches within the federation or churches with which the federation has ecclesiastical fellowship shall be received under the spiritual care of the consistory upon receipt of a testimony regarding their doctrine and life. Others shall be admitted only after the consistory has examined them concerning doctrine and life. In such cases the consistory shall determine whether a public profession of faith shall be required.
- b. The Departure of Members: Members departing to a church within the federation or a church with which the federation has ecclesiastical fellowship shall submit a written request to the consistory, which shall send a letter concerning their doctrine and life to such church, requesting it to accept them under its spiritual care.
- ~~c. The Withdrawal of Members: The withdrawal of a member shall be appropriately announced.~~
- ~~d. Letter of testimony: If a letter of testimony concerning doctrine and life is requested by a member, the consistory shall furnish such a letter.~~

**Article 57.
Property**

All property, whether real or personal, held by a local church for the benefit of that local church, shall remain the property of that local church in accordance with its own by-laws or regulations and the governing laws of the jurisdiction in which the church is located.

All property, whether real or personal, held for the benefit of the federation by a local church, a

Should he harden himself in his sin, or when the sin committed is of such a nature that he cannot effectively continue in office, he shall be deposed from his office by his consistory. In each case the concurring advice of classis is required, and in the case of a minister the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod is also required. No broader assembly may suspend or depose an office-bearer.

Suspension or deposition in itself does not necessarily require further ecclesiastical discipline.

A man once deposed may be reconsidered for office only with the involvement of the consistory which deposed him, after a sufficient period of time, and upon evidence of genuine repentance. The regular procedure for entering office shall be followed.

**Article 57
The Reception and Departure of Members**

- A. The Reception of Members
Members from churches within the federation or churches with which the federation has ecclesiastical fellowship may be received under the spiritual care of the consistory upon receipt of a letter of testimony from their former consistory regarding their doctrine and life. Others may be admitted only after the consistory has examined them concerning doctrine and life. In such cases the consistory shall determine whether a public profession of faith shall be required. The reception of members shall be appropriately announced.
- B. The Departure of Members
Members departing to a church within the federation or a church with which the federation has ecclesiastical fellowship shall submit a written request to the consistory. The consistory shall send a letter of testimony concerning their doctrine and life to such a church, requesting it to accept them under its spiritual care, and shall furnish a copy thereof to the members. The departure of members shall be appropriately announced.

**Article 58
Property**

All property, whether real or personal, held by a local church for the benefit of that local church, shall remain the property of that local church in accordance with its own by-laws or regulations and the governing laws of the jurisdiction in which the church is located.

All property, whether real or personal, held for the benefit of the federation by a local church, a

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classis or synod or a committee, trustee or trustees thereof, or otherwise, shall be held in trust as property in common of all of the churches within the federation, in accordance with the rules and regulations adopted by classes or synods of the federation. In the event a local church withdraws from the federation, unless the rules and regulations of the federation provide otherwise, the withdrawing church shall cease to have any benefit in such property.

Notwithstanding the laws of the jurisdiction in which a local church is located, the final authority for any acquisition or disposition of property by a local church, whether real or personal, shall be the council of that church in accordance with the church's own by-laws or regulations, regardless of how the property is held.

Any appeals to broader assemblies with respect to property shall be governed by this article.

**Article 58.
The Observance and Revision of the Church Order**

These articles, relating to the lawful order of the church, having been ^{drafted in accord with the Foundational Principles and} adopted by common consent, shall be observed diligently. Only when the good order and welfare of the churches make it necessary, shall this Church Order be revised. Any proposed revision of the Church Order shall be adopted only by a majority vote of a general synod.

classis or synod or a committee, trustee or trustees thereof, or otherwise, shall be held in trust as property in common of all of the churches within the federation, in accordance with the rules and regulations adopted by classes or synods of the federation. In the event a local church withdraws from the federation, unless the rules and regulations of the federation provide otherwise, the withdrawing church shall cease to have any benefit in such property.

Notwithstanding the laws of the jurisdiction in which a local church is located, the final authority for any acquisition or disposition of property by a local church, whether real or personal, shall be the consistory with the deacons of that church in accordance with the church's own by-laws or regulations, regardless of how the property is held.

Any appeals to broader assemblies with respect to property shall be governed by this article.

**Article 59
The Observance and Revision of the Church Order**

These articles, relating to the lawful order of the church, having been adopted by common consent, shall be observed diligently. Only when the good order and welfare of the churches make it necessary, shall this Church Order be revised. Any proposed revision of the Church Order shall be adopted only by a majority vote of a general synod.

Ecclesiastical Examinations

Appendix 4	<u>Ecclesiastical Examinations</u>
<p style="text-align: center;">The Licensure Examination (cf. Article 4)</p> <p>A theological student who is a member of a church within the federation and is preparing for the ministry of the Word and sacraments must undergo the licensure examination in order to be authorized to exhort in the churches.</p> <p>A. Required Documents:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Proof of successful completion of at least one year of training at a seminary approved by the federation. 2. A letter from the student's consistory which <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. in consultation with the faculty of his seminary, gives a positive testimony regarding his doctrine and life, and b. recommends that classis proceed with the examination. 3. A brief statement from the student regarding his wholehearted commitment to the Lord, His Word, and the Three Forms of Unity. <p>B. Procedure and Content:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The student's consistory shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis with the request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis. 2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda. 3. Five weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the student a sermon text. 4. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of the student's written sermon to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis. 5. The student shall deliver the sermon at classis. 6. Only if classis judges the sermon to be acceptable shall it examine him to determine if he is sufficiently competent in the following areas: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. knowledge of the Three Forms of Unity (20-30 minutes); b. understanding of public worship (15-25 minutes); c. exegesis and homiletics (15-25 minutes). <p style="margin-left: 40px;">Members of classis will be given sufficient time to ask questions after each</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">The Licensure Examination (cf. Article 4)</p> <p>A theological student who is a member of a church within the federation and is preparing for the ministry of the Word and sacraments must undergo the licensure examination in order to be authorized to exhort in the churches.</p> <p>A. Required Documents:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Proof of successful completion of at least one year of training at a seminary approved by the federation. 2. A letter from the student's consistory which <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. in consultation with the faculty of his seminary, gives a positive testimony regarding his doctrine and life, and b. recommends that classis proceed with the examination. 3. A brief statement from the student regarding his wholehearted commitment to the Lord, His Word, and the Three Forms of Unity. <p>B. Procedure and Content:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The student's consistory shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis with the request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis. 2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda. 3. Five weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the student a sermon text. 4. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of the student's written sermon to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis. 5. The student shall deliver the sermon at classis. 6. Only if classis judges the sermon to be acceptable shall it examine him to determine if he is sufficiently competent in the following areas: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. knowledge of the Three Forms of Unity (20-30 minutes); b. understanding of public worship (15-25 minutes); c. exegesis and homiletics (15-25 minutes). <p style="margin-left: 40px;">Members of classis will be given sufficient time to ask questions after each</p>

Ecclesiastical Examinations

area of the examination. After a maximum of ten minutes of questioning by classis in each area, classis will vote to signify that it has received enough information from the student to proceed to the next section of the examination. Classis may decide not to sustain a student so that a subsequent classis can re-examine him in specified areas.

7. If classis judges the student's performance to be acceptable, and he promises to teach in accordance with the Three Forms of Unity, classis shall issue him a license to exhort in the churches as long as he continues preparing for the ministry of the Word and sacraments, subject to annual review by the licensing classis.

Appendix 2

The Candidacy Examination

(cf. Articles 4 and 5)

A man aspiring to the office of minister who is a member of a church within the federation and has graduated from an approved seminary must undergo the candidacy examination in order to become eligible for call within the federation.

A. Required Documents:

1. Proof of successful completion of required training at a seminary approved by the federation.
2. Written recommendations from one or more consistories and ministers of the federation under whom the prospective candidate has labored in ministerial training for a minimum equivalent of ~~nine~~ months of full-time work.
3. A letter from the prospective candidate's consistory which:
 - a. In consultation with his seminary, gives a positive testimony regarding his doctrine and life,
 - b. Recommends that classis proceed with the examination.
4. A medical ~~certificate~~ ^{report} of good health.
5. A brief statement from the prospective candidate regarding his wholehearted commitment to the Lord, His Word, and the Three Forms of Unity.

B. Procedure and Content:

1. The consistory shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis, and request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis.

area of the examination. After a maximum of ten minutes of questioning by classis in each area, classis will vote to signify that it has received enough information from the student to proceed to the next section of the examination. Classis may decide not to sustain a student so that a subsequent classis can re-examine him in specified areas.

7. If classis judges the student's performance to be acceptable, and he promises to teach in accordance with the Three Forms of Unity, classis shall issue him a license to exhort in the churches as long as he continues preparing for the ministry of the Word and sacraments.

The Candidacy Examination

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A man aspiring to the office of minister who is a member of a church within the federation and has graduated from an approved seminary must undergo the candidacy examination in order to become eligible for call within the federation.

A. Required Documents:

1. Proof of successful completion of required training at a seminary approved by the federation.
2. Written recommendations from one or more consistories and ministers of the federation under whom the prospective candidate has labored in ministerial training for a minimum equivalent of six months of full-time work.
3. A letter from the prospective candidate's consistory which:
 - a. In consultation with his seminary, gives a positive testimony regarding his doctrine and life,
 - b. Recommends that classis proceed with the examination.
4. A medical report of health.
5. A brief statement from the prospective candidate regarding his wholehearted commitment to the Lord, His Word, and the Three Forms of Unity.

B. Procedure and Content:

1. The consistory shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis, and request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis.

Ecclesiastical Examinations

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda. 3. The convening church shall notify the deputies of Regional Synod regarding the request. 4. Six weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the applicant the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. an Old Testament passage for examination in exegesis; b. a New Testament passage for examination in exegesis; and c. three sermons, one from each of the assigned scripture passages, and one from an assigned Lord's Day. 5. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of each of the applicant's written sermons to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis. 6. At classis the candidate shall deliver one of the sermons. This sermon shall not have been previously delivered. 7. Only if classis judges the sermons to be acceptable shall it examine him to determine if he is competent in the following areas: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. <u>Practica</u>: the prospective candidate's personal and spiritual life; his relationship with the Lord; his growth in faith; his background and preparation for ministry; his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking it; and his understanding of this office with respect to the theory and practice of preaching and public worship, of pastoral work among the congregation, and of evangelism and missions (at least 25 minutes). b. <u>Knowledge of Scripture</u>: the prospective candidate's doctrine of Scripture; his understanding of canonicity and hermeneutics; and primarily his familiarity with the contents of the various books of the Bible (15-20 minutes). c. <u>Biblical Exegesis</u>: the prospective candidate's ability to work with the original languages and to exegete the assigned Old Testament and New Testament passages (15-20 minutes). d. <u>Knowledge of the Creeds and Confessions</u>: the prospective candidate's knowledge of the history and content of the creeds and confessions, and his willingness to subscribe to them by signing the form of subscription (15- 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda. 3. The convening church shall notify the deputies of Regional Synod regarding the request. 4. Six weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the applicant the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. an Old Testament passage for examination in exegesis; b. a New Testament passage for examination in exegesis; and c. three sermons, one from each of the assigned scripture passages, and one from an assigned Lord's Day. 5. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of each of the applicant's written sermons to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis. 6. At classis the candidate shall deliver one of the sermons. This sermon shall not have been previously delivered. 7. Only if classis judges the sermons to be acceptable shall it examine him to determine if he is competent in the following areas: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. <u>Practica</u>: the prospective candidate's personal and spiritual life; his relationship with the Lord; his growth in faith; his background and preparation for ministry; his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking it; and his understanding of this office with respect to the theory and practice of preaching and public worship, of pastoral work among the congregation, and of evangelism and missions (at least 25 minutes). b. <u>Knowledge of Scripture</u>: the prospective candidate's doctrine of Scripture; his understanding of canonicity and hermeneutics; and primarily his familiarity with the contents of the various books of the Bible (15-20 minutes). c. <u>Biblical Exegesis</u>: the prospective candidate's ability to work with the original languages and to exegete the assigned Old Testament and New Testament passages (15-20 minutes). d. <u>Knowledge of the Creeds and Confessions</u>: the prospective candidate's knowledge of the history and content of the creeds and confessions, and his willingness to subscribe to them by signing the form of subscription (15-
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Ecclesiastical Examinations

<p>20 minutes).</p> <p>e. Reformed doctrine: the prospective candidate's knowledge of the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology (20-30 minutes).</p> <p>f. Church Polity: the prospective candidate's knowledge of the history and principles of Reformed Church Polity and of the Church Order (10-15 minutes).</p> <p>g. Church History: the prospective candidate's knowledge of church history in terms of major persons, heresies, and developments, with special emphasis on the Reformation and the history of the Reformed churches (15-20 minutes).</p> <p>h. Ethics: the prospective candidate's knowledge of the meaning and function of the Decalogue, including its relation both to Christian motivation and character and to contemporary moral problems (10-15 minutes).</p> <p>Members of classis will be given sufficient time to ask questions after each area of the examination. After a maximum of ten minutes of questioning by classis in each area, classis will vote to signify that it has received enough information from the applicant to proceed to the next section of the examination. Classis may decide not to sustain an applicant so that a subsequent classis can re-examine him in specified areas.</p> <p>8. Classis shall issue a written declaration, valid for two years, that the applicant is eligible for call to the churches in the federation upon:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. the affirmative vote of classis, b. the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and c. his ^{whole-hearted} promise to adhere to Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity. <p>9. If after two years the candidate has not received a call he may, with the recommendation of his consistory, request an extension of his candidacy for another year. To grant this request classis may require another examination.</p>	<p>20 minutes).</p> <p>e. Reformed doctrine: the prospective candidate's knowledge of the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology (20-30 minutes).</p> <p>f. Church Polity: the prospective candidate's knowledge of the history and principles of Reformed Church Polity and of the Church Order (10-15 minutes).</p> <p>g. Church History: the prospective candidate's knowledge of church history in terms of major persons, heresies, and developments, with special emphasis on the Reformation and the history of the Reformed churches (15-20 minutes).</p> <p>h. Ethics: the prospective candidate's knowledge of the meaning and function of the Decalogue, including its relation both to Christian motivation and character and to contemporary moral problems (10-15 minutes).</p> <p>Members of classis will be given sufficient time to ask questions after each area of the examination. After a maximum of ten minutes of questioning by classis in each area, classis will vote to signify that it has received enough information from the applicant to proceed to the next section of the examination. Classis may decide not to sustain an applicant so that a subsequent classis can re-examine him in specified areas.</p> <p>8. Classis shall issue a written declaration, valid for two years, that the applicant is eligible for call to the churches in the federation upon:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. the affirmative vote of classis, b. the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and c. his promise to adhere to Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity. <p><u>9. If the candidacy exam is sustained and the candidate accepts a call within one year in the classis which examines him, the ordination exam may be waived. The classis that examined him may make such a decision.</u></p> <p>10. If after two years the candidate has not received a call he may, with the recommendation of his consistory, request an extension of his candidacy for another year. To grant this request classis may require another examination.</p>
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Ecclesiastical Examinations

Appendix 2	
<p style="text-align: center;">The Ordination Examination (cf. Article 5)</p> <p>A candidate who has accepted a call within the federation must undergo the ordination examination to become eligible for ordination to the ministry of the Word and sacraments in the churches.</p> <p>A. Required Documents:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A letter of call. 2. A letter of acceptance of the call. 3. A written declaration of candidacy. 4. A letter from the candidate's consistory which: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. gives a positive testimony regarding his doctrine and life, and b. recommends that classis proceeds with the examination. <p>B. Procedure and Content:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The calling church shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis with the request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis. 2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda. 3. The convening church shall notify the deputies of Regional Synod regarding the request. 4. Five weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the candidate a scripture passage for examination in exegesis, from which he is also to prepare a new sermon. 5. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of the written sermon to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis. 6. At classis the candidate shall deliver the sermon. This sermon shall not have been previously delivered. 7. Only if classis judges the sermon to be acceptable, shall it examine him to determine if he is competent in the following areas: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Practica: the candidate's personal and spiritual life; his relationship with the Lord; his growth in faith; his background and preparation for ministry; his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking it; and his understanding of this office with respect to the theory and practice of preaching and public worship, of pastoral work 	<p style="text-align: center;">The Ordination Examination (cf. Article 5)</p> <p>A candidate who has accepted a call within the federation must undergo the ordination examination to become eligible for ordination to the ministry of the Word and sacraments in the churches.</p> <p>A. Required Documents:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A letter of call. 2. A letter of acceptance of the call. 3. A written declaration of candidacy. 4. A letter from the candidate's consistory which: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. gives a positive testimony regarding his doctrine and life, and b. recommends that classis proceeds with the examination. <p>B. Procedure and Content:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The calling church shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis with the request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis. 2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda. 3. The convening church shall notify the deputies of Regional Synod regarding the request. 4. Five weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the candidate a scripture passage for examination in exegesis, from which he is also to prepare a new sermon. 5. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of the written sermon to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis. 6. At classis the candidate shall deliver the sermon. This sermon shall not have been previously delivered. 7. Only if classis judges the sermon to be acceptable, shall it examine him to determine if he is competent in the following areas: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Practica: the candidate's personal and spiritual life; his relationship with the Lord; his growth in faith; his background and preparation for ministry; his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking it; and his understanding of this office with respect to the theory and practice of preaching and public worship, of pastoral work

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<p>among the congregation, and of evangelism and missions (at least 25 minutes).</p> <p>b. Biblical Exegesis: the candidate's ability to work with the original languages and to exegete the assigned passage (15-20 minutes).</p> <p>c. Knowledge of the Creeds and Confessions: the candidate's knowledge of the history and content of the creeds and confessions, and his willingness to subscribe to them by signing the form of subscription (15-20 minutes).</p> <p>d. Reformed doctrine: the candidate's knowledge of the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology (20-30 minutes). Members of classis will be given sufficient time ask questions after each area of examination. After a maximum of ten minutes for each area, classis will vote to proceed to the next section. This period of questioning by classis may be extended by a majority vote.</p> <p>8. Classis shall declare that the candidate has sustained his ordination examination, and is therefore eligible to be ordained as a minister of the Word and sacraments, upon:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> the affirmative vote of classis, the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and his promise to sign the form of subscription upon ordination. <p>9. A candidate who does not sustain his examination may undergo the ordination examination again by a subsequent classis upon the request of the calling church.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Appendix 4</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The Examination for Ordained Ministers (cf. Articles 7 and 32)</p> <p>Requirement for Ecclesiastical Examinations of Ordained Ministers: Ordained ministers who seek admission to the ministry within the federation who come from churches with whom the federation maintains ecclesiastical fellowship or who come from churches with whom we do not maintain such fellowship, are required to undergo an ecclesiastical examination to become eligible for a call from the churches of the federation. One of the following three examinations shall be conducted as applicable:</p>	<p>among the congregation, and of evangelism and missions (at least 25 minutes).</p> <p>b. Biblical Exegesis: the candidate's ability to work with the original languages and to exegete the assigned passage (15-20 minutes).</p> <p>c. Knowledge of the Creeds and Confessions: the candidate's knowledge of the history and content of the creeds and confessions, and his willingness to subscribe to them by signing the form of subscription (15-20 minutes).</p> <p>d. Reformed doctrine: the candidate's knowledge of the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology (20-30 minutes). Members of classis will be given sufficient time ask questions after each area of examination. After a maximum of ten minutes for each area, classis will vote to proceed to the next section <u>without thereby indicating that the candidate has sustained this section</u>. This period of questioning by classis may be extended by a majority vote.</p> <p>8. Classis shall declare that the candidate has sustained his ordination examination, and is therefore eligible to be ordained as a minister of the Word and sacraments, upon:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> the affirmative vote of classis, the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and his promise to sign the form of subscription upon ordination. <p>9. A candidate who does not sustain his examination may undergo the ordination examination again, <u>in whole or in part</u>, by a subsequent classis upon the request of the calling church.</p>
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<p>I.—A minister from a church with whom the federation maintains ecclesiastical fellowship:</p> <p>A. Documents:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A letter of call 2. A letter of acceptance <p>B. Procedure and Content:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The calling church shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis with the request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis. 2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda. 3. The convening church shall notify the deputies of Regional Synod regarding the request. 4. Five weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the applicant a scripture passage for examination in exegesis, from which he is also to prepare a new sermon. 5. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of the written sermon to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis. 6. At classis the applicant shall deliver the sermon. This sermon shall not have been previously delivered. 7. Only if classis judges the sermon to be acceptable, shall it examine him to determine if he is competent in the following areas: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. <u>Practica</u>: the applicant's personal and spiritual life; his relationship with the Lord; his growth in faith; his background and preparation for ministry; his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking it; and his understanding of this office with respect to the theory and practice of preaching and public worship, of pastoral work among the congregation, and of evangelism and missions (at least 25 minutes). b. <u>Biblical Exegesis</u>: the applicant's ability to work with the original languages and to exegete the assigned passage (15-20 minutes). c. <u>Knowledge of the Creeds and Confessions</u>: the applicant's knowledge of the history and content of the creeds and confessions, and his willingness to 	<p><u>Ecclesiastical Examination for a minister from a church with whom the federation maintains ecclesiastical fellowship.</u> <u>(cf. Article 7 part 1)</u></p> <p>A. Documents:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A letter of call 2. A letter of acceptance <p>B. Procedure and Content:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The calling church shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis with the request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis. 2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda. 3. The convening church shall notify the deputies of Regional Synod regarding the request. 4. Five weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the applicant a scripture passage for examination in exegesis, from which he is also to prepare a new sermon. 5. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of the written sermon to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis. 6. At classis the applicant shall deliver the sermon. This sermon shall not have been previously delivered. 7. Only if classis judges the sermon to be acceptable, shall it examine him to determine if he is competent in the following areas: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. <u>Practica</u>: the applicant's personal and spiritual life; his relationship with the Lord; his growth in faith; his background and preparation for ministry; his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking it; and his understanding of this office with respect to the theory and practice of preaching and public worship, of pastoral work among the congregation, and of evangelism and missions (at least 25 minutes). b. <u>Biblical Exegesis</u>: the applicant's ability to work with the original languages and to exegete the assigned passage (15-20 minutes). c. <u>Knowledge of the Creeds and Confessions</u>: the applicant's knowledge of the history and content of the creeds and confessions, and his willingness to
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<p>subscribe to them by signing the form of subscription (15-20 minutes).</p> <p>d. <u>Reformed doctrine</u>: the applicant's knowledge of the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology (20-30 minutes).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Members of classis will be given sufficient time ask questions after each area of examination. After a maximum of ten minutes for each area, classis will vote to proceed to the next section. This period of questioning by classis may be extended by a majority vote.</p> <p>8. Classis shall declare that the applicant has sustained his ^{ordination} examination, and is therefore eligible to be <u>ordained</u> as a minister of the Word and sacraments, upon:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. the affirmative vote of classis, b. the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and c. his promise to sign the form of subscription upon <u>ordination</u>. <p>9. An applicant who does not sustain his examination may undergo the above examination again by a subsequent classis upon the request of the calling church.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Appendix 4 (part 2)</p> <p>II.—A minister of a church with whom the federation does not maintain ecclesiastical fellowship, and who is seeking eligibility for call to a church of the federation:</p> <p>A. Documents:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A letter from the minister requesting the examination for ^{ordained} ministers and providing information relating to the background of the minister and the circumstances leading to this request, 2. A letter from the sponsoring consistory which: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. gives a positive testimony regarding his doctrine and life, and 	<p>subscribe to them by signing the form of subscription (15-20 minutes).</p> <p>d. <u>Reformed doctrine</u>: the applicant's knowledge of the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology (20-30 minutes).</p> <p>e. <u>Church Polity: the prospective applicant's knowledge of the history and principles of Reformed Church Polity and of the Church Order (10-15 minutes)</u>.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Members of classis will be given sufficient time ask questions after each area of examination. After a maximum of ten minutes for each area, classis will vote to proceed to the next section. This period of questioning by classis may be extended by a majority vote.</p> <p>8. Classis shall declare that the applicant has sustained his examination, and is therefore eligible to be <u>installed</u> as a minister of the Word and sacraments, upon:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. the affirmative vote of classis, b. the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and c. his promise to sign the form of subscription upon <u>installation</u>. <p>9. An applicant who does not sustain his examination may undergo the above examination again by a subsequent classis upon the request of the calling church.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Ecclesiastical Examination for a minister of a church with whom the federation does not maintain ecclesiastical fellowship, and who is seeking eligibility for call to a church of the federation.</u> (cf. Article 7 part 2)</p> <p>A. Documents:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A letter from the minister requesting the examination for ministers and providing information relating to the background of the minister and the circumstances leading to this request, 2. A letter from the sponsoring consistory which: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. gives a positive testimony regarding his doctrine and life, and
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<p>b. recommends that classis proceed with the examination.</p> <p>3. Documentation relating to seminary training, and</p> <p>4. A letter from the church he last served regarding his pastoral record.</p> <p>B. Procedure and Content:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The sponsoring consistory shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis, and request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis. 2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda. 3. The convening church shall notify the deputies of Regional Synod regarding the request. 4. Six weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the applicant the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. an Old Testament passage for examination in exegesis; b. a New Testament passage for examination in exegesis; and c. three sermons, one from each of the assigned scripture passages, and one from an assigned Lord's Day. 5. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of each of the applicant's written sermons to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis. 6. At classis the applicant shall deliver one of the sermons. This sermon shall not have been previously delivered. 7. Only if classis judges the sermons to be acceptable shall it examine him to determine if he is competent in the following areas: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. <u>Practica</u>: the applicant's personal and spiritual life; his relationship with the Lord; his growth in faith; his background and preparation for ministry; his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking it; and his understanding of this office with respect to the theory and practice of preaching and public worship, of pastoral work among the congregation, and of evangelism and missions (at least 25 minutes). b. <u>Knowledge of Scripture</u>: the applicant's doctrine of Scripture; his understanding of canonicity and hermeneutics; and primarily his familiarity with the contents of the various books of the Bible (15-20 	<p>b. recommends that classis proceed with the examination.</p> <p>3. Documentation relating to seminary training, and</p> <p>4. A letter from the church he last served regarding his pastoral record.</p> <p>B. Procedure and Content:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The sponsoring consistory shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis, and request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis. 2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda. 3. The convening church shall notify the deputies of Regional Synod regarding the request. 4. Six weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the applicant the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. an Old Testament passage for examination in exegesis; b. a New Testament passage for examination in exegesis; and c. three sermons, one from each of the assigned scripture passages, and one from an assigned Lord's Day. 5. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of each of the applicant's written sermons to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis. 6. At classis the applicant shall deliver one of the sermons. This sermon shall not have been previously delivered. 7. Only if classis judges the sermons to be acceptable shall it examine him to determine if he is competent in the following areas: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. <u>Practica</u>: the applicant's personal and spiritual life; his relationship with the Lord; his growth in faith; his background and preparation for ministry; his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking it; and his understanding of this office with respect to the theory and practice of preaching and public worship, of pastoral work among the congregation, and of evangelism and missions (at least 25 minutes). b. <u>Knowledge of Scripture</u>: the applicant's doctrine of Scripture; his understanding of canonicity and hermeneutics; and primarily his familiarity with the contents of the various books of the Bible (15-20
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<p>minutes).</p> <p>c. Biblical Exegesis: the applicant's ability to work with the original languages and to exegete the assigned Old Testament and New Testament passages (15-20 minutes).</p> <p>e. Knowledge of the Creeds and Confessions: the applicant's knowledge of the history and content of the creeds and confessions, and his willingness to subscribe to them by signing the form of subscription (15-20 minutes).</p> <p>f. Reformed doctrine: the applicant's knowledge of the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology (20-30 minutes).</p> <p>g. Church Polity: the applicant's knowledge of the history and principles of Reformed Church Polity and of the Church Order (10-15 minutes).</p> <p>h. Church History: the applicant's knowledge of church history in terms of major persons, heresies, and developments, with special emphasis on the Reformation and the history of the Reformed churches (15-20 minutes).</p> <p>i. Ethics: the applicant's knowledge of the meaning and function of the Decalogue, including its relation both to Christian motivation and character and to contemporary moral problems (10-15 minutes).</p> <p>Members of classis will be given sufficient time ask questions after each area of examination. After a maximum of ten minutes for each area, classis will vote to proceed to the next section. This period of questioning by classis may be extended by a majority vote.</p> <p>Classis may decide not to sustain the applicant for the sake of a subsequent classis re-examining him in specified areas.</p> <p>An applicant who does not sustain his examination may be reexamined by a subsequent classis in all or specific areas of the candidacy examination.</p> <p>8. Classis shall decide whether the applicant:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. has sustained the examination and need not undergo a period of testing in the work of ministry before being declared eligible for call, or b. has sustained the examination and yet needs to undergo a period of testing in the work of ministry before being 	<p>minutes).</p> <p>c. Biblical Exegesis: the applicant's ability to work with the original languages and to exegete the assigned Old Testament and New Testament passages (15-20 minutes).</p> <p>d. Knowledge of the Creeds and Confessions: the applicant's knowledge of the history and content of the creeds and confessions, and his willingness to subscribe to them by signing the form of subscription (15-20 minutes).</p> <p>e. Reformed doctrine: the applicant's knowledge of the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology (20-30 minutes).</p> <p>f. Church Polity: the applicant's knowledge of the history and principles of Reformed Church Polity and of the Church Order (10-15 minutes).</p> <p>g. Church History: the applicant's knowledge of church history in terms of major persons, heresies, and developments, with special emphasis on the Reformation and the history of the Reformed churches (15-20 minutes).</p> <p>h. Ethics: the applicant's knowledge of the meaning and function of the Decalogue, including its relation both to Christian motivation and character and to contemporary moral problems (10-15 minutes).</p> <p>Members of classis will be given sufficient time ask questions after each area of examination. After a maximum of ten minutes for each area, classis will vote to proceed to the next section. This period of questioning by classis may be extended by a majority vote.</p> <p>Classis may decide not to sustain the applicant for the sake of a subsequent classis re-examining him in specified areas.</p> <p>An applicant who does not sustain his examination may be reexamined by a subsequent classis in all or specific areas of the candidacy examination.</p> <p>8. Classis shall decide whether the applicant:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. has sustained the examination and need not undergo a period of testing in the work of ministry before being declared eligible for call, or b. has sustained the examination and yet needs to undergo a period of testing in the work of ministry before being
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<p>declared eligible for call, or</p> <p>c. has not sustained the examination.</p> <p>9. If classis decides that the applicant need not undergo a period of testing before declaring him eligible for call to the churches in the federation, then classis shall issue a written declaration, valid for two years, that the applicant is eligible for call to the churches in the federation upon:</p> <p>a. the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and</p> <p>b. the applicant's ^{whole-hearted} promise to adhere to Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity.</p> <p>10. If Classis judges that the applicant should undergo a period of testing in the work of ministry by the sponsoring consistory before declaring him eligible for call to the churches in the federation, then Classis shall determine how long this period of testing should be, Classis shall issue the applicant a license to preach in the churches in the federation for that time period upon the applicant's ^{whole-hearted} promise to adhere to Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity. The sponsoring consistory, after the prescribed period of testing and upon approval of his performance, shall recommend to a subsequent classis to declare the applicant eligible for call to the churches in the federation. This subsequent classis shall issue the applicant a written declaration, valid for two years, that the applicant is eligible for call to the churches in the federation upon:</p> <p>a. the affirmative vote of the classis,</p> <p>b. the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and</p> <p>c. the applicant's ^{whole-hearted} promise to adhere to Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity.</p> <p>11. If after two years the applicant has not received a call he may, with the recommendation of his sponsoring consistory, request an extension of his eligibility for a call for another year. To grant this request classis may require another examination.</p>	<p>declared eligible for call, or</p> <p>c. has not sustained the examination.</p> <p>9. If classis decides that the applicant need not undergo a period of testing before declaring him eligible for call to the churches in the federation, then classis shall issue a written declaration, valid for two years, that the applicant is eligible for call to the churches in the federation upon:</p> <p>a. the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and</p> <p>b. the applicant's promise to adhere to Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity.</p> <p>10. If Classis judges that the applicant should undergo a period of testing in the work of ministry by the sponsoring consistory before declaring him eligible for call to the churches in the federation, then Classis shall determine how long this period of testing should be, Classis shall issue the applicant a license to preach in the churches in the federation for that time period upon the applicant's promise to adhere to Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity. The sponsoring consistory, after the prescribed period of testing and upon approval of his performance, shall recommend to a subsequent classis to declare the applicant eligible for call to the churches in the federation. This subsequent classis shall issue the applicant a written declaration, valid for two years, that the applicant is eligible for call to the churches in the federation upon:</p> <p>a. the affirmative vote of the classis,</p> <p>b. the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod, and</p> <p>c. the applicant's promise to adhere to Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity.</p> <p>11. If after two years the applicant has not received a call he may, with the recommendation of his sponsoring consistory, request an extension of his eligibility for a call for another year. To grant this request classis may require another examination.</p>
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Appendix 4
(part 3)

III.—A minister of a church with whom the federation does not maintain ecclesiastical fellowship, and who, together with his congregation, is seeking entrance into the federation:

A. Documents:

1. A letter from his congregation requesting the examination for ^{ordained} ministers and providing information relating to the background of the minister and the congregation, the pastoral record of the minister, and the circumstances leading to this request,
2. A letter from the sponsoring consistory recommending that classis proceed with the examination,
3. Documentation relating to seminary training, and
4. A letter from the church he served prior to his present congregation regarding his pastoral record.

B. Procedure and Content:

1. The ministers' consistory shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis, and request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis.
2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda.
3. The convening church shall notify the deputies of Regional Synod regarding the request.
4. Six weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the applicant the following:
 - a. an Old Testament passage for examination in exegesis;
 - b. a New Testament passage for examination in exegesis; and
 - c. three sermons, one from each of the assigned scripture passages, and one from an assigned Lord's Day.
5. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of each of the applicant's written sermons to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis.
6. At classis the applicant shall deliver one of the sermons. This sermon shall not have been previously delivered.

Ecclesiastical Examination for a minister of a church with whom the federation does not maintain ecclesiastical fellowship, and who, together with his congregation, is seeking entrance into the federation.
(cf. Article 33)

A. Documents:

1. A letter from his congregation requesting the examination for ministers and providing information relating to the background of the minister and the congregation, the pastoral record of the minister, and the circumstances leading to this request,
2. A letter from the sponsoring consistory recommending that classis proceed with the examination,
3. Documentation relating to seminary training, and
4. A letter from the church he served prior to his present congregation regarding his pastoral record.

B. Procedure and Content:

1. The ministers' consistory shall submit the required documents to the convening church of classis, and request that the examination be placed on the provisional agenda of classis.
2. The convening church shall notify each of the churches regarding the request by way of the provisional agenda.
3. The convening church shall notify the deputies of Regional Synod regarding the request.
4. Six weeks prior to the classis, the ministers appointed by a previous classis shall assign the applicant the following:
 - a. an Old Testament passage for examination in exegesis;
 - b. a New Testament passage for examination in exegesis; and
 - c. three sermons, one from each of the assigned scripture passages, and one from an assigned Lord's Day.
5. Three weeks prior to the classis, the convening church shall send two copies of each of the applicant's written sermons to each consistory in the classis for those delegated to classis.
6. At classis the applicant shall deliver one of the sermons. This sermon shall not have been previously delivered.

Ecclesiastical Examinations

<p>7. Only if classis judges the sermons to be acceptable shall it examine him to determine if he is competent in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. <u>Practica</u>: the applicant's personal and spiritual life; his relationship with the Lord; his growth in faith; his background and preparation for ministry; his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking it; and his understanding of this office with respect to the theory and practice of preaching and public worship, of pastoral work among the congregation, and of evangelism and missions (at least 25 minutes). b. <u>Knowledge of Scripture</u>: the applicant's doctrine of Scripture; his understanding of canonicity and hermeneutics; and primarily his familiarity with the contents of the various books of the Bible (15-20 minutes). c. <u>Biblical Exegesis</u>: the applicant's ability to work with the original languages and to exegete the assigned Old Testament and New Testament passages (15-20 minutes). d. <u>Knowledge of the Creeds and Confessions</u>: the applicant's knowledge of the history and content of the creeds and confessions, and his willingness to subscribe to them by signing the form of subscription (15-20 minutes). e. <u>Reformed doctrine</u>: the applicant's knowledge of the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology (20-30 minutes). f. <u>Church Polity</u>: the applicant's knowledge of the history and principles of Reformed Church Polity and of the Church Order (10-15 minutes). g. <u>Church History</u>: the applicant's knowledge of church history in terms of major persons, heresies, and developments, with special emphasis on the Reformation and the history of the Reformed churches (15-20 minutes). h. <u>Ethics</u>: the applicant's knowledge of the meaning and function of the Decalogue, including its relation both to Christian motivation and character and to contemporary moral problems (10-15 minutes). <p>Members of classis will be given sufficient time ask questions after each area</p>	<p>7. Only if classis judges the sermons to be acceptable shall it examine him to determine if he is competent in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. <u>Practica</u>: the applicant's personal and spiritual life; his relationship with the Lord; his growth in faith; his background and preparation for ministry; his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking it; and his understanding of this office with respect to the theory and practice of preaching and public worship, of pastoral work among the congregation, and of evangelism and missions (at least 25 minutes). b. <u>Knowledge of Scripture</u>: the applicant's doctrine of Scripture; his understanding of canonicity and hermeneutics; and primarily his familiarity with the contents of the various books of the Bible (15-20 minutes). c. <u>Biblical Exegesis</u>: the applicant's ability to work with the original languages and to exegete the assigned Old Testament and New Testament passages (15-20 minutes). d. <u>Knowledge of the Creeds and Confessions</u>: the applicant's knowledge of the history and content of the creeds and confessions, and his willingness to subscribe to them by signing the form of subscription (15-20 minutes). e. <u>Reformed doctrine</u>: the applicant's knowledge of the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology (20-30 minutes). f. <u>Church Polity</u>: the applicant's knowledge of the history and principles of Reformed Church Polity and of the Church Order (10-15 minutes). g. <u>Church History</u>: the applicant's knowledge of church history in terms of major persons, heresies, and developments, with special emphasis on the Reformation and the history of the Reformed churches (15-20 minutes). h. <u>Ethics</u>: the applicant's knowledge of the meaning and function of the Decalogue, including its relation both to Christian motivation and character and to contemporary moral problems (10-15 minutes). <p>Members of classis will be given sufficient time ask questions after each area</p>
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Credential Form

CLASSICAL CREDENTIAL

The Consistory of _____ (church) at _____ (place)
has on _____ (date) delegated the following brothers:

Delegates	Alternate delegates (in order)
	1
	2

to the Classis _____ (region) which is to be held on
_____ (date) at _____ (place).

These brothers have been authorized to deliberate and decide upon all matters that have been legitimately brought to this Classis. They are to do this in total submission to the Word of God, in faithful adherence to the Confessions of the Church, and with loyal observance of the adopted Church Order.

The Consistory with the Deacons, on their part, promise to abide by all decisions which have been taken in accordance with the above conditions.

Wishing your assembly the wisdom from above through the guidance of the Holy Spirit,

With fraternal greetings,

For the Consistory

Chairman: _____

Clerk: _____

Credential Form

REGIONAL SYNOD CREDENTIAL

The Classis _____ (*region*) of the _____
 (*federation*) held _____ (*date*) has delegated the following brothers:

Delegates		Alternate delegates (in order)	
Ministers	Elders	Ministers	Elders
		1	1
		2	2
		3	3
		4	4

to the Regional Synod _____ (*region*) which is to be held on
 _____ (*date*) at _____ (*place*), in
 accordance with Article 25e of the Church Order.

These brothers have been authorized to deliberate and decide upon all matters that have been legitimately brought to this Regional Synod. They are to do this in total submission to the Word of God, in faithful adherence to the Confessions of the Church, and with loyal observance of the adopted Church Order.

Wishing your assembly the wisdom from above through the guidance of the Holy Spirit,

With fraternal greetings,

For the Classis on _____ (*date*)

Chairman: _____

Clerk: _____

Credential Form

GENERAL SYNOD CREDENTIAL

The Classis _____ (region) of the _____
(federation) held _____ (date) at _____ (place) has
delegated the following brothers:

Delegates		Alternate delegates (in order)	
Ministers	Elders	Ministers	Elders
		1	1
		2	2

to the General Synod which is to be held on _____ (date)
at _____ (place), in accordance with Article 25e of the Church
Order.

These brothers have been authorized to deliberate and decide upon all matters that have been
legitimately brought to this General Synod. They are to do this in total submission to the Word of
God, in faithful adherence to the Confessions of the Church, and with loyal observance of the
adopted Church Order.

Wishing your assembly the wisdom from above through the guidance of the Holy Spirit,

With fraternal greetings,

For the Classis on _____ (date)

Chairman: _____

Clerk: _____

Comments on PJCO 2010

Prefacing Comments

We composed this document to assist the reader in evaluating PJCO 2010.

Before getting into the substance of this document, the reader should be aware of our “modus operandi” as joint church order committee.

Since the general synods of 2007 we received a large amount of input from the United Reformed and Canadian Reformed Churches. Each member of the joint committee received a copy of each item of correspondence received. Every item of correspondence received before the March 1, 2009 deadline as set by the general synods was carefully considered. The United Reformed brothers carefully considered and drafted recommendations regarding all matters raised by the United Reformed Churches, and the Canadian Reformed brothers did the same regarding all matters raised by the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Correspondence received late was scanned for issues not already brought up in previous correspondence. Recommendations for these issues were then also drafted.

Recommendations for changes to PJCO 2007, both from the Canadian Reformed brothers and from the United Reformed brothers, were then deliberated and decided upon by the joint committee. These specific deliberations and decisions form the basis for the comments made in this document.

This document, therefore, is not at all exhaustive: such would require a substantial commentary. Rather, this document is meant as a walk through PJCO 2010 which highlights some of the rationale for the changes made to PJCO 2007 in response to the input from the churches.

The reader will wish to read through this document with the two-column document at hand.

Status and Placing of the Documents Around the Church Order Proper

Before getting into the articles of the church order itself, we should consider the status and placement of documents around the church order proper.

We received questions and expressions of concern regarding the status of the Introduction, the Foundational Statements (called “Foundational Principles” in PJCO 2007), and the Ecclesiastical Examinations (called Examination Appendices in PJCO 2007).

In our deliberations we considered a number of matters:

1. Some general considerations:

While Scripture and the Confessions are normative documents, the church order is regulative.

The unique regulative character of the Church Order itself as compared to the Introduction, Foundational Statements, the Ecclesiastical Examinations, and the Credential Forms should be highlighted. Mere “proceduralism” should be avoided in the handling of the Church Order.

Instead of referencing specific appendices or regulations number, the PJCO itself should simply name the appendix or the regulation to prevent it from assuming a “procedural” flavor.

This unique regulative character of the Church Order itself will not be compromised by putting all the documents together in one booklet. In fact, particularly the Introduction and the Foundational Statements will serve to underline the unique regulative character of the Church Order.

2. Some considerations regarding the nomenclature and status of the Foundational Statements:

The term “Foundational Statements” rather than terms such as e.g. “Biblical References” avoids Biblicism.

The term “Foundational Principles” could be construed as too strong: the statements should not be considered as of the same level and character as our confessional standards, or serve as another basis of appeal besides Scripture, the Confessions, and the Church Order. Hence the term “Foundational Statements” is preferable, and the reference to “Foundational Statements” in PJCO 59 should be removed.

The introduction to the Foundational Statements is as follows: “The following list of foundational statements, though not exhaustive, provides a clear biblical basis for and source of our Church Order.” This introduction helps to clarify the status of these statements, highlights that they are didactic, and serves to concretize important principles that need to be kept in mind when working with the Church Order.

The Foundational Statements should be placed up front to avoid the notion that they were crafted as an “after the fact support” for the Church Order.

3. Some considerations regarding the Introduction:

The phrase “Biblical and Confessional Basis” in the Introduction does not impart to this introduction a confessional status;

The introduction attaches an important connection about what we believe and how we implement it. Providing this introduction will serve to prevent the Church Order from being treated as a haphazard document;

An introduction by its very nature belongs at the beginning.

4. Some considerations regarding the Ecclesiastical Examinations:

These regulations (as well as the Credential forms) are actually applications of the church order. They are “procedural” in nature and thus should be kept separate from the Church Order proper.

Including particularly the ecclesiastical examination regulations with the Church Order, however, will serve to promote good order across the federation. They deal with admission to the pulpit, and thus are very important. They should not end up becoming a “wax nose” which can be modified willy-nilly.

Given such considerations we decided to:

Change the nomenclature “Foundational Principles” to “Foundational Statements;

Change the nomenclature “Examination Appendices” to “Ecclesiastical Examinations;”

Remove reference to the Foundational Statements” from PJCO Article 59, The Observance and Revision of the Church Order;

No longer specify in the Church Order the exact examination number but simply use the title of the examination in question;

Order the documents as follows: Introduction, Foundational Statements, Church Order, Ecclesiastical Examinations, Credential Forms. In due time synodical regulations could also be added;

Recommend that all the documents listed be printed along with every reprinting of the Church Order.

Introduction

We deemed as fitting the suggestion to add the words “the spread of the gospel” to the second paragraph of the section called “Biblical and Confessional Basis.”

In the same sentence to which we added the words “the spread of the gospel” we also referenced I Corinthians 14:40 for reasons explained in the comments on PJCO Article 1.

We did not make any changes to the Historical Background. Other than the change of name from “Foundational Principles” to “Foundational Statements” we only made one change to these statements: we added the reference of Ephesians 4:3-4 to the fourth Foundational Statement since it fits very well with the mention of “spiritual unity.”

PJCO Article 1, The Purpose and Divisions of the Church Order

We corrected an enumeration error in the PJCO 2007 version of this article.

In the PJCO 2007 version of this article, I Corinthians 14:40 was explicitly referenced in connection with the mandate to maintain proper ecclesiastical order. We decided to remove this reference from the Church Order proper and place it in the introduction since many provisions of the church order could be referenced in this way. Such referencing in the church order proper is not necessary particularly given the inclusion of the Foundational Statements with the Church Order.

I. OFFICES

PJCO Article 2, The Three Offices

We changed the first words of this article from “Christ has instituted three distinct offices in the church:...” to “The offices of the church are...” The reason for this change lies in the well known debate regarding whether Christ has instituted two offices or three offices in the Church. While the stronger language of saying that Christ instituted three distinct offices in the church could be helpful in addressing the wrong tendency of speaking of “the office of evangelist,” “the office of church musician,” etc., such language also says more than Articles 30 and 31 of the Belgic Confession.

We added to this article the stipulation that none shall exercise an office without subscribing to the Three Forms of Unity” in order to remove the necessity of repeating this stipulation three times over in the articles dealing with the office of minister, office of elder, and office of deacon. This also leaves it in the freedom of the churches as to whether the subscription form is actually signed just prior to or just after actual ordination.

With regard to the stipulation that no one shall exercise an office without having been lawfully called to it with the cooperation of the congregation, we received the suggestion that “cooperation” should be changed to “affirmation” or support. We decided not to take over that suggestion so as to in no way diminish the vital importance of congregational involvement in this matter. Such necessity of congregational involvement is rooted in the office of all believers.

PJCO Article 3, The Duties of the Minister

We decided to add to the list of duties of the minister the matter of “visiting members in their homes” and “comforting the sick with the Word of God.” This fits with Acts 20:20 and the Form of Ordination, and is also in line with PJCO Article 17, The Duties of Elders.

We also decided to expand the phrase “catechizing the youth” to “catechizing and instructing the youth in the doctrines of scripture.” We noted that the term “catechizing” nicely connects to the Heidelberg Catechism, while the new formulation at the same time does not restrict instruction to just one of the confessional statements and nicely highlights the goal of the instruction.

We received expressions of concern regarding the phrase “watching over his fellow office-bearers,” particularly since PJCO 2007 had this terminology only in this article and not in the article about the elder (Article 17). Many find that the terminology has the flavor of “lording.” This language, however, is in the Dort Church Order and does fit with the concept of “overseer.” A suggestion was made to use the language of “ensuring that they faithfully carry out their office,” but this does not capture the point of this stipulation. We decided to retain the language of “watching over” in this article but also to include this same language in the article about the elder (Article 17) in order to preclude that the minister has a higher office than the elder.

PJCO Article 4, Preparation for the Ministry

We received much input here particularly from Canadian Reformed Churches (both in submissions and in the Regional Conferences) requesting the inclusion in PJCO Article 4a a provision that the churches shall maintain an institution for the training for the ministry. Following are some of the grounds given for such an inclusion:

- this is in line with the principle stated by Synod Chatham of the Canadian Reformed Churches (Article 98, 5.16.3) which stated that there should be at least one federational seminary;
- theological education should be “by the churches, for the churches.” A federational seminary is the fullest way to express the principle that the churches take full responsibility for training for the ministry (II Tim 2:2);
- Both Synod Smithers 2007 (Article 103, 3.3) and Synod Schererville 2007 (Article 52) agreed with the following six points:
 1. It is the task of the churches to train ministers;
 2. Ministers of the churches must receive sound Reformed theological training;

- 3. As a principle, the training of ministers should be done by ministers;
 - 4. Such training is best accomplished in the context of institutional theological education;
 - 5. It is acknowledged that active involvement of the churches is required for the training of ministers and to protect the confessional integrity of such training;
 - 6. The churches, i.e., the URCNA and CanRC, should work towards theological education that is properly accountable to the churches;
- The positive history of a federational seminary in the Canadian Reformed history;

When the input from the churches started coming in we decided to simply flag this matter and leave it alone until we would receive word from the Theological Education Committee regarding what recommendations it would be making to the General Synods of 2010. At the Regional Conferences we also explained that while PJCO Article 4a does not speak of a federational seminary, it at the same time does not preclude it either: it remains an article that needs work.

When we ascertained that we would not be receiving any input from the Theological Education Committee then we considered the following:

- From the beginning we always said that we cannot really address this. The fact that the Theological Education Committee has not come through with anything does not change this.
- For us now to seek to address this issue could come across as presumptuous.

We decided, therefore, to continue to leave this article unchanged, but also highlight to the synods that this matter is not yet complete given that the synods (with their theological education committees) have not yet resolved this matter.

We also modified the last sentence of PJCO Article 4a to: “This consistory with the deacons shall also help him ensure that his financial needs are met, if necessary with the assistance of the churches of classis.” The following considerations came into play:

- There are two concerns here: the financial needs of the student must be met; the churches need to support the man while he is in seminary.
- The phrase “if he has need” could be used by the churches to really skimp. At the same time, it is important that a student does not unduly and unnecessarily burden the churches.

- There has been an overture at the United Reformed synods to adopt the language “help him ensure” as opposed to “ensure” in order to put the onus on the student.
- The phraseology “this consistory” clarifies which consistory is meant, namely the one from which he originates and not the one to which he might move in order to attend seminary.

Regarding PJCO Article 4b (Licensure) we modified the last sentence to clarify which consistory is the supervising consistory. Concern was expressed that restricting the length of the licensure to just the time of studying for the ministry could raise problems for a licentiate after graduation from the seminary and before he receives a call. We decided, however, that no change is needed since it is clear that declaration of candidacy includes licensure or authorization to preach in the churches.

PJCO Article 5, Calling a Candidate

We removed the stipulation that elders too must participate in the “laying on of hands,” considering that that Dort does not have this stipulation and that a case can be made that this laying on of hands belongs specifically to the office of the minister.

PJCO Article 6, Calling a Minister Within the Federation

We removed the word “ordained” from the title of this article since a minister is by definition ordained. We also reformulated the first sentence for clarification purposes.

Given the following considerations, we decided to add the stipulation that “Any minister receiving a call shall consult with his current consistory with the deacons regarding the call. He may accept the call only with their consent.”:

- This stipulation is found in the Dort Church Order;
- While a stipulation like this can be abused by a minister in hiding behind this provision to not seriously consider a call, and by a consistory in imposing its will, such abuses do not negate the merit of the stipulation itself;
- Historically the freedom of ministers to consider a call has been treated with great respect by Reformed consistories which are aware of the weight of a call from a church of Christ;
- It would be exceptional for a consistory to prevent its minister from accepting a call elsewhere, and the avenue is open for a minister to appeal such a decision of his consistory;

- Ministers are sinful men and thus not above seeking to bypass their consistory in deliberating a call;

For the sake of clarity we expanded the second paragraph to include 3 sections about how classis is to ensure the good order of the calling process, namely by verifying the issuance of written ecclesiastical testimonies from:

- a. the consistory of the church from which the minister is departing;
- b. the classis in which he last served; and
- c. the consistory of the church to which he is joining.

These three sections do not given an exhaustive listing of all the documents required, but highlight the three parties from which testimonies are needed.

We received the suggestion that testimony of an honorable release from classis was not needed. We maintained this provision, however, since classis has a role to play in the reception and departure of ministers within the classical region. The consistory releases a minister from service in the congregation while classis releases him from service within the classis. In this way good order in the calling process is promoted. This is not a matter of classis placing itself above consistory, but rather a matter of mutual help and accountability for doing things properly.

PJCO Article 7, Calling a Minister from Outside the Federation

We changed the title of this article to reflect more accurately its content, namely that of calling a minister from outside the federation. Article 7 of PJCO 2007 did not contain any provisions for the calling of a minister from a federation with which we have ecclesiastical fellowship. This was rectified by adding another paragraph which now serves as the opening paragraph in this article. We also substituted the phrase “ordained minister” with simply “minister” (also in PJCO Article 38) since a minister is by definition ordained.

Regarding a minister from a church with whom the federation does not maintain ecclesiastical fellowship, we regarded as proper to add the stipulation that such a minister must first become a member of a congregation in the federation. We also deleted the words “to the satisfaction of classis” since “sustaining an examination” implies this. We noted that the examination regulations will ensure that the deputies for Regional Synod are present at this examination.

We were questioned about what would determine “adequate period of consistorial supervision.” This would depend upon circumstances which the supervising consistory would have to consider in its determination of “adequate period.” We decided to add the words “determined by his consistory” to make clear that the consistory will determine what is an adequate period.

PJCO Article 8, Bound to a Particular Church

The phrase “All ministers shall remain subject to the Church Order” was changed to “each minister shall remain bound to the Church Order” in order to maintain consistency with the title of this article and since this terminology fits better with that subscription form.

To pre-empt the broadening of the concept of “other ministerial task” to include positions such as Bible instructor at a high-school (for which there is no reason for a man to retain his status as minister), we decided to add the words “such as chaplains and professors of theology.” This will serve to limit and clarify what is meant by “some other ministerial task.”

PJCO Article 9, Bound for Life

We made no changes to this article.

PJCO Article 10, Support and Emeritation of Ministers

For the sake of clarity we decided to change the first sentence from “Each church shall provide honorably for the minister...” to “Each church shall provide honorably for its minister...”

We received input favoring the establishing of a denominational fund for the support of retired ministers. In discussing this we noted that the United Reformed Churches and the Canadian Reformed Churches currently have different practices. We concluded that the responsibility for emeritation ought to be retained by the consistory of the church in which the minister last served, but that the other churches are obligated to help where this is necessary. We also discussed whether we should stipulate that this help should come from the churches in the classical region, but opined that this would perhaps be “over-regulation.” We settled on the wording, “...the church which he last served, which shall provide honorably for his support, with the assistance of the churches if necessary.”

PJCO Article 11, Temporary Release

We saw merit to the view that the time period of “four months” was too restrictive in the sentence “If the duration of the release is greater than four months, the consistory shall obtain the concurring advice of classis.” Hence we changed the time period from “four months” to “one year.”

PJCO Article 12, Exceptional Release of a Minister

We received conflicting input regarding the “up to two years” time period for adequate support of a minister released as per this article. A number of Churches suggested that the stipulation should be “up to three years” in order to give adequate opportunity for a minister to receive a call who

perhaps needs some time for recovery and who strives to continue diligent labour in ministerial tasks. At the regional conferences, however, voices were heard suggesting that “up to two years” was too long. To address the possibility of the good circumstance of a released minister labouring diligently and being able to convince his consistory that released him of the merit of seeking more time to receive a call, we decided to adopt the following wording: “This eligibility shall be valid for two years, whereafter he shall be honorably discharged from office. Upon the request of the consistory that released the minister, classis may extend his eligibility for call for no more than two additional years.”

PJCO Article 13, The Nomination and Election of Elders and Deacons

The first line of this article in PJCO 2007 stated, “The council shall provide adequate preparation of elders and deacons by means of instruction and training regarding the duties of each office.” Since this could come across as if the consistory itself has to provide the actual instruction, this line was modified to “The consistory with the deacons shall provide instruction and training of elders and deacons.”

For the sake of clarity we changed the phrase “who indicate their agreement with the Form of Subscription” in the paragraph that begins with the word “First” to “who indicate their willingness to sign the Form of Subscription.”

Regarding the stipulation that “ordinarily the number of nominees shall be twice the number of vacancies” input was received suggesting that this be removed particularly given smaller churches where this would be impossible and given churches that practice life-time eldership. We decided to retain the stipulation as a safeguard against self perpetuation while at the same time noting that “ordinarily” gives the flexibility needed.

In the paragraph that begins with the word “Second” we added the stipulation of announcing the names of the nominees on two Sundays before the date of election to ensure congregational approbation in the whole process. Speaking of “announcements,” we changed “two weeks prior to entering office” to “two Sundays prior to entering office.”

For the sake of clarity we specified the regulations as “local regulations.”

PJCO Article 14, The Term and Ordination of Elders and Deacons

We discussed adding a stipulation to the effect that as much as possible a proportionate number of elders and deacons shall retire each year. We noted, however, that the case can be made that “term eldership” is actually abnormal and we need not “over-regulate.”

PJCO Article 15, Subscription to the Confessions

We made no changes to this article.

PJCO Article 16, Parity Among Office-bearers

We mad no changes to this article.

PJCO Article 17, The Duties of Elders

Under PJCO Article 3 (The Duties of the Minister) we already explained the reasoning behind the first change in this article.

We decided to change the ambiguous phrase “confessionally Reformed Schooling” to “schooling...that is in harmony with the Word of God as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity.”

We receive input to the effect that while the Christian nurture of covenant children belongs to the pastoral supervision of the elders, the promotion of schooling is not an ecclesiastical calling associated with the office of elder. While the matter of Reformed Schooling is important, it is too specific a matter to be included in this list of general matters pertaining to the offices. The matter of promoting Reformed schooling is but one matter of many in the pastoral work done in the congregations as office-bearers guide the congregation in preparing the youth of the church for a life of service. We considered this input and decided to leave the wording as is considering that “promotion of schooling” is not the same as “promoting specific schools,” and that promoting of education of children in the ways of the Lord is a very strong scriptural mandate, given particularly to the leaders of the people.

We also received objection to the words “at all levels” within the phrase “promote confessionally Reformed Schooling at all levels.” The input argued that these words seem to bind the consciences of office-bearers to promoting the establishment and attendance of Reformed colleges and universities, and mandates them to fulfil a role that is properly the concern of the school society or home-schooling organization. Our considerations for leaving the language “as is” are as follows:

- It is arbitrary to speak about the promotion of confessionally Reformed Schooling only at the primary and secondary levels of education while not at the tertiary level.
- The article does not speak about the establishment of schools per se.
- This provision addresses a prevalent dualistic notion that the Church is the kingdom of God, and schooling belongs to the secular realm.
- The phraseology expresses the need for leadership in this matter.

Regarding the location of this article within the church order, we received input stating that Scripture teaches that the responsibility for godly training of covenant children belongs to parents. This leads parents to enrol their children in a Reformed school or to teach them at home, depending on communal and/or individual circumstances. The place for an article on Reformed education in the Church Order, therefore, is not in PJCO 17 (The Duties of Elders) but in PJCO 38 (The Baptism of Covenant Children). We decided to leave the matter as is since the Dort Church Order also has an article on schools (Dort 21) which is apart from the articles on baptism.

We added the stipulation that elders shall engage in annual home visits to ensure regular visitation, something that perhaps has merit particularly in our time.

PJCO Article 18, Protecting Doctrinal Purity

We made not changes to this article.

PJCO Article 19, The Duties of Deacons

We changed the stipulation of the deacons giving a “monthly” account of their work to a “regular account” since “monthly” is not found in the other church orders (Dort, CanRC, URCNA) and over-regulates.

PJCO Article 20, The Civil Authorities

We made no changes to this article.

II. THE ASSEMBLIES

We received numerous communications, particularly from United Reformed Churches, regarding the perceived development of hierarchy in the PJCO. In response to this the following was drafted:

PJCO committee statement on the authority of broader assemblies.

The PJCO committee has received numerous communications from churches which have raised questions or registered concerns over a perceived development of hierarchy in the PJCO. At the heart of these concerns lies the desire to defend the authority of the consistory against encroachment upon that authority by a classis or a synod.

The following statements on the nature of broader assemblies are understood by the committee to underlie the Reformed church polity of the church order of Dort, and are thus reflected in the PJCO according to the committee’s mandate to follow the principles of Dort.

The authority that Christ gives to His church rests with the consistory (PJCO Article 22, cf. Foundational Statement 6). Therefore when broader assemblies are convened they do not take over or replace the authority of the consistories.

The churches give broader assemblies the jurisdiction (i.e., the mandate to make decisions) only to deliberate and to make decisions on all matters lawfully placed before them (PJCO Article 21.d.). The Church Order, as agreed to by all the churches (PJCO Article 58), stipulates what matters are lawfully placed before the broader assemblies.

Members of broader assemblies are those who have been delegated by narrower assemblies (PJCO Article 21.c.). Once a broader assembly is constituted, the delegated brothers become members of that assembly. Therefore, each member of a broader assembly serves the good of all the churches with respect to the matters lawfully placed before that assembly, rather than represent the interests of his sending body.

Broader assemblies are deliberative in nature (PJCO Article 21 a). Whereas a consistory may give input and direction concerning overtures on the agenda to the men it delegates, it may not bind their votes. Rather, it should write a letter to the assembly concerning its conviction. Binding votes would negate the need for deliberative reflection on the issues, and consistories could then simply send in their votes by written ballot. The size of broader assemblies should not impede careful reflection and deliberation, by being either too large as to make broad participation in such deliberation by its members unwieldy and impossible, or too small as to lack in depth and breadth of wisdom.

By common consent the churches agree to abide by the decisions of a broader assembly because a matter to be decided upon at the broader assembly has been lawfully placed before it by way of a consistory's request or an appeal.

The decisions of a broader assembly must be considered settled and binding, and must therefore be implemented, unless found to be in conflict with Scripture, the Three Forms of Unity, or the Church Order (PJCO Article 21 e).

PJCO Article 21, Ecclesiastical Assemblies

In the section of this article dealing with "delegation" (c.) we removed the stipulation in PJCO 2007 which required "each delegate to indicate his agreement with the Form of Subscription" considering the following:

- The issuing of proper credentials guarantees the good standing of the minister and the elders according to the terms of their office, including PJCO Article 15 (Subscription to the Confessions). According to the credentials delegates are authorized to transact matters only in faithfulness to the Three Forms of Unity.
- The Churches delegate the men: hence the assemblies themselves have no authority to ask this question or to discipline those who might be at odds with the form of subscription.
- To require indication of agreement with the Form of Subscription also at the broader assemblies becomes a matter of redundancy: vow upon vow – and each is the same.
- “Agreeing with the form of subscription” could be taken narrowly to agreeing with the form in and of itself.

We also removed the words “as required in Appendix X” given that Credential Forms are not really part of the Church Order proper but are “forms” used for the working out of the Church Order stipulations.

In the section of this article dealing with jurisdiction (d.) we replaced the last paragraph of this section as found in PJCO 2007 with the following wording, “All matters that pertain to the churches in common must originate with a consistory and must receive the support of the narrower assembly before being considered by the broader assembly.” This should help ensure that a classis, for example, does not just “pass along” an overture from a consistory to a regional synod, but also actually supports the overture (perhaps with some modifications or additional grounds).

In the section of this article dealing with decisions (e.) we changed the terminology from “the Reformed Confessions” to “The Three Forms of Unity” for the sake of clarity.

Article 21 in PJCO 2007 had a section called “Proceedings” and another called “Records.” We combined all the material under “f. Proceedings,” thereby putting all the tasks of the officers of classis in one article and making more clear that not only the duties of the clerk but also of the chairman and the vice-chairman cease when the assembly itself ceases.

Speaking of the officers of classis, we received comments suggesting confusion between a clerk of an assembly, and a clerk working under the supervision of a convening church. These two functions are not the same.

In the section of this article dealing with censure (g.) PJCO 2007 stipulated that admonition for those who demonstrated unworthy behaviour be given particularly at the close of the assembly. This time reference was dropped as unnecessary and perhaps even a hindrance to more timely admonition.

PJCO Article 22, The Consistory

Particularly from the Canadian Reformed sources we received input that the deacons should be considered part of the consistory to prevent the danger of hierarchy by the elders over the deacons. The input appealed particularly to Article 30 of the Belgic Confession which includes the deacons under the term “council” and speaks of the work of the council in terms of governing. We decided, however, not to add the deacons to the consistory since the office of deacon is not one of ruling or governing the church. This is also in line with the Church Order of Dort.

Regarding the term “council” in Article 30 of the Belgic Confession, the original Dutch version does not call it “the council” but says that it functions as a council (als een raad) of the town. The term “council” itself has reference to “civic bodies of government (cf. Idzerd VanDellen and Martin Monsma in The Revised Church Order Commentary, p. 111 (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1967)). The Belgic Confession, therefore, as a confession of testimony to the outside world, compares the government of the church to a civil government for illustrative and explanatory reasons. To use the terminology of this comparison to suggest that therefore the deacons too have a ruling office is improper. In fact, consistency in using this comparative terminology to say that Article 30 of the Belgic Confession stipulates that the office of deacon includes “governing” necessitates saying that Article 30 also stipulates that the office of elder includes ensuring “that the poor and all the afflicted are helped and comforted according to their need.” Both matters are found in the same context. Scripture, however, is clear: governing belongs to the office of elder, and caring for the poor belongs to the office of deacon.

In PJCO 2007 we used the term “council” throughout the articles of the Church Order, and further specified in Article 22 that “the term council designates not an assembly of the church, but a meeting of the elders and minister(s) with the deacons under the authority of the consistory, at which matters are dealt with as stipulated by the Church Order or as assigned by the consistory.” We reverted back to the terminology of “consistory with the deacons” given what is stated in the paragraph above about the term “council” as well as the following considerations:

- Though the terminology “consistory with the deacons” is perhaps more cumbersome than the term “council,” it is less confusing;
- The terminology fits with the terminology used in the Dort Church Order;
- The term “council” gives credence to the mistaken view that the deacon’s office is a ruling office;
- The popular conception of the authority of “the council” as the highest governing body in the church, even over the consistory, is a concern. In times past the deacons were considered part of the consistory, and had a lot of power.

PJCO Article 23, Small Number of Office-bearers

In line with what is stated above under PJCO Article 22, we received input particularly from the Canadian Reformed side objecting to the provision which speaks of the deacons merely giving advice instead of being added to the consistory in situations where there are a small number of office-bearers. We remained with what we previously decided, however, since the office of deacon is not one of ruling or governing the church.

PJCO Article 24, Instituting a New Church

For the sake of clarity we changed the wording of this article. We also changed the words “the neighbouring consistory” to “a neighbouring consistory” in order to give the necessary flexibility in situations where the nearest church might not be the most able to provide supervision.

PJCO Article 25, Classis

To preclude any notion of a broader assembly being a continuing body, we deleted the definite article from the title of this article so that it now reads “Classis” instead of “The classis.” For the same reason we changed “The Regional Synod” in the title of PJCO Article 28 to “Regional Synod,” and “The General Synod” in the titles of PJCO Article 30 to “General Synod.” In line with this we also changed “The” to “A” in the first sentences of the second paragraphs of PJCO Article 28 (Regional Synod) and PJCO Article 30 (General Synod).

Regarding section c (Convening), PJCO 2007 stipulated that the churches shall take turns providing a chairman from their delegation. For practical reasons we reverted back to the stipulation of Dort 1920 which states that the assembly shall choose one to preside.

In section d (Mutual Oversight) we removed the adverb “wholeheartedly” in the phrase “and confessionally Reformed schooling is wholeheartedly promoted.” We did this for the sake of consistency with PJCO Article 17 (The Duties of Elders), and since the adverb improperly highlights the matter of “confessionally Reformed schooling” even over the other matters in the list.

PJCO Article 26, Church Visitors

We received input wondering about the practicality and principle of appointing elders as church visitors. Following are some of the considerations received:

- Since elders normally serve in their office for a term of three years, how will the two-year appointment of elders as church visitors function well? Classis needs to know quite well the elders whom it appoints as church visitors, but can only appoint those whose term still has at least two years.

- Since ministers sign the classis subscription form, and elders do not, it is understood that ministers will serve in certain capacities within churches of the federation other than their own local church. Elders do not sign the classis subscription form and hence do not generally serve beyond the bounds of their own local church. Once elders are made to serve classis churches on a broader level, as this article proposes, then subscription at the classis level would be necessary.

The joint committee considered these matters and decided to leave this stipulation as is given the following considerations:

- Currently in the Canadian Reformed Churches only ministers sign the subscription form at classis, while in the United Reformed Churches both ministers and elders do. Neither the Church Order of the United Reformed Churches nor the Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches, nor the PJCO, however, stipulates that office-bearers need to sign the form for subscription at classis.
- Elders should not be precluded from this task simply because of the practice of term eldership.
- It is possible to have appointment of church visitors each year: in one year they would be appointed for half of the churches and in the other year for the other half.
- In United Reformed practice the elders that serve as church visitors often have it stated that this task ceases when their term as elder ends.

Given the stipulation in Article 44 of the Church Order of Dort, Article 27 of the Church Order of the United Reformed Churches, and Article 46 of the Canadian Reformed Churches, we decided to add as a duty of the church visitors to “admonish those who have been negligent.” We also took out some of the archaic wording in PJCO 2007.

PJCO Article 27, Counselors

For the sake of clarity we slightly modified the wording of this article.

PJCO Article 28, Regional Synod

For the sake of clarity we changed the word “via” to “by the way of” in the phrase “The regional synod shall deal only with matters properly placed on its agenda by the churches via classes...” We did the same in PJCO Article 30 (General Synod).

Particularly from the United Reformed Churches we received a lot of input questioning and objecting to Regional Synods and Regional Synod Deputies. We therefore crafted the following rationale:

1. Historical. Although regional synods have not been used in some Reformed denominations in North America, traditional Reformed church polity around the world (including North America) has acknowledged and generally employed regional synods as part of church government. Throughout most of its history, the Christian Reformed Church in North America made provision for regional synods in its Church Order, but never implemented those provisions. It is worth reflecting about the developments within the CRC in the decades after removing these provisions from its Church Order. In Europe, South Africa, and Canada, regional synods have functioned meaningfully.

2. Juridical. Perhaps the most important (though not the only) function of regional synods consists in adjudicating appeals and reviewing overtures in a timely manner. Usually the general synods meet once every three years, a time period that is not adequate for adjudicating appeals. The absence of regional synods virtually requires annual general synods if justice and pastoral care are to be administered properly in the church.

2.1 In this connection, the concern and warning that regional synods will increase hierarchy must be met with the observation that precisely the absence of regional synods invests general synods with such a degree of urgency and responsibility that the general synods tend to exhibit the features of hierarchy and domination. Moreover, the evil of hierarchy is not inherent in a system of broader assemblies, for hierarchy can be manifest within consistories as well.

2.2 The use of regional synods for adjudicating appeals and reviewing overtures helps to prevent these matters from escalating into federation-wide controversy, because they are reviewed and addressed in their regional context rather than a national or international context.

2.3 The use of regional synods for reviewing overtures will ensure that the overtures that come to general synods have already been deliberated and enjoy the support of a larger number of consistories. Conversely, overtures that do not gain support would then come to general synod only by way of appeal, if necessary.

3. Broader, not higher. Today's pervasive need for historical awareness within the church can be met only when we seek to understand why our spiritual ancestors applied the Bible to the life of the church as they did. Fundamental to this application was the notion that beyond the local congregation, church assemblies are not higher but broader in character. As broader assemblies, they seek to ensure and safeguard the federation's shared interests, including the most frequent role of their deputies, which is to ensure the following of regularized procedures for entering and leaving the office of minister of the Word and sacraments. Particularly the minister's office,

though exercised within local congregations (note the plural), is not restricted in its exercise to a single local congregation. For this reason, in order to protect both the minister and the congregations, because ministerial ordination authorizes a federation-wide exercise of office, the procedures and standards for entering and for leaving this office must be regularized. To construe or represent this oversight as a form of hierarchy is seriously mistaken and erodes the continued unity and well-being of the federation.

PJCO Article 29, Deputies of Regional Synod

In addition to what is stated above regarding deputies of regional synod, we note two changes to this article. Firstly, for the sake of clarity the wording of the second paragraph of this article was revised. Secondly, both for the sake of clarity and to prevent any impression of a Regional Synod being an ongoing body, we changed the words “regional synod” to “the next regional synod” in the final paragraph so that the sentence now reads, “They shall submit a report of their actions to the next regional synod...”

PJCO Article 30, General Synod

To be consistent with the terminology of the articles on classis (Article 25) and regional synod (Article 28), and to reflect that once seated as members of a broader assemblies the brothers are not there as delegates from their sending body but rather as members of the current body, we changed the first phrase of the article from “A general synod, consisting of delegates chosen by the classes...” to “A general synod, consisting of those delegated by the classes...”

We also deleted the words “at least” as superfluous from the phrase “shall meet at least every three years” in the opening sentence: the following sentence already provides for an earlier convening of General Synod if necessary.

PJCO Article 31, Appeals and Procedure (Article 55 in PJCO 2007)

In PJCO 2007 this article was placed under the Discipline section of the Church Order. It fits better, however, under the section of Assemblies, and thus we moved it into this section and logically placed it right after the article regarding General Synod.

In order to avoid any connotation of hierarchy, we decided to remove the word “level” from the first line which stated “When all avenues for settling a dispute at the consistory level have been exhausted...” It now reads “When all avenues for setting a dispute with the consistory have been exhausted...”

For the sake of clarity regarding standard, we replaced the words “The Reformed Confessions” with “The Three forms of Unity” in two places in this article.

PJCO Article 32, Ecumenical Relations (Article 31 in PJCO 2007)

We repackaged the content of this article considering the following:

- Input from the churches made clear that greater clarity was needed;
- Stipulating that local relations should have federative unity as its goal will properly encourage progress in the relationship and provides rationale for federational involvement before advancing to preaching exchange and fellowship at the Lord’s Supper.

Several churches expressed the wish to remove the stipulation that a church must receive the approbation of classis before such ecumenical relations progress to include preaching exchange and fellowship at the Lord’s Supper. They find the stipulation restricts the local consistory and in effect puts the supervision of the pulpit and the Lord’s Table in the hands of synod. In considering these sentiments the joint committee noted the following:

- our ministers must undergo rigorous examinations at classis in order to fill the pulpits and our licentiates and candidates must be “certifiably” Reformed in doctrine and life;
- the PJCO does not thereby put supervision of the pulpit and the Lord’s Table in the hands of synod. There is no infringement on the authority of the consistory to agree as churches to common standards for our pulpits and the Lord’s Table.

To clarify in the paragraph about local ecumenical relations that classical decisions about local ecumenical relations pertain only to that local church which has requested classis to grant approbation for the local ecumenical relations to include preaching exchange and fellowship at the Lord’s Supper, we decided to change the wording from “a church” to “each church” in the phrase “...each church must receive the approbation of classis before such ecumenical relations progress to include preaching exchange and fellowship at the Lord’s Table.”

We replaced the phrase “the Three Forms of Unity” with “the Reformed Confessions” in the first part of this article in light of the fact that both the United Reformed Churches and the Canadian Reformed Churches have significant ecumenical relations with faithfully Reformed Churches whose creedal formulations are not identical (e.g. the Orthodox Presbyterian Church).

PJCO Article 33, Admitting a Church (Article 32 in PJCO 2007)

We changed the terminology “agree with the Church Order” to “agree to abide by the Church Order” since that is really the issue.

We decided not to replace the phrase “gifts of gratitude” with “Christian offerings for the poor.” While it is true that Lord’s Day 38 uses such language,

the phrase “gifts of gratitude” covers more. It was also noted that even though Lord’s Day 38 also mentions the sacraments, that does not mean that the sacraments have to be celebrated in every service: the same applies to the matter of “offerings for the poor.”

III. WORSHIP, SACRAMENTS, AND CEREMONIES

PJCO Article 34, Regular Worship Services (Article 33 in PJCO 2007)

For the sake of consistency with the titles of the proceeding articles, we deleted the definite article from the title.

We did not take over the suggestion that the this article should state that the law must be read each Lord’s Day since the items listed in this article are not meant to be exhaustive. If we would want to be exhaustive then we should also list matters like the reading of scripture, the benediction, etc.

PJCO Article 35, Special Worship Services (Article 34 in PJCO 2007)

We decided to change the wording of this article given the following considerations:

PJCO 2007 only stipulated that special worship services “may” be called in observance of the redemptive historical events listed. A Church Order should not merely stipulate what “may” be done: a Church Order does not need to mention that a consistory may call the congregation together for a special worship service.

The point really is not “may be called” but “shall be commemorated.” In the phraseology of PJCO 2007 these events need not even be commemorated.

We have to keep in mind, for example, that we don’t know in which time of year Christ was born, and thus to say we must celebrate Christmas on Dec 25 is something we cannot do.

PJCO Article 36, Psalms and Hymns (Article 35 in PJCO 2007)

While not entirely consistent, many Canadian Reformed Churches expressed strong support for the provision that the lyrical renditions of the Psalms and hymns be “approved by general synod,” and many United Reformed Churches expressed strong disagreement. The joint committee regrets that the general synods of 2007 received a “minority report” without also receiving a “majority report” that would have explained the rationale for the majority position. The joint committee therefore decided to ensure that in the submissions to the general synods of 2010 the majority report would be included and the minority report would once again also be submitted.

For the sake of precision we modified the phrase "...the congregation shall sing faithful musical renderings of the Psalms..." to "...the congregation shall sing faithful lyrical renditions of the Psalms..."

PJCO Article 37, Admission to the Pulpit (Article 36 in PJCO 2007)

For the sake of consistency we changed the first line of this article from "Consistories shall permit men to administer the Word and the sacraments..." to "Consistories shall permit men to preach the Word and administer the sacraments..."

In PJCO 2007 this article stipulated that only ministers, licentiates, and candidates of churches in ecclesiastical fellowship may be allowed on the pulpit, granting exception only occasionally, only to those who faithfully subscribe to the Reformed Confessions, and only with prior approbation of classis. This "exception clause," though having no precedence in the Dort Church Order, was crafted considering the reality that there are faithful churches that we do not officially recognize and that at times exist in erring federations. It was also crafted so as to be quite restrictive. Numerous Canadian Reformed Churches, however, expressed reservations about this exception clause out of concern for the safeguarding of the pulpit. The article was revised to remove students and candidates from even being considered for an exception, and to clarify that an exception can be granted to a church only occasionally for a minister who subscribes to the Reformed Confessions.

A number of churches also wished to remove the word "prior" in the phrase "prior approbation of classis" so that the granting of permission by a local church would appear on the credential to classis "after the fact." Given the vital importance of admission to the pulpit, however, we refrained from deleting the word "prior."

PJCO Article 38, Administration of the Sacraments (Article 37 in PJCO 2007)

We deleted the definite article "the" in the title of PJCO 38 (as well as 39 and 40) for the sake of consistency.

PJCO Article 39, Baptism of Covenant Children (Article 38 in PJCO 2007)

We made no changes to this article.

PJCO Article 40, Public Profession of Faith (no counterpart in PJCO 2007)

Many United Reformed Churches questioned why PJCO 2007 contained no article regarding public profession of faith. Since public profession of faith is an important act in the church and is referred to elsewhere in the PJCO (Article 43) we decided to add this article.

PJCO Article 41, Baptism of Adults (Article 39 in PJCO 2007)

We made no changes to this article.

PJCO Article 42, Administration of the Lord's Supper (Article 40 in PJCO 2007)

We made no changes to this article.

PJCO Article 43, Admission to the Lord's Supper (Article 41 in PJCO 2007)

Many Canadian Reformed Churches submitted input regarding this article and the joint committee again deliberated extensively on the matter. Following are some of the concerns expressed:

- Reference should be made also to the practice of using a letter of testimony or attestation.
- The article should reflect the principle that it is the responsibility of the elder, not the individual himself, to bear witness to a person's godly doctrine and life.
- PJCO 2007 has a double standard regarding admission of people to the Lord's Supper. For members of the local church the standard is "public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life", while for visitors the standard is "confirmation of their biblical church membership, of their proper profession of faith, and of their godly walk of life." For visitors a Reformed confession is not demanded as it is of members, and thus the standard is lesser. Does this not wrongly allow for partiality (Deut 1:17, Prov 24:23, and 1 Tim 5:21)?
- It is improper for members to be admitted to the Lord's Supper on the basis that the elders know their doctrine and life while visitors could be admitted on the basis of their own testimony.
- It is not essential for visitors to participate at the celebration of the Lord's Supper should it happen to be celebrated on a Sunday when the visitors are in the area. Therefore it is incumbent on the guests, who wish to participate when visiting another church or congregation, to show proof of having made public profession of faith and lead a godly life. Such proof can easily be supplied by an attest signed by two elders of their home congregation. Modern technology even allows for this via fax and other means should an unexpected situation arise.
- The terminology "as much as possible" is subjective and open to various interpretations.
- The term 'biblical' is much too broad and is open to interpretation and argumentation. The formulation of PJCO 2007 could be used to allow people to the table who even out-rightly reject the confessions

of the Reformation, which would contravene what we confess in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession.

- If we allow persons of non-Reformed confession to participate in the Lord’s Supper, which is to participate in the body of Christ and is an expression of unity with the local body of Christ, how can we refuse them membership in the church?
- In refusing people from other churches at the table we are not rendering a judgment about these particular churches, i.e. whether these churches are true or false. In fact, precisely by denying admittance to everyone without distinction who happens to come from churches with which we are not in ecclesiastical fellowship, we refrain from making such judgments.

Following are some considerations of the joint-committee:

- For the Canadian Reformed Churches this matter is a “flash point.”
- The article crafted does not mean visitors will be admitted on their own testimony: the phrase “as much as possible” implies that testimony will normally be there.
- One can argue whether indeed we ought to have exactly the same standard for visitors as for members. It is much more serious if a consistory fails to discipline its own members than if it wrongly allows a visitor at the Lord’s Table.
- We have to keep things in perspective: the norm remains that the Lord’s Supper is given in the local church for its own members. Having visitor present is an “exception” that we seek to regulate.

We adopted new terminology that removes the words “as much as possible.”

PJCO Article 44, The Church’s Mission Calling (Article 42 in PJCO 2007)

We received input suggesting that PJCO Articles 44 and 45 go far beyond the scope of what a Church Order article should include, and has the flavor of suggesting that it is now the job of the consistory to ensure that each member has filled a certain quota of evangelism or mission type tasks. In our deliberation about such sentiments we considered that to say or suggest that the mission calling belongs only to the ministers of the Word and not to the members creates a false dilemma: while maintaining the importance of the office of missionary, the mission mandate, particularly after Pentecost, is an important mandate given to the Church. Also in response to the concerns articulated (e.g. “a certain quota”), we changed the first line of PJCO Article 45 to highlight the necessity of engaging in evangelism relying on the Holy Spirit.

For the sake of clarity we changed the phrase “...and supervised by their consistories...” to “...and supervised by their respective consistories...”

Considering how regeneration is the work of God (Lord's Day 32) we decided to change the wording "those who have come to the faith" (which could be taken to imply an action of man) to "those who have been converted to the faith."

For the sake of economy of words we shortened the phrase "labor and service" to simply "service."

We received input suggesting that the PJCO should include regulations for the matter of church plants. Following are some of the items of discussion on this matter:

- Since there is nothing in the Church Order, various United Reformed classes have said, "This is the path you have to follow."
- In the Canadian Reformed Churches there is a general synod decision about this having to be dealt with on a local level.
- Could a Church Order really address and explain how to go about church planting? Whatever we might put in will likely not answer the real questions people have. No Church Order or synodical stipulations can prescribe exactly how church planting should be done given how local situations can be extremely varied. The Church Order ought not to include anything beyond what is already stated in PJCO 24 (Instituting a New Church).
- It is noteworthy how the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America each have a "Mission Order."
- Would not classis be the place for churches to address various questions and work together on issues of Church Planting?

We decided, therefore, to not add anything into the PJCO for church plants beyond what is already stated in PJCO Article 24 (Instituting a New Church).

PJCO Article 45, The Church's Evangelism Calling (Article 43 in PJCO 2007)

We received objections to having a separate article for evangelism. Following are some of the objections

- There is no precedent for this in Reformed Church polity;
- The article lacks a governance flavor and sounds more like a mission statement which, though good in itself, does not belong in a church order.

We decided to keep the article, however, noting the following:

- The difference between the Church's Mission Calling and Evangelism Calling is a difference between the official activity of the church and the witnessing and more personal, ongoing activity of Christians. While Mt 28 does not provide for this distinction, it does cover it.

- Evangelism should be in the church order because it specifies the task of the consistory as that of calling to promote the involvement of church members in this important work.
- The Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland has added an article on evangelism.
- It is important, particularly in our time, to stipulate the necessity of people joining the church: this should be clearly stated.

We also decided to change the terminology “...affiliating with His church...” to “...being joined to His church...”

We revised the opening wording of this article somewhat for clarity and to highlight the necessity of going about this task in reliance upon the Holy Spirit, which sets Reformed evangelism apart.

PJCO Article 46, Marriage (Article 44 in PJCO 2007)

We changed the phrase “instruct and admonish” to “instruct and exhort” due to the modern negative connotation of “admonish.” We chose the word “exhort” due to its “appeal” nuance.

PJCO Article 47, Funerals (Article 45 in PJCO 2007)

We made no changes to this article.

PJCO Article 48, The Church Records (Article 46 in PJCO 2007)

We made no changes to this article.

IV. DISCIPLINE

Particularly at the Regional Conferences, and particularly from United Reformed Churches, this section of the PJCO received praise for its clarity and direction.

PJCO Article 49, The Nature and Purpose of Discipline (Article 47 in PJCO 2007)

We made no changes to this article.

PJCO Article 50, Consistory Involvement (Article 48 in PJCO 2007)

We made no changes to this article.

PJCO Article 51, The Reconciliation of a Member (Article 49 in PJCO 2007)

We made no changes to this article.

PJCO Article 52, The Discipline of a Member (Article 50 of PJCO 2007)

Our attempt made in PJCO 2007 to deal with the discipline of communicant and the non-communicant member together proved confusing and unworkable. The term “mature non-communicant member” as used in PJCO 2007, for example, suggests legitimacy for a member to be mature without professing his faith and also makes it impossible to censure a “not yet mature non-communicant member.” We therefore divided this article into two parts. Part A pertains to a communicant member and part B to a non-communicant member. In the process we reformulated some of the terminology in order to have uniformity of language within the two parts of the article.

Regarding Part A, PJCO 2007 had as first line under “Silent Discipline” the following: “a member who persists in sin shall be suspended by the consistory from all the privileges of church membership, including using the sacraments and voting at congregational meetings.” We changed this to “a member who persists in sin shall be suspended by the consistory from participating in the sacraments, and is thereby not a member in good standing.” We made this change given the following considerations:

- The sacraments are a means of grace: this sets them apart from e.g. privilege to vote;
- The Church Order of Dort also mentions only the Lord’s Supper;
- Communicant membership in and of itself does not entitle one to vote.

Regarding Part B, we were asked from the United Reformed side why PJCO 2007 had no stipulations regarding “exclusion” in the disciplinary process. The category of “exclusion” is operative in the United Reformed Churches to refer to what the Canadian Reformed Churches know as “excommunication of non-communicant members.” This language of exclusion is also found in the old CRC Church Order. We did not adopt the language of exclusion in the Church Order given the following considerations:

- The term “excommunication” can be understood covenantally (excluded from the community) or sacramentally (excluded only from the sacraments). For a communicant member excommunication is both sacramental and covenantal; for a non-communicant member excommunication is covenantal only;
- While it sounds contradictory to speak of “excommunication of a non-communicant member” the point of “excommunication” is not simply “barring from the Lord’s Supper table” but more comprehensively “barring from the communion of the Church”;

- The term "excommunication" highlights the severity of discipline.

While working on this article we also decided to note that a united federation of churches will need forms for discipline.

PJCO Article 53, The Readmission of an Excommunicated Person (article 51 in PJCO 2007)

We made no changes to this article.

PJCO Article 54, No Lording it Over (article 52 in PJCO 2007)

We made no changes to this article.

PJCO Article 55, Mutual Censure (Article 53 of PJCO 2007)

We added the words "and encourage" in order to highlight the positive intent of this article.

PJCO Article 56, The Suspension and Deposition of an Office-bearer (Article 54 in PJCO 2007)

We were questioned why the deacons are not included in this article, especially since they are involved in appointment to office. We did not change this provision noting that suspending and deposing is a matter of special discipline that belongs particularly to the office of elder. Just because deacons are involved when office-bearers are admitted to office does not mean that they must be involved in discipline. Once again the important point is "office." We also noted that Article 79 of the Church Order of Dort speaks of "the preceding sentence of the consistory" (not "the consistory with the deacons") when it comes to suspension and deposition of office-bearers.

Turning to the first paragraph of this article, we removed the word "temporarily" in the phrase "temporarily suspended" since the concept of "temporarily" is already implied in the word "suspension."

We considered as valuable the suggestion to add to the fourth paragraph the provision that "No broader assembly may suspend or depose an office-bearer." We considered adding this provision to PJCO Article 21 d (Ecclesiastical Assemblies, Jurisdiction), but noted that deposing of office-bearers by a broader assembly has nothing to do with "jurisdiction" but would be nothing less than "power grab."

We modified the last paragraph of this article which addresses the matter of reconsideration for office by adding the stipulation that reconsideration for office may only be done with the involvement of the consistory that deposed the man. We discussed whether the classis involved in the deposition should also be involved in the reconsideration, but this would be impossible: classis

is not a continuing body. At the same time, in the case of a minister the stipulation that “the regular procedure for entering office shall be followed” will ensure classis involvement.

PJCO Article 57, The Reception and Departure of Members (Article 56 in PJCO 2007)

Regarding section a. (The Reception of Members) we changed the terminology of “shall be received” and “shall be admitted” to “may be receive” and “may be admitted” since otherwise the stipulation could be taken to mean that the consistory has no choice in this matter (even when a testimony is not good).

We further specified “testimony” to “letter of testimony” from the former consistory in order to ensure decency and good order in the matter of receiving members. We noted that the term “attestation” could be an adequate term here as well, but the term “letter of testimony” is more descriptive and more widely used.

We received input suggesting that we stipulate that this letter be signed by two. We did not adopt this suggestion since the point is not “signed by two” but “official testimony of the entire consistory.” Dort also speaks of one signature if the letter is sealed, and today official letterhead also has bearing.

We received input expressing the desire to see a stipulation included that requires announcements to the congregation of the names of those wishing to join the church prior to their actual admission, whether these persons come from churches in ecclesiastical fellowship or not. In this way there would be prior congregational approbation. In dealing with this we decided to add the stipulation that both the reception and departure of members shall be appropriately announced: engaging the congregation in the reception and departure of members is fitting. We also considered, however, that it would not be proper to require prior congregational approbation in the case of members coming from churches in ecclesiastical fellowship since such would undermine the significance of our mutual recognition. At the same time it would be proper for members coming from other churches. The current wording of the article which speaks of “appropriately announced” is generic enough to meet both situations.

Moving on to section b. (The Departure of Members), quite a number of Canadian Reformed Churches expressed the conviction that letters of testimony for communicant members should not be sent directly to the church to which the member is moving, but rather should be given to the member(s) himself who in turn shall give it to the consistory of that church which he hopes to join. After all, the responsibility of joining a new church when moving to a new location remains the responsibility of the member, who should therefore himself give the letter of testimony to the new consistory. Following are considerations of the joint committee on this matter:

- In the United Reformed Churches most consistories do not issue letters of testimony directly to the members to enable them to join another church, but send such letters to the destination consistory;
- Even if an attestation is forwarded from consistory to consistory, the individual involved still has responsibility in the whole matter: he has to submit a written request to the consistory requesting this to happen;
- The conviction that the member submits himself to the office-bearers (and thus he should give the attestation) fits with the office of all believers. At the same time, the conviction that a consistory ought to send an attestation to another consistory at the request of the member fits with the elders being undershepherds who do not entrust the care of the sheep to themselves, but to other undershepherds;
- To rely on the members themselves to forward the letter of testimony to the destination consistory has lead to members “quietly withdrawing” and “falling between the cracks”;
- It indeed is important that members know the content of a letter of testimony issued.

Given the above, we decided to include a stipulation that a copy of the letter of testimony be given to the member.

As already mentioned above, we added the stipulation that also “the departure of members shall be appropriately announced. This contends with the reality that a member may be involved in a Mt 18 situation. Announcing the request for a letter of testimony in order to join another church ensures that the consistory is able to grant such a letter with full confidence and in clear conscience.

We discussed adding a provision to PJCO Article 57 regarding “temporary membership” for e.g. students studying elsewhere, but decided that a church order need not cover every situation imaginable.

In PJCO 2007 this article also had a “c” and a “d” section which we decided to delete.

The “c” section, called “The Withdrawal of Members,” stimulated much input and deliberation. In the end we decided to eliminate reference to “withdrawal” from the PJCO altogether and to simply specify in the article that all receptions and departures of members should be appropriately announced. Following are some of the considerations for this decision:

- Having a provision for withdrawal in the Church Order has no precedent in Reformed Church Polity.

- Having such a provision would also mean trying to specify or defining exactly what withdrawing actually is.
- It is true that “withdrawals” is very much a sinful reality of our day. In spite of much discussion we have not been able to draft anything that is satisfying. We can distinguish between one who leaves to join another church (e.g. Baptist) and one who leaves for other reasons. We can speak of “sinful withdrawal” and “non-sinful withdrawal.” “Non-sinful” could still be “unwise.”
- PJCO 2007 simply sought to stipulate appropriate announcement of a withdrawal. This single line in PJCO 2007, however, only served to raise questions at the conferences.
- Specifying that all departures of members be appropriately announced would address this need for appropriate announcing withdrawals.

If we drop the mention of withdrawal, then we are saying that it is a matter of local regulation.

We cannot address everything in the Church Order, and mere mention of something can inadvertently legitimize the practice.

The “d” section was called “Letter of Testimony.” This section is no longer needed since the provision of a “letter of testimony” is now mentioned in the first section of this article.

PJCO Article 58, Property (Article 57 of PJCO 2007)

We made no changes to this article.

PJCO Article 59, The Observance and Revision of the Church Order (Article 58 of PJCO 2007)

As mentioned above in the section about the status of the documents, we deleted the reference in this article to the Foundational Statements.

Ecclesiastical Examinations

Each of the examination regulations stipulates that members of classis will be given sufficient time to ask questions after each area of examination. Having discussed this matter further, we decided to clarify that after each area of examination, classis will vote to proceed to the next section without thereby indicating that the examinee has sustained this section.

The Licensure Examination

In PJCO 2007, this examination regulation stated that the license to exhort in the churches shall be valid “as long as [the student] continues preparing for the

ministry of the Word and the sacraments, subject to annual review by the licensing classis.” We deleted the words “subject to annual review by the licensing classis” as unnecessary.

The Candidacy Examination

We decided to delete the term “whole-hearted” in PJCO 2007 Appendix 2, B, 8, c (as well as in Appendix 4, part 2, B, 9 and Appendix 4, part 2, B, 10 (2 occurrences)) in line with the Biblical requirement that our “yes be yes” and our “no be no.”

We also decided to change the stipulation of “nine months of full-time work” to “six months of full-time work” given the following considerations:

- Churches expressed concern that “nine months” was too much, especially if the seminary program is only three years long;
- Stipulating “nine months” could result in students getting their practical experience after graduation, which is not desirable.

Under “required documents” we changed “a medical certificate of good health” to “a medical report of health.” To specify a “certificate of good health” over regulates: a classis will have the good sense to know what to do with a man’s health, whether good or bad. Chronic illness does not necessarily preclude one from serving well in the ministry.

Several United Reformed Churches expressed the desire for the option of classis waiving the requirement for an ordination examination for an examinee who does very well in his candidacy examination and who ends up accepting a call to a church in that classis. This practice is currently allowed in the United Reformed Churches, contends with the fact that the Candidacy Examination is much weightier than the Ordination Examination, and would save a classis work (without sacrificing the safeguarding of the pulpit). Hence the following stipulation was added to the Regulations for the Candidacy Examination: “If the candidacy exam is sustained and the candidate accepts a call within one year in the classis which examined him, the ordination exam may be waived. The classis that examined him may make such a decision.”

The Ordination Examination

Other than the change mentioned under “Ecclesiastical Examinations” above, no changes were made.

The Examinations for those who already are Ministers

In PJCO 2007 The Examination for Ordained Ministers had three parts in order to cover various scenarios which would call for examination of men who wish to be ordained or who have already been ordained in other federations. For the sake of clarity we changed this so that we now have:

1. Ecclesiastical Examination for a Minister from a Church With Whom the Federation Maintains Ecclesiastical Fellowship (cf. Article 7 part 1);

2. Ecclesiastical Examination for a Minister of a Church With Whom the Federation Does Not Maintain Ecclesiastical Fellowship, and who is Seeking Eligibility for Call to a Church of the Federation (cf. Article 7 part 2);

3. Ecclesiastical Examination for a Minister of a Church With Whom the Federation Does Not Maintain Ecclesiastical Fellowship, and who, Together with his Congregation, is Seeking Entrance into the Federation (cf. Article 33).

We fixed up the terminology in the first of the above three examinations to reflect that the examinee in this case has already been ordained. We also fixed up the terminology in the third of the above three examinations to reflect that the examinee in this case does not become eligible to be admitted to the ministry, but to be admitted “as minister of his congregation in the federation.”

We added to the examination of a minister from a church with whom the federation maintains ecclesiastical fellowship a component called “Church Polity” since some federations with whom we maintain ecclesiastical fellowship have a significantly different church order and church political practices.

Credential Forms for Broader Assemblies

These were not included in PJCO 2007 since at that time we had not yet finalized our composition of them. These are forms: in an actual credential the blanks in the forms would be filled in and typically it would appear on stationary with the letterhead of the sending body.

Series of horizontal lines for taking notes.

Majority Report of the Joint Church Order Committee

1. Background

In the Joint Church Order (JCO) Committee Report to Synod Smithers 2007 and Synod Schererville 2007 the churches received a minority position on Article 35 of the JCO by two of the committee members. This article, which in the revised Proposed Joint Church Order (PJCO) is Article 36, reads:

Article 35 (New PJCO 36) Psalms and Hymns

The 150 Psalms shall have the principle place in the singing of the churches. In the worship services, the congregation shall sing faithful musical renditions of the psalms, and hymns which faithfully and fully reflect the teaching of Scripture in harmony with the Three Forms of Unity, provided they are approved by general synod.

Although the committee had not anticipated that the synods would interact with the minority position as presented in the “Minority Report” (without also having before it the position of the majority of the committee) this is in fact what happened. It is therefore important that the churches receive the rationale from the majority of the committee for including the proviso: “provided they (the psalms and hymns) are approved by general synod”. Hence we submit this “Majority Report.”

The Church Order Committees of the URCNA and the CanRC were mandated by their general synods to propose a common church order in the line of the Church Order of Dort. As we move together to a new Reformed church federation, we endeavor to reflect our common heritage in the Church Order. In line with many other Reformed churches, we seek to embrace and maintain our historical roots by encoding a Reformed principle and practice that has served the churches well throughout the centuries – also with respect to her singing.

Our report will focus first of all on the reasons why the churches are best served by synodically approved songs and, secondly, on the reasons why leaving the selection of songs to individual churches is not desirable.

2. Why the churches are best served by synodically approved songs

2.1 Since the committees were mandated to formulate a Church Order in the line of the Church Order of Dort, the historical precedent that synod approve the songs we sing in the worship service is significant. Dort Article 69 on Psalms and Hymns clearly stipulates:

In the Churches only the 150 Psalms of David, the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer, the Twelve Articles of Faith, the Songs of Mary, Zacharias and Simeon, the Morning and Evening Hymns, and the Hymn of Prayer before the sermon shall be sung.

NB: Synods both in the Netherlands (Middelburg, 1932) and (Grand Rapids, 1930) recognized that the position of Dort on the singing of hymns was too restrictive – and moved to broaden the *selection* of hymns which could be sung in the worship services. Nevertheless, it was then, and ever continued to be the principled position of those churches – both in the Netherlands and in North America – that it is the responsibility of a Synod *to approve* the songs that may be sung by the churches in the worship services. To regulate otherwise removes a strong historical precedent, a precedent that has served the Reformed churches well throughout their history. (Cf. The Church Order Commentary, [the MCMXLI edition] of Van Dellen and Monsma, pp. 282-284.)

In keeping with this precedent, Reformed church federations worldwide have Church Orders that stipulate synodical involvement in approving not only the Psalms but also the hymn selections. (See e.g. RCNZ, CO Art. 66; FRCSA, CO Art. 69; FRCA, CO Art. 64; CanRC, CO Art. 55; GKNv, CO Art. 67; and GKSA, CO Art. 69). Therefore, a proposal that the matter of song selection be left to the freedom of each consistory removes an important and vital historical precedent. We note, therefore, that the proposal that the matter of song choice be left to the freedom of each consistory violates this CO principle of Dort, and must be rejected.

- 2.2 Having synodically approved renditions of the psalms and synodically approved hymns fosters unity and peace within the federation. It adheres to the principle “one Word” and “one faith” (cf. Eph. 4:3-5) in the church of Christ, for the adage holds true: “the church confesses as she sings”. The songs we sing during the worship services have to do with the teaching and the confessing of the church. Therefore, the provision that the churches together approve the songs that may be sung in the worship services promotes a common commitment to the Confessions and promotes unity in the church of Christ.
- 2.3 Leaving the song selections to the freedom of the churches, even if regulated by synodically adopted standards, opens the door to disputes in the churches about congregational singing. There is ever the tendency to yield to what is judged to be popular for the moment while being less than cognizant of un-Reformed influences in such songs. Additionally, leaving the choice of songs to the freedom of the churches inevitably opens the door to excessive influence of personal tastes and preferences, especially on the part of ministers. History has shown that where there is this freedom, questionable songs do come into usage. Agreeing to sing synodically approved songs will help serve the unity of the churches for years to come. Their selection/adoption is, therefore, a matter of mutual concern for the churches.

2.4 Maintaining the principle of synodically approved songs also shows a care for churches that may need, and indeed may benefit from, more regulative direction on this subject than others might require. We recognize that this may not be a popular idea in our day and age. Nevertheless, the fact cannot be denied that the desire/need to provide regulative guidance lies behind many of the regulations of Dort. Neither can it be argued that we have outgrown the need for such regulative guidance – especially in the selections of songs which may properly be sung in our worship services. The fact is, we are weak and prone to err. Therefore, standing together on the ever so important matter of song selection is not only for our mutual protection, it will also provide help to the weaker churches – and therein is an exercise of Christian love within the fellowship of Christ’s church.

2.5 Given the propensity to be sentimental and pragmatic regarding the issue of song selection, it is important to ensure that the long-term welfare of the churches *as a united federation* determines our starting point. The fact that the churches need to seek synodical approval for the songs that are sung in the worship services does not take this matter out of the hands of the consistories; rather, it makes this a matter that the churches work on together.

It should be noted also that Dort regulated the matter of the approval and adoption of songs in the same way that it regulates the use of e.g. the Liturgical Forms that were to be used in the worship services. Such continues to be done in Reformed church federations to this very day – without anyone thinking or suggesting that that constitutes an interfering with the authority of a consistory.

3. Why leaving the selection of songs to individual churches is not desirable

The Majority of the committee was not persuaded by either the force or indeed the correctness of the arguments which were presented at our meetings by the Minority and subsequently drafted in their Minority Report. We will, therefore, at this point touch on/respond to some of the points raised in our meetings and reflected in the Minority Report.

3.1 The Minority asserts that there is insufficient “Scriptural precept, principle, or precedent which (would) require that the general synod, rather than the local consistory, must approve all music used in the local churches”. Surely, that is overstating the case – especially in light of the principle so succinctly articulated in the expression: “as a church sings, so she confesses”. Additionally, as was noted in point 2.2 above, having synodically approved renditions of the psalms and synodically approved hymns adheres and gives expression to the Scriptural principle: “one Word” and “one faith” (cf. Eph. 4:3-5).

Moreover, even if there were not to be found a specific “Scriptural precept, principle or precedent” the argument of the Minority is really a moot point. After all, if such a line of argumentation were judged to be valid, it would necessitate the removal of several other articles presently in the Church Order. For example, where is the “Scriptural precept, principle, or precedent” that would require that there be a meeting of Classis every four months, and/or that a Classis examine students for the ministry, and/or that a church be faithful in the use of the synodically approved Liturgical Forms. However, our churches have agreed that it is wise that such practices be adhered to as regulated by the Church Order.

- 3.2 The Minority Report (in its second point) contends that requiring synodical approval of the songs that may be sung in the worship services of our churches “places an impractical restriction on the local church which wishes to reach other cultures with the Gospel.” We recognize that there is the challenge of ministering to people “who do not all speak English....” However, it should be noted (a) that such a situation is the exception, not the rule; (b) that the exception may neither destroy nor may it negate the rule; and (c) that there are ways to deal with the exception without violating the rule – e.g. in exceptional circumstances, churches ministering to non-English speaking peoples could be permitted to use a number of hymns with the understanding that they will place such hymns before Synod for approval. Nevertheless, the ‘norm’ would still be that the churches present such hymns for approval prior to their use in such a ministry.
- 3.3 A second “practical” issue is raised in point 5 of the Minority Report. After correctly acknowledging (a) that “both the principle and the practice of singing in public worship only those songs approved by synod have a deep and broad history among Reformed churches” and (b) that “usually this principle and practice are defended with an appeal to preserving unity among the churches” the Minority argues: “Nevertheless, given the current circumstances that exist among the churches we seek to serve with this Church Order, one very foreseeable and probable consequence of codifying this requirement in the current Church Order will be the fracturing of the unity already being enjoyed among the congregations”.

It should be noted, however, that the Church Order seeks to reflect what we as churches agree is *normative*. If maintaining faithfulness to *the norm* is seen as a threat to “the unity already being enjoyed among the congregations”, then it is the task of the federation to defend among its member-churches what *faithfulness to the norm* demands/requires of the churches. The threat of a potential “fracturing of the unity” of the churches may never be used to coerce the church to forsake what it confesses to be *the norm* for her life and action.

- 3.4 Contrary to the minority view with respect to the matter of (a possible) fracturing of our unity, we are of the opinion that unity will be enhanced by singing from a common songbook the songs the churches have jointly adopted as Scriptural songs. As churches we want to sing the best songs possible during the worship services so as to obtain the highest standard in God's service. To that end we need the wisdom of many counselors – a principle we apply also in Foundational Statement #10. Therefore we believe that there is great merit in having the churches agree on the songs approved for singing during the worship services. NB, this does not in any way prevent a consistory from analyzing songs it deems appropriate for worship – only, let a church submit to “the wisdom of many counselors” the song selection(s) which it would have the churches include in the songbook of the churches.
- 3.5 As was noted earlier, the “Minority Report” properly affirms that “both the principle and the practice of singing in public worship only those songs approved by synod have a deep and broad history among Reformed churches”. It is our sincere desire to promote that “historical principle and practice” since it is our conviction that it has served the churches well. We are of the conviction that the issue therefore is not “a (possible) restricting or constricting of the responsibility of a consistory to exercise leadership and oversight in the congregation”. Rather, the issue is: Do the churches recognize that they express their unity *precisely in their use of what they adhere to in common*, namely: their Creeds, their Church Order, their Songbook, their Liturgical Forms? Surely, the churches would not tolerate a practice where each consistory would claim the freedom to write its own Creed(s), Church Order or Liturgical Forms – with the argument that in its unique ministry such a practice was (is) necessary. We submit that the Songbook issue falls in the same category. If that is clearly understood and accepted, the unity of our churches will be enhanced – for the glory of the Lord and our wellbeing.
- 3.6 We submit, therefore, that the argument presented by the Minority in its 3rd point is fallacious. Though we recognize that the matter of the choice of Bible translation is not an insignificant matter – as a matter of fact, many Reformed church federations recommend, if not approve, Bible translation which the churches are ‘free to use’ as they may choose – we maintain that it is not “inconsistent with what we expect” of the consistory that the churches regulate in the Church Order what songs may properly be sung in the worship services. As stated above, the churches’ Songbook is (and has historically been understood to be) in the same category as the Creeds, the Liturgical Forms and the Church Order.
- 3.7 The argument presented by the Minority in its fourth “ground” is
s p e c i o u s .

A Minority Report of the Joint Church Order Committee, re. PCO 35

Background

It has been a privilege for us to serve our federation by functioning on the Joint Church Order Committee with brothers from both the United Reformed Churches in North America and the Canadian Reformed Churches. Our presentation of this minority report in no way indicates any personal differences with these brothers. It does indicate a difference of perspective on a very specific matter. We support the vast majority of the Proposed Church Order which is a thoughtful, careful, and hopefully helpful work which will assist in bringing our two federations together.

Objection

Our objection is centered on Article 35: **Psalms and Hymns**. It says, "The 150 Psalms shall have the principal place in the singing of the churches. In the worship services, the congregation shall sing faithful musical renderings of the Psalms, and hymns which faithfully and fully reflect the teaching of Scripture in harmony with the Three Forms of Unity, provided they are approved by general synod." We agree with this article with the exception of the last phrase, "by the general synod." Our present church order (Article 39, *Church Order of the URCNA*) indicates that the congregation may sing "hymns which faithfully and fully reflect the teaching of the Scripture as expressed in the Three Forms of Unity..., provided they are approved *by the consistory*." We believe that the "150 Psalms should have the principal place in the singing of the churches." There is adequate Biblical principle and precedent to use the Psalms prominently in the churches. We fully agree that any hymns sung in the worship of the churches must "faithfully and fully reflect the teaching of Scripture as expressed in the Three Forms of Unity." This is in keeping with the Biblical principle that our singing in worship must truly conform to Scripture and the Reformed Confessions. We do, however, disagree that the *general synod* needs to approve all music sung in the churches. Rather, we are convinced that our singing ought to contribute to the unity of the newly formed federation by the use of a synodically approved set of standards for music which shall be applied on the local level by the wise decision of the consistory of each church.

Reasons for the Objection

There are several reasons for our objection.

1. We have not been persuaded that there is sufficient Scriptural precept, principle, or precedent which requires that the general synod, rather than the local consistory, must approve all music used in the local churches.

2. Mandating the general synod to approve all music used in the local churches places an impractical restriction on the local church which wishes

to reach other cultures with the gospel. A number of our churches are located in areas where people do not all speak English, or who communicate better in another language. To mandate that the local church cannot use any other songs than those approved in the English language hymnal, effectively and sadly conveys an attitude that we are not interested in having any other than English speaking Reformed Christians as part of our federation. To suggest that the federation will produce a hymnal in various languages is impractical and costly. It is much more practical to permit each local consistory, which is sensitive to the local needs of other cultures, to approve of songs appropriate for these congregations.

3.

To mandate the general synod, rather than the local consistory, to approve of all music used in the worship of the churches is rather inconsistent with what we expect of our consistories. In Article 33: **The Regular Worship Services**, the Proposed Church Order states that the “consistory shall regulate the worship services,” one item of which is the singing of the congregation. Our synod does not require the churches to use a specific Bible translation. We expect our local consistory to choose a reliable and faithful translation of the Bible, something very crucial for the life and instruction of the churches. We have entrusted to the local consistory this important responsibility. Yet, by suggesting that the local consistory cannot and should not make evaluated and wise decisions about appropriate music in the churches is inconsistent with what we expect of them. At each service we expect the elders to determine whether the sermon preached was in accord with Scripture and the Reformed Confessions. If not, the consistory is expected to deal appropriately with the concern. Yet, removing the task of approving music from the consistory’s responsibility, as is indicated in the Proposed Church Order, conveys the idea that the local consistory cannot and should not be entrusted with this responsibility.

4.

To remove from the local consistory the responsibility of approving the churches’ music, and to place this in the hands of the general synod, effectively denies the churches any opportunity to use any other music than that which is contained in the current song book of the federation. This means that no church in the future may use any old music now contained in the 1976 *Blue Psalter Hymnal* which did not make it into the new federation hymnal. This means that no church may use any music which meets the criterion for entry into a new federation hymnal, but for reasons of space did not make it into the new hymnal. This means that any Psalm tune now contained in the *Book of Praise* but which will not make it into the new federation hymnal may not be sung in the future. The long standing practice of a church singing the “Hallelujah Chorus” on Resurrection morning would have to cease, because this chorus likely would not be included in the federation hymnal. If a church uses any other music than that contained in the new song book, that church will be out of compliance with the Church Order.

Furthermore, to mandate that only the general synod may approve of music used in the worship of the churches effectively puts an end to the use of any *new* Biblically, Reformed, well-written, beautiful music. The last time any changes were made to the music in the *Songs of Praise* hymnal was in 1983. The URCNA currently uses the 1976 edition of the *Psalter Hymnal*. Such books cannot be frequently updated. It is too costly and time consuming. Nor would we expect the federation to do so. Under our present Church Order, the churches could purchase the *Trinity Hymnal*, for example. If this article of the Proposed Church Order is adopted, however, this fine hymnal may not be used.

5. Both the principle and the practice of singing in public worship only those songs approved by synod have a deep and broad history among Reformed churches. Usually this principle and practice are defended with an appeal to preserving unity among the churches.

Nevertheless, given the current circumstances that exist among the churches we seek to serve with this Proposed Church Order, one very foreseeable and probable consequence of codifying this requirement in the current Church Order will be the fracturing of the unity already being enjoyed among the congregations. This fracturing of unity would arise from restricting what many have come to believe is the liberty, given by God through Scripture to the consistory, to determine, in accordance with Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity, which songs may be used in the congregation's public worship.

This liberty is in principle related to the liberty which a consistory exercises regarding the choices (1) of Bible version for public worship, (2) of catechism and Sunday School materials for youth nurture, (3) of vacation Bible school materials, and (4) of Bible study materials for use by groups sponsored by the consistory. The proposed Church Order fully recognizes the consistory's prerogative in all of these latter areas. To refuse the exercise of this same prerogative with regard to songs sung in public worship seems inconsistent and harmful.

Recommendation

In view of these objections, we wish to recommend to the synod the following wording of the Proposed Church Order Article 35:

“The 150 Psalms shall have the principal place in the singing of the churches. In the worship services, the congregation shall sing faithful musical renderings of the Psalms, and hymns which faithfully and fully reflect the teaching of Scripture in harmony with the Three Forms of Unity, provided they are approved by the consistory in accord with a synodically adopted standard.”

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Nelson D. Kloosterman
Rev. Ronald L. Scheuers

Amended Report of br. Nordeman, re. incorporation:

Incorporating churches.

Should churches or a federation incorporate?

It is important that we take a careful look at this.

I am not familiar with possible U.S.A requirements for incorporation of churches. In Canada however, it is not necessary for churches to incorporate in order to function as an entity. Churches can be organized as a charitable trust with appointed trustees.

The church is a body of believers gathered locally as the bride of Christ and of which He is the Head. As described in our Church Order, it is necessary for the maintenance of good order in the church that there are offices. The offices of minister of the Word, elder, and deacon are recognized (Art. 1 C.O.). These are Scripture based offices and not the equivalent of a board of directors in a secular organization. An important principle is that among and between the offices there is equality.

Therefore, when certain functions are assigned it is done only to divide some of the tasks. It does not assign rank. When a minister functions as chairman he does not become the president or CEO of the church.

By incorporating we reduce the church of our Lord Jesus Christ to a charitable organization, or corporate entity, that operates under the equivalent of a board of directors, called the council. It has an executive body consisting of a president/chairman, vice-president, and a secretary. The council then governs the church and has in effect two sub-committees. The elders (consistory) have responsibilities for doctrine and discipline, the deacons are responsible for the ministry of mercy and also for the finances of the church. The chairman is the chief executive officer of the corporation (church), and the clerk becomes the corporate secretary.

When we incorporate our churches they become a non-share company subject to corporate and business law, with ultimate control of the "company" in the hands of the members. This has the following implications:

The corporation is governed by and subject to a set of by-laws. These bylaws and any changes thereto must be approved by the members of the organization.

At each annual meeting the member approve, ratify and confirm all acts, contracts, by-laws, proceedings, appointments, elections and payments, made, done and taken by the board of directors

The members further need to approve all minutes of membership meetings and all financial statements.

This in reality makes the council responsible to the members of the church.

Gerry Nordeman

Revised April 17, 2008

**Reports to
General Synod Burlington-Ebenezer
2010**

Committee for a Common Songbook

REPORT TO GENERAL SYNOD BURLINGTON 2010 COMMITTEE FOR A COMMON SONGBOOK

Introduction:

The Committee for a Common Songbook (hereinafter referred to as the Committee) hereby submits a report on its activities regarding the mandate given by General Synod Smithers, 2007. As a point of clarification, the terminology introduced originally by the General Synods of Neerlandia and Escondido has changed over time. For ease of use, we will consider our Committee the “Canadian Reformed Committee for a Common Songbook” which has as its counterpart the “URCNA Committee for a Common Songbook.” When these two committees meet together, we refer to such a meeting as a “Joint Committees for a Common Songbook” meeting.

At the time of writing this report, a meeting of the Joint Committees for a Common Songbook had been scheduled for October 28, 2009. An update on this meeting will be forthcoming in the form of a supplemental report to the churches.

Membership:

The members of the Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise are the members of the Canadian Reformed Committee for a Common Songbook.

Mandate:

Article 104 in the *Acts of General Synod Smithers 2007* delineates the mandate for this Committee. One key element of this mandate is the decision to:

Reappoint the Committee for a Common Songbook with the mandate to prepare the Psalms and Hymns section for the Common Songbook (excerpt taken from par. 4.5)

Other aspects in this article deal with the place of such a songbook in the process leading towards full federative unity, as well as the purpose of a common songbook once federative unity is a reality. Article 104 in the *Acts* concludes with the observation that all the decisions regarding the URCNA were unanimous.

The implementation of the mandate implies joint meetings with the URCNA Committee for a Common Songbook from time to time.

Report on the Committee’s activities:

During the past three years, the activities of the Committee for a Common Songbook were deeply affected by a change in direction and mandate given by the URCNA General Synod Schererville IL (July 2009). This Synod’s decision to affirm “*that in addition to reaffirming our original abiding purpose to publish a new URCNA Psalter Hymnal (Synod 1999) we remain committed to the*

supplemental decision of Synod 2001 to continue to dialogue with the Canadian Reformed Churches as a parallel track.

Adopted

(Source: Acts of Synod Schererville 2007 of the United Reformed Churches in North America July 9-13, 2007. Art. 63 Point 7)

In effect, this decision changed the direction away from working together towards a common songbook. By direct implication, this decision rendered the mandate given to the Committee by General Synod Smithers impossible to attain.

Contact with the URCNA Songbook Committee:

In April 2008, a meeting of the Joint Committees for a Common Songbook was held in Wyoming ON. This meeting was followed up by an exchange of letters. Throughout this process, both parties expressed disappointment in the diverse decisions reached by the respective General Synods in 2007. We took note of the fact that the change in mandate especially affected the URCNA Committee for a Common Songbook members, since their energies would primarily be geared towards putting together a collection of hymns for presentation to the URCNA churches within a relatively short time frame. We also took note of the fact that General Synod Schererville had expressed its continued commitment *to the supplemental decision of Synod 2001 to continue to dialogue with the Canadian Reformed Churches as a parallel track.* Yet, the reality is that this work has now been put on a backburner.

Throughout our interactions, ways in which we could still continue to do some work together were suggested and explored. The Canadian Reformed Committee members observed that taking on a mere consulting or advisory role to the URCNA members in their work was not part of the mandate received from GS Smithers.

It was decided to continue to work independently for the time being: The URCNA Committee for a Common Songbook members will concentrate on publishing a new URCNA *Psalter Hymnal*, while the Canadian Reformed Committee for a Common Songbook members will devote their energies on *Book of Praise*-related matters.

It was also decided to keep each other informed on a regular basis, and to aim for an annual joint committee meeting. In the mean time, requests for feedback and input are shared between the two Committees for a Common Songbook.

Further it was decided that when we meet as joint committees, we would discuss general topics of common interest. Examples of such topics include the matter of individualism in psalms and hymns; the “vivid historic present”, as well as issues of translation in psalmody. It is hoped that in due course, these discussions may help us in the production of a common songbook.

The place and function of the jointly-developed *Principles and Guidelines*

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Committee on Liturgical Forms

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LITURGICAL FORMS AND CONFESSIONS SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE COMMITTEE FOR CHURCH UNITY

REPORT TO GENERAL SYNOD BURLINGTON-EBENEZER 2010

September 17, 2009

Esteemed brothers in Christ,

Hereby we humbly submit our report to Synod Burlington-Ebenezer 2010. As we look back over our labours, unfortunately we do not have much to report in the way of progress with regards to our mandate. Our prayer is that this report and the resulting discussions at Synod will help the Liturgical Forms and Confessions Sub-Committee gain some direction and momentum in our discussions with our URCNA counterparts.

1.0 Mandate

According to the Acts of Synod Smithers, Article 104, Recommendation 4.4, the Common Songbook Committee recommended:

“To appoint a Liturgical Forms and Confessions Committee to meet with their counterparts in the URCNA to come with a unified text for creeds, confessions, and liturgical forms and prayers, for the proposed prose section for the Common Songbook.”

This recommendation was adopted by Synod Smithers without any further elaboration.

2.0 Committee Members

Synod Smithers appointed Revs. C. Bouwman (convener), W. Bredenhof, and T. Lodder. Dr. N. Gootjes and Rev. J. Van Vliet were appointed as advisors.

Regrettably, Rev. Lodder was unable to take up his work with this committee. The committee therefore asked Rev. Van Vliet to be an active participant in our discussions. Because of his health difficulties, Dr. N. Gootjes was also unable to participate in our committee's work.

As noted above, Rev. Bouwman was appointed as the convener and he has served in that capacity. Rev. Bredenhof has served as the committee secretary.

We may note that, at the time of the writing of this report, Rev. Bredenhof and Rev. Van Vliet have moved to Hamilton.

3.0 Committee Activities

As understood by the committee, the essence of our mandate was to work with our URCNA counterparts in order to move towards unified texts for our creeds, confessions, liturgical forms, and prayers. We anticipated doing so through face to face meetings, along the same lines as that of the other sub-committees of the Committee for Church Unity (CCU). In preparation for such meetings, our committee made some preliminary studies comparing all the forms and prayers in use in the CanRC with those in use and proposed for use by the URCNA. We note that the URCNA has multiple versions of some forms (e.g. three for infant baptism), some forms we do not have at all (e.g. Form for Reception of New Families), as well as Seasonal Collects (prayers for Thanksgiving Day, Good Friday, etc.) that we do not have. We made careful notes of similarities and differences in our respective forms, as well as a number of questions for discussion or further clarification/information.

In an appendix you will find two of our studies comparing our existing forms with those of the URCNA with regards to Profession of Faith and Readmission. In these studies some of our concerns and questions are evident. It is also evident that there are both similarities and differences in these forms. We have also included two of the Seasonal Collects adopted by Synod Schererville 2007 for Synod's information. Finally, we have also included the proposed Form for Reception of New Families. This form will be presented to Synod London 2010 for adoption by the URCNA.

Though we considered face to face meetings the most productive, we soon discovered that our URCNA counterparts had agreed to serve on their committee with the proviso that they would not have to travel for meetings. Therefore, we offered to travel to southern California where the majority of their committee lives and meet at a time that was convenient for them. However, this did not work out.

In the course of doing our work we learned that the URCNA committee was in fact working with contradictory or unclear instructions from Synod Schererville. Our committee examined the decisions of that Synod and noted the following:

1. Classis Southwest US submitted Overture 17 which proposed that in Synod 2001's mandate to the Psalter Hymnal (Songbook) Committee the phrase "this song book" should be understood as referring to "a new URCNA Psalter Hymnal" (*Acts*, pg. 185).
2. At Synod Schererville, the advisory committee proposed that synod not accede to this overture and that "this song book" should be understood as referring to the Common Songbook being worked on by our respective synodical committees. Synod defeated that proposal and instead decided to accede to Overture 17 (*Acts*, pg. 32).

- 3. By acceding to Overture 17 Synod Schererville also decided that the phrase “work together with” in the Psalter Hymnal Committee should be understood as including “both consultation with and careful consideration of views advanced by the Canadian Reformed ‘Book of Praise Committee’ but only insofar as such work does not hinder, delay, or divert the Psalter Hymnal Committee from fulfilling its purpose as originally adopted” (*Acts*, pg. 185).
- 4. At the same time, Synod Schererville decided that “Synod 2007 maintain the goal for production and use of a Common Song Book, but establish that the production and use of a Common Song Book is not a condition for federative unity with the Canadian Reformed Churches.” (*Acts*, pg. 46).

We therefore asked the following questions of our URC counterparts in a letter dated October 2, 2008:

- 1. Our committee has received the mandate to meet with you face to face, while your committee appears to have the mandate to consult and consider, with the proviso that no one from your committee needs to travel for this work. Does this difference in our respective mandates effectively rule out the possibility of our committees, or certain delegates from our committees, meeting together?
- 2. On the one hand, our committee has received the mandate to work on “a unified text” of liturgical forms and prayers to be included in an eventual Common Songbook. On the other hand, we have received mixed messages from Synod Schererville (compare points 2 & 4 above). Is the URCNA still committed to working on this Common Songbook? Connected to this, is your committee still planning to work on a unified text of liturgical forms and prayers with the CanRC? If so, in what way? If not, please inform us of that, as well.

In their October 27, 2008 response, the URCNA committee stated that their committee was mandated to prepare liturgical forms and confessions for a URCNA songbook. They went on to state, “Therefore, we do not see our mandate as entailing the production of ‘a unified text’ for all future liturgical forms, as does yours.”

In their reply they also appended a copy of all their completed work to date on their revised liturgical forms and prayers. The URCNA brothers requested our thoughts on these forms and prayers. In a letter dated November 28, 2008, we made some suggestions for improvements, but until now we have not heard any official response.

4.0 Issues

4.1 URCNA Mandate Clarity

For this committee to function, there needs to be clarity from the URCNA as to the mandate of their committee vis-à-vis our committee. Our committees

cannot function together if the mandate of the URCNA committee does not include direction to work with the CanRC committee towards unified texts for a joint songbook. At this juncture, it behooves us to consider whether the URCNA is sincerely interested in unity with the Canadian Reformed Churches. Our concern on this point was communicated also to the CCU coordinators.

4.2 CanRC Mandate Clarity

Through the course of our discussions as a committee several issues arose with regards to our existing creeds, confessions, liturgical forms, and prayers.

- a. In the future, the committee will need to discuss the Three Forms of Unity. Must we insist on our editions of the Three Forms? Are the URCNA editions acceptable to us? What are we to say if the URCNA wishes to adopt editions from another church federation? Is it within the mandate of the committee to produce new editions of the Three Forms of Unity in collaboration with our URC counterparts?
- b. Is our committee to entertain the production of new liturgical forms, such as a Form for the Reception of New Families? Are we also to consider multiple forms such as found in the URCNA (Blue) Psalter Hymnal?
- c. With regards to the prayers, the present mandate does not address whether the committee has the freedom to, or is expected to propose additions to or emendations of the prayers. Other related questions arise such as: what is the purpose of the prayers? Are they teaching models or intended to be used on a regular basis? Do we envision a common songbook with a small number of prayers or are we open to the possibility of multiple prayers (i.e. having the URC prayers and traditional CanRC prayers both included)?
- d. Do we want Seasonal Collects in our joint song book?

5.0 Recommendations

- 1) Synod Burlington-Ebenezer 2010 forthrightly address URCNA Synod London 2010 on the concerns raised in 4.1.
- 2) Synod 2010 clarify the mandate of the CanRC Liturgical Forms and Confessions Sub-Committee by providing guidance as to the questions posed above in 4.2.
- 3) Synod 2010 appoint Rev. Van Vliet to the committee and use its own discretion as to where the committee should be based and who should serve.

Respectfully submitted,

C. Bouwman
W. Bredenhof
J. Van Vliet

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: COMPARATIVE STUDY OF FORMS FOR PUBLIC PROFESSION OF FAITH**Background Notes**

- Our own liturgical forms were revised and approved at Synod Cloverdale 1983
- At this point we have not done any extensive analysis of why the CanRC made the changes we did back in 1983
- Our understanding is that within the URCNA there were proposals to adopt just Form Number 1 for Baptism, Profession of Faith, and Lord's Supper, but these overtures were defeated so we have evaluated all the forms in the blue Psalter-Hymnal
- Abbreviation: POC = point of concern

Comparison Table

	Old CanRC (1972 BOP)	New CanRC (1984 BOP)	URCNA Form 1	URCNA Form 2
Intro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimalist connection to admission to Supper 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More elaborate • gratitude to God expressed • specific mention of adoption/covenant, thereby allusion to baptism • connection to admission to Supper 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not so elaborate • Gratitude to God expressed • No connection to baptism • Connection to "full communion with the people of God" not Supper per se (POC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most elaborate • Gratitude to God expressed • Explicit connection to baptism • Connection to "full life of church's fellowship" not Supper per se (POC) • POC "today... publicly accept and confirm what was sealed in their baptism" rather than respond
1st Question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "acknowledge" • content: doctrine in Scripture <i>and</i> in the articles of the Christian faith • "to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation" • promise to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "wholeheartedly believe" • content: doctrine of Scripture <i>summarized</i> in "the confessions" • "true & complete", presumably implied in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "heartily believe" • content: doctrine in Scripture <i>and</i> in articles of Christian faith • "to be true and complete doctrine of salvation" • promise to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "believe" • content: ?1 = Jesus as Son of God & Redeemer + ?2 = Scripture reveal Christ/redemption and

	continue in this doctrine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “wholeheartedly”? promise to continue in this doctrine + reject heresy 	continue in this doctrine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> confessions “faithfully reflect” this revelation no promise to continue (POC)
2nd Question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acknowledge God’s covenant promise in baptism Detest yourself because of sin Seek your life in Christ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acknowledge God’s covenant promise in baptism Detest yourself because of sin Seek your life in Christ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “accept” (POC) God’s covenant promise in baptism Detest yourself because of sin Seek your life in Christ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> =?3 “accept” gracious promises in baptism Detest... & seek... affirm union with Christ and church
3rd Question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> desire to love Lord serve Him acc. to Word forsake world, mortify old nature, lead godly life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> desire to love Lord serve Him acc. to Word forsake world, crucify old nature, lead godly life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> desire to love Lord serve Him acc. to Word forsake world, mortify old nature, lead godly life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> =?1 love & trust Christ forsake... & mortify... with repentance & joy embrace him as Lord of life
4th Question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> promise to submit to admonition/discipline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> commit as living member of Church promise to submit to admonition/discipline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> promise to submit to admonition/discipline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> commit as living member of Church discipline honor & submit to authority
Vow itself	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is your answer & “I do” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is your answer & “I do” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is your answer & “I do” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “I do” 4x <i>or</i> 4 questions changed into statements by altering “you” to “I” Optional: moment of personal “self-expression”
Post-vow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assurance of God’s grace via 1 Peter 5:10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assurance of God’s grace via 1 Peter 5:10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Charge to continue in profession (link to 1st question) Welcome to full communion with people of God (POC) Assurance of God’s grace via 1 Peter 5:10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [congregation rises] Welcome to full communion with people of God (POC) Assurance of God’s grace via Heb. 13:20,21 Cong. promises love, encouragement & prayers to those making PoF All: Apostles’

				Creed
Prayer	• No prayer in Form	• No prayer in Form	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Optional prayer in Form, with allusions to various Scriptures, and mention of covenant POC: “in their case thou didst add the special of the Holy Spirit” so that they profess 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (Required?) prayer in Form, less allusions to Scripture, mention of covenant

General Impressions & Evaluation

Old CanRC (1972)

- rather spartan; lacks warmth of language in some places

New CanRC (1984)

- helpful additions / fleshing out; some warmer language.
- (somewhat) controversial change of “articles of the Christian faith” to “confessions”

URCNA Form 1

- many similarities to both CanRC Forms, although in some respects the language is more similar to old CanRC than new CanRC
- POC – when you add together the language of a) “obtaining the privileges of *full communion*” & b) “accepting” covenant promises & c) “welcome”, the impression could be given (emphasis on *could*) that baptized members of the church are only half- or quasi- or tentatively-speaking-members, but once they make PoF they are fully (and certainly?) members. Might there be some lack of clarity or precision concerning the doctrine of the covenant which leads to this kind of language? This is a question worth discussing.
- The post-vow “charge” is interesting. CanRC has a charge to office bearers & congregation in the Ordination Forms; we have no charge to parents in the Baptism Form; we have no charge in the PoF form; we have something like a pre-vow charge in the “duties” section of the Marriage Form. Should there be greater consistency in our forms? Should there always be a charge after a vow is made? It’s a point worthy of discussion.

URCNA Form 2

- This is a Form that seeks not only to update and improve Form 1, but at least in some regards, introduce new approaches or elements
- New elements:
 - Christocentric emphasis, rather than “Lord” or “God” which usually refer to our Triune God.
 - Conscious effort to alter some words which could have a negative ring to them — such as “detest,” “mortify,” “discipline” and replace

them with more positive sounding language – such as “affirm”, “repentance and joy,” “honor.” The net result may be, though, that those making the vow are not so directly confronted with the need for detesting and putting to death the sinful self, or the need to submit to discipline. Is this a case of watering down?

- o Optional, personal “self-expression” – seems to be a kind of personal testimony. Is this liturgically appropriate? Is there a hint of individualistic attitudes?
 - o Congregational involvement – something worth considering. Because PoF is done publicly, in a worship service, it is assumed that since we (= congregation) are witnesses to the vow, we also have a responsibility toward those who make the vow. However, is there room for making this assumption more explicit such as Form 2 does?
- Same POC re: welcome & full communion as Form 1
 - POC: Beside the quote from Heb 13, Form 2 does not mention the “covenant,” which was in the 2nd question and the (optional) prayer in Form 1. In our opinion, this is not a helpful deletion.

APPENDIX 2: COMPARATIVE STUDY OF FORMS FOR READMISSION

Background Notes

- Our own liturgical forms were revised and approved at Synod Cloverdale 1983
- At this point we have not done any extensive analysis of why CanRC made the changes we did back in 1983
- The CanRC 1972 & URCNA (Blue Psalter Hymnal) are virtually identical
- Abbreviation: POC = point of concern

Comparison Table for Form for Readmission of Communicant Members

	Old CanRC (1972 BOP)	New CanRC (1984 BOP)	URCNA
Announcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is an announcement that the excommunicated member has now repented and requests to be readmitted. Therefore, if there are no lawful objection, the readmission shall occur in conjunction with the next Lord's Supper celebration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slight linguistic revision of old announcement; addition of: a) precise year of excommunication b) precise mention of # of weeks for lawful objections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is an announcement that the excommunicated member has now repented and requests to be readmitted. Therefore, if there are no lawful objection, the readmission shall occur in conjunction with the next Lord's Supper celebration; Point of Curiosity: The Excommunication Form did not have an adopted announcement, but the Form for Readmission does (?)
Explanation of Readmission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reference to keys of kingdom (Mat 18:18) which contains both closing and opening • Reference & paraphrasing 2 Cor 2:5-7 & Jn 20:23 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reference to keys of kingdom (Mat 18:18) which contains both closing and opening • Reference & paraphrasing 2 Cor 2:5-7 & Jn 20:23 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reference to keys of kingdom (Mat 18:18) which contains both closing and opening • Reference & paraphrasing 2 Cor 2:5-7 & Jn 20:23
Actual Readmission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three questions to one to be readmitted: a) genuine sorry? b) faith in forgiveness? c) promise to live in godliness from here on? The familiar triad from Catechism and other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three questions to one to be readmitted: a) genuine sorry? b) faith in forgiveness? c) promise to live in godliness from here on? The familiar triad from Catechism and other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three questions to one to be readmitted: a) genuine sorry? b) faith in forgiveness? c) promise to live in godliness from here on? The familiar triad from Catechism and other

General Impressions & Evaluation

Old CanRC (1972) & URCNA

- virtually identically to URCNA form in Blue Psalter hymnal

New CanRC (1983)

- has a number of improvements over the old form, and is generally speaking preferable.

APPENDIX 3: SEASONAL COLLECTS**Christmas**

Merciful Father, you so loved the world that you gave your only begotten Son. He who was rich for ourselves became poor, the eternal Word made flesh, a great Light shining in the darkness. Only because of your Word and Spirit have we seen that Light and been drawn into its brightness. Give us the grace humbly and joyfully to receive your Son even as the shepherds and princes who welcomed him, and to look no further for our redemption than to this child lying in a manger. In the name of Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Pentecost

Father in Heaven, we give you thanks especially on this day for the gift of your Holy Spirit. Just as you sent your Son to redeem us, you sent your Spirit to renew us after his image, and to begin even now the new creation that awaits us fully and finally at the last day. Forgive us for grieving the Spirit, forgetting the great work that he performed at Pentecost and continues to perform as he makes your Word effectual for the justification and sanctification of sinners. We give you praise for sending your Spirit of adoption into our hearts, so that we may call you "Father"; for his ministry of testifying to Christ, convicting the world of sin and judgment, and opening our hearts to receive the gospel of your Son. Even now, through the gospel, he is gathering from all nations a church to declare your goodness. May we be filled again with marvelous wonder at this saving operation of the Holy Spirit, who, together with you and the Son, is worshiped and glorified, one God, world without end. Amen.

APPENDIX 4: FORM FOR THE RECEPTION OF NEW FAMILIES

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ,

Concerning the covenant of grace, the Apostle Peter, on the day of Pentecost, proclaimed, "The promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to himself" (Acts 2:39). Therefore, when certain persons (such as Lydia and the Philippian jailer) professed faith in Jesus Christ, their whole household was baptized and added to Christ's visible church.

Ever since the days of the apostles, Christ has been pleased to add to his church both individuals and families. We thank our God that he has given you grace at this time to profess your faith publicly and to present your children for baptism. Since you have already received the sign and seal of God's gracious covenant, we ask you to answer the following questions.

Profession of Faith

First: Do you heartily believe the doctrine contained in the Old and New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and taught in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation, and do you promise by the grace of God steadfastly to continue in this profession?

Second: Do you openly accept God's covenant promise, which has been signified and sealed unto you in your baptism, confessing that you are by nature a sinner under God's just condemnation, seeking your life not in yourself but only in Jesus Christ your Savior?

Third: Do you declare that you love the Lord, and that it is your heartfelt desire to serve him according to his Word, to forsake the world, to mortify your old nature, and to lead a godly life?

Fourth: Do you promise to submit to the government of the church, including its admonition and discipline?

_____, what is your answer?

Answer: I do (to be given each individually)

Baptism of Infants and Children

Beloved congregation in the Lord Jesus Christ:

The principle parts of the doctrine of holy baptism are these three:

First: That we with our children are conceived and born in sin, and therefore are children of wrath, so that we cannot enter into the kingdom God, unless

we are born again. By this sacrament we are taught our need for cleansing from the pollution of our sin and to find purification outside of ourselves, in Christ alone.

Second: Holy baptism witnesses and seals unto us the washing away of our sins through Jesus Christ. We are baptized into the name of the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For in this sacrament the Father witnesses and seals unto us that he makes an eternal covenant of grace with us and adopts us for his children; the Son witnesses and seals the washing in his blood, so that we are freed from sins and accounted righteous before God. Likewise, the Holy Spirit assures us by this holy sacrament that he will dwell in us, sanctify us as visible members of Christ's body, giving to us all that belongs to us in Christ.

Third: Since all covenants have two parts, baptism obliges us to cling to this one God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; to forsake the world, die daily to ourselves and live to Christ. And if we sometimes through weakness fall into sins, we must not therefore despair of God's mercy, nor continue in sin, since baptism is a seal and certain testimony that we have an eternal covenant with God.

All of this applies to our children as well as to us, since in Christ we share in the covenant of grace that God established with Abraham, promising to be a God to him and to his children. For this reason, he commanded him to circumcise his male offspring (Gen 18:7). In the new covenant, the Spirit is poured out on all flesh, males and females, and all children of believers are now set apart by God. For this reason, they are to be baptized, since baptism has replaced circumcision (Col 2:11-13). From the earliest days of the church, there are examples of whole households being baptized.

You have professed faith, joining this local assembly of Christ's church, and now present your child/children for baptism.

Let us pray:

O Almighty and eternal God, who judged the unrepentant in the flood yet in your great mercy saved and protected believing Noah and his family; you who drowned the obstinate Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea and led your people through the waters on dry land—by which baptism was signified—we ask you graciously to look upon this/these your children and incorporate them by your Spirit into your Son Jesus Christ. May you be pleased to bury them with him through baptism into death and raised with him in newness of life, so that they may be so preserved in true faith and repentance that they may not fear the judgment seat of Christ, who with you and the Holy Spirit, is to be worshiped as the only God forever. AMEN.

Address to Parent/s

Beloved in Christ, you are solemnly asked to answer the following questions.

First: Do you acknowledge that your children, though conceived and born in sin and therefore subject to all manner of misery—even to condemnation itself—are sanctified in Christ and therefore, as members of his visible church, ought to be baptized?

Second: Do you promise to raise your children in the doctrine and practice that you have yourself/yourselfs professed?

Answer: I/we do.

Holy Baptism

Then the minister of Word and Sacrament, in baptizing, will say: _____, I baptize you into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Thanksgiving

Almighty God and merciful Father, we thank and praise you that you have pledged forgiveness of sins to us and to our children in the covenant of grace, signified and sealed in baptism. We ask you also, through Christ and by the powerful working of your Spirit, to govern and nurture these children in Christian faith and practice so that they too will know the mercy and goodness of your salvation all the days of their life. May they fight valiantly against the world, the flesh, and the devil, until that day when, together with us, they give eternal praise and thanksgiving in heavenly glory to you together with your Son and the Holy Spirit—the only true God. AMEN.

**Reports to
General Synod Burlington-Ebenezer
2010**

**Committee for
Contact with Churches in North America**

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The Committee for Contact with Churches in North America Report to Synod Burlington-Ebenezer 2010

September 15, 2009

Esteemed brothers in the Lord,

With fraternal greetings in the name of Christ, we submit our report to General Synod Burlington-Ebenezer 2010, as mandated by General Synod Smithers 2007. We do so in gratitude to the Lord for His blessing upon the many brotherly meetings, discussions, and visits that took place during the past three years. May the churches continue to offer prayers for increased unity in the faith among the churches with whom we enjoy ecclesiastical fellowship or other close relations.

1. Introduction

1.1 Committee members

General Synod Smithers 2007 made the following appointments for the Committee for Contact with Churches in North America: (*Acts 2007*, p.193)

R.A. Faber (convener) (2013), J. Jonker (2010), E. Kampen (2016), R.E. Pot (2013); P.H. Holtvlüwer (2016), J. Kuik (2013), A.J. Pol (2010), A. Poppe (2010).

In May 2009, on accepting a call to Australia, Rev. R.E. Pot resigned his membership on the committee; Rev. D.W. Vandeburgt was found willing to replace Rev. Pot. Replacements need to be appointed for br. J. Jonker, Dr. A.J. Pol, and br. A. Poppe, who will complete their terms in 2009, and for Rev. R.E. Pot. To maintain continuity and efficiency, the CCCNA will submit to Synod a letter containing nominations of suitable individuals who are willing and able to serve in this capacity.

Recommendations:

1. Br. J. Jonker, Dr. A.J. Pol, br. A. Poppe, and Rev. R.E. Pot, be discharged from the CCCNA, and thanked for their years of service to the churches as members of the committee;
2. Suitable replacements be appointed to the CCCNA, with consideration given to the geographic distribution of committee members in East (Ontario) and West (Manitoba), and to the candidates suggested by the CCCNA;
3. Rev. D. Vandeburgt be appointed to serve as committee member until 2019.

1.2 General activity and committee structure

Plenary meetings of the CCCNA were held on Friday, September 5, 2008, and Friday September 11, 2009. At the first plenary meeting, appointments were made as follows:

- a. Chairman: Dr. R.A. Faber
- b. Secretary: Dr. A.J. Pol
- c. Treasurer: Br. A. Poppe

Two subcommittees were maintained according to the location of committee members in Ontario and Manitoba; the following division of labour was agreed upon:

Subcommittee East: Contacts with ERQ, OPC, FRCNA, OCRC

Subcommittee West: Contacts with RCUS, RPCNA, and NAPARC

Two members of each subcommittee were responsible for attending NAPARC in 2007, 2008, and 2009. Minutes of the subcommittee meetings were exchanged via email to promote good communication and mutual scrutiny.

2. General Mandate

General Synod Smithers 2007 gave the CCCNA the general mandate: (*Acts 2007*, p.216-217)

1. Continue contact with all those churches in the Americas with which we have Ecclesiastical Fellowship according to the adopted rules, and in accordance with the mandates described in decisions taken by Synod with respect to the churches with which we have ongoing relationships;
2. Investigate diligently all the requests received for entering into Ecclesiastical Fellowship in the Americas;
3. Respond, if possible and feasible, to specific requests made to attend assemblies, synods, or meetings of other churches in the Americas;
4. Report on its findings with suitable recommendations to the next General Synod, and to present to the churches a report of its work six months prior to the convening of the next General Synod.

Recommendation:

That this continue to be the mandate of the CCCNA. We also recommend that the committee be mandated:

To keep other committees appointed by Synod informed about relevant topics, as raised by committees of churches with which we have Ecclesiastical Fellowship. Grounds: From time to time, these Interchurch committees raise matters that concern the mandate of our fellow committees (e.g. CRCA, CCU).

3. Subcommittee East

3.1 General activity

Meetings of subcommittee East were held on June 19, 2007; September 10, 2007, December 10, 2007; April 14, 2008; October

28, 2008; January 20, 2009; April 27, 2009; and July 9, 2009. Dr. Faber served as convener; until May 2009 Rev. Pot as secretary, and thereafter Rev. Kampen; and Rev. Kampen as corresponding secretary.

The subcommittee met with representatives of the ERQ's Committee for Interchurch Relations on November 13, 2007; March 28, 2008; and June 19, 2009.

With the OPC Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relationships our subcommittee met on November 14, 2007; and November 11, 2008.

Various members of the subcommittee, or those delegated by it, attended the 74th General Assembly of the OPC in Sioux Centre Iowa on June 14-15 2007; and the 76th General Assembly in Grand Rapids Michigan on June 1-2, 2009. Delegates of the subcommittee attended Synods of the ERQ on June 1-2, 2007, March 29, 2008; March 21-22, 2009; and June 19-20, 2009.

When feasible and in the interests of effective analysis and reporting, two delegates were sent to attend these assemblies.

The subcommittee members also kept in contact with one another and with their counterparts in the ERQ and OPC via telephone and email.

3.2 Reports and recommendations

Reports and recommendations are attached for the following:

1. L'Église Réformée du Québec (ERQ)
2. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)
3. The Free Reformed Churches in North America (FRCNA)
4. The Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches (OCRC)

4. Subcommittee West

4.1 General Activity

Meetings of Subcommittee West were held on June 19, 2007; September 27, 2007; February 19, 2008; August 26, 2008; January 21, 2009; May 9, 2009; and June 24, 2009. At these meetings, Dr. A.J. Pol served as chairman; br. J. Kuik as corresponding secretary, and Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer as recording secretary.

The subcommittee met with delegates of the RCUS Inter-Church Committee at NAPARC 2007, and at NAPARC 2008. The committee also met with delegates from the RPCNA's Inter-Church Relations Committee November 14, 2007; June 25-26, 2008; and November 12, 2008.

Regarding attendance at the broader assemblies, the subcommittee was represented at the 177th Synod of the RPCNA in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania June 23-27, 2008. Delegates from the subcommittee also attended the 263rd Synod of the RCUS on May 11-15, 2009.

When feasible and in the interests of effective analysis and reporting, two delegates were sent to attend these assemblies. The

subcommittee members also kept in contact with one another and with their counterparts in the RCUS and RPCNA via telephone and email.

4.2 Reports and Recommendations

Reports and recommendations are attached for the following:

- 5. The Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)
- 6. Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA)

5. NAPARC

The North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) is an organization of confessional Reformed and Presbyterian churches. As such, both subcommittees of the CCCNA have delegated two members to attend annual meetings of NAPARC, and decisions pertaining to our participation in it are normally determined at plenary meetings. For the purposes of efficient communication, planning, and operation, subcommittee West has been assigned responsibility.

A report and recommendations are attached for:

- 7. The North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC)

6. Expenses

From the time of Synod Smithers 2007, until June 22, 2009, \$12,564.44 has been spent. This does not include the expenses to NAPARC in November, 2009, which could not yet be calculated.

Respectfully submitted by your committee,

Subcommittee East:

- R.A. Faber (Elora, ON) (convener)
- J. Jonker (Owen Sound, ON)
- E. Kampen (Orangeville, ON)
- D. Vandeburgt (Burlington, ON)

Subcommittee West:

- P.H. Holtvlüwer (Carman, MB)
- J. Kuik (Winnipeg, MB)
- A.J. Pol (Carman, MB)
- A. Poppe (Carman, MB)

Appended Reports

- 1. L'Église Reformée du Québec (ERQ)
- 2. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)
- 3. The Free Reformed Churches in North America (FRCNA)
- 4. The Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches (OCRC)
- 5. The Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)
- 6. The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA)
- 7. The North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC)

CCCNA Report to Synod Burlington-Ebenezer 2010

REPORT 1: L'Église Réformée du Québec (ERQ)

Introduction

For an historical survey of relations with the ERQ the reader is directed to "Report 1: L'Église Réformée du Québec (ERQ)", p.115-118 in *Reports to General Synod Smithers 2007*, Vol.1.

1. Mandate

With respect to the ERQ, Synod Smithers decided (4.2) to enter into a Relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the ERQ under the adopted rules and to mandate CCCNA as follows: (*Acts 2007*, p. 48)

(4.3.1) To convey this decision to the next ERQ Synod, via the Interchurch Committee;

(4.3.2) To actively engage in the Relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the ERQ under the adopted rules;

(4.3.3) To express to the Interchurch Committee a willingness to provide encouragement and assistance in the adoption of the liturgical forms, and in other such matters, and to provide this assistance where possible;

(4.3.4) To respond if specific requests for assistance and advice are made on further matters of confession, church polity, liturgy, and mission, as per the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship;

(4.3.5) To continue discussion when appropriate on existing differences in confession and practice with a particular focus on admission to the Lord's Supper and the supervision of the pulpit;

(4.3.6) To meet and have contact with the ERQ Interchurch Committee and synods if and when invited;

(4.3.7) To encourage the churches to continue supporting the ERQ prayerfully, and financially when needed;

(4.4) To encourage the churches to seek out ways and means to develop contacts with individual ERQ churches as is done between Owen Sound and St. Georges.

2. Correspondence

2.1 The decision by Synod for the Canadian Reformed Churches to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship was reported to the Synod of the ERQ held June 1-2, 2007 by the ERQ delegate to Synod Smithers, Rev. P. Bédard, and by means of a letter (May 31, 2007) from your committee. Following publication of the *Acts*, a more official communication was sent to the CICR (December 11, 2007). In this letter the committee also articulated the practical

implications for Ecclesiastical Fellowship, and reviewed the Rules whereby it proposed to proceed; it also requested the ERQ to consider areas in which the Canadian Reformed Churches may assist financially. In a letter dated February 28, 2008, CICR acknowledged receipt of this letter, and reciprocated by sharing the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship that had been adopted by the ERQ; these rules are nearly identical to those of the Canadian Reformed Churches, and thus allow for immediate interaction. In other communication (May 2008), the ERQ informed our committee of an official overture from the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship; this overture was received at the March 2008 Synod.

- 2.2 To a letter from CICR (May 27, 2007) requesting input on a proposed Form for the Baptism of Infants, the committee responded upon careful consideration with a letter (July 2007); it expressed gratitude for the Reformed character of the liturgy, while suggesting alterations for the sections dealing with *Instruction*, *Promises of Parents*, and *Response of the Church*. These recommendations were received with thanks.
- 2.3 Receipt of email communication from Rev. M. Veilleux (December 7, 2007) requesting information and grounds for the Canadian Reformed practice regarding supervision of the Lord's Supper. The committee responded later that month by sending relevant materials from its archives, a bibliography and copies of representative publications, and other information.
- 2.4 Regular receipt of the minutes of the regular meetings of Synod, held thrice yearly, in March, June and November. These minutes were discussed at subsequent meetings of the subcommittee East, and, where needed, matters arising from them were pursued with the CICR.
- 2.5 Publication of a 'press release' for members of the Canadian Reformed Churches via *Clarion*, entitled "Fellowship with l'Église Réformée du Québec" (*Clarion* 57 [2008], 360). By means of this 'press release' the churches were kept informed of the status of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the ERQ.

3. Meetings of CICR and CCCNA

Delegates of CICR and CCCNA met at NAPARC in Newark, November 13, 2007. Besides sharing the highlights of Synod Smithers and the implementation of the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship, your committee addressed three items with the CICR. The first is the supervision of the Lord's Supper in the ERQ. A committee of the ERQ had been working on a report concerning the supervision of guests and visitors since 2000; by 2007 the report reflected principles and practices common to our federation. Given the diversity within the ERQ, this report did not meet with consensus, however, and no decision has

been implemented. Your committee promoted the Reformed understanding of supervision of the Lord's Supper, and further explained the implementation of it within the Canadian Reformed Churches. Secondly, the meeting addressed the status and nature of liturgical forms within the ERQ. Your committee was gratified to learn that a Form for the Public Profession of Faith has now been adopted; this form is thoroughly Reformed in character. The committees also discussed the growing number of ecumenical contacts of our respective federations. As one of the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship is that the churches shall consult each other when entering into relations with third parties, we discussed the state of relations with various other denominations.

A meeting of members of the CICR and CCCNA took place in Montreal on March 28, 2008; two items especially were discussed, namely the means whereby the Canadian Reformed Churches might assist the ERQ along the model of Owen Sound and St. Georges, and the status of the discussions regarding supervision of the Lord's Supper. Your committee learned from its ERQ counterpart that it would be impractical or unwise to apply the model of the Owen Sound-St. Georges relationship to other congregations within the federation. Especially the variations in the background and character of individual congregations makes the extension of the model unsuitable. Regarding the supervision of the Lord's Supper the committee learned again of the complex nature of congregations within the ERQ, the differences in the views of the ministers and elders, and the sensitive nature of the issue.

Besides the specific points reported above, at these meetings the following items have been treated also: general implementation of the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship (including the proper practice regarding attestations), sharing the major decisions of the respective Synods, sharing information about the principles and practices of Canadian Reformed liturgical forms (esp. *Form for Baptism*, *Form for the Public Profession of Faith*, *Form for the Ordination of Ministers*), discussing developments in third-party relations. In treating these topics, our practice has been to review the relevant official documents approved by previous Synods, relevant publications, and prior discussions both within the committee and in relation with other denominations. During the meetings of NAPARC in November 2008 it was learned that regarding a common principle and practice of admission to the Lord's Supper the federation has not yet succeeded in achieving a consensus, but that all consistories are committed to arriving at a common approach and that following a period of reconsideration the matter will be placed on the agenda of a future Synod.

A meeting of the two committees took place also on June 19, 2009, in Québec City. At this meeting we received an update on the status and

wellbeing of the congregations in the ERQ, especially regarding the one in Charny (L'Église Réformée de la Rive-Sud). Furthermore, information about mission and evangelism projects in Montreal and Québec City was provided. We also discussed the status of an ERQ's committee proposal regarding admission to the Lord's Supper; the principles and practices of examination and ordination of ministers within the ERQ was also treated. In turn, the CICR requested updates on the state of relations between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the URCNA, and on the missionary and outreach activities of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

4. Attendance at Synods of the ERQ

Attendance at the triennial Synods occurred on the following occasions since Synod Smithers 2007.

On June 1-2, 2007, elder Gerrit Bos (Guelph) attended the meeting at Repentigny as delegate of Classis Northern Ontario and on behalf of the committee. He was able to convey the recent decision to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship, as well as observe and report upon the proceedings.

Two delegates from the committee were in attendance at Synod on March 29, 2008 (Montreal). Among other matters, the delegates inquired of ways in which the federations might work more closely together (through possible local congregational support, mission projects, etc.). Discussion and suggestions on the nature and extent of involvement revealed that the ERQ should be granted time to consider these opportunities. As at other synods, the delegates noted appreciation for and exercise of Ecclesiastical Fellowship by recurrent consultation on matters of church polity, church order, and other practices in our federation. Financial and other resource needs remain high. The fragile circumstances of ERQ within Québec's secular society underscore the pastoral challenges.

Rev. G. Van Popta, pastor of the Canadian Reformed Church at Ottawa that is closest geographically to the congregations in Québec, attended the synod of March 21-22, 2009 at Montreal as delegate of the committee. He reported the highlights of the meeting, which included lengthy discussion on the viability of the congregation at Charny, which continues to struggle in various ways.

Two delegates from the committee were in attendance at the synod of June 19-20, 2009, in Québec City. At that assembly extensive attention was given again to the wellbeing of the congregation at Charny. The request by one of the ministers to be released from a pastoral call was the subject of discussion before being accepted.

5. Considerations

- 5.1 The Committee has fulfilled the mandate to inform the ERQ of the decision of Synod Smithers 2007 to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship.
- 5.2 The current practice of attending one meeting of Synod annually, meeting once per year as committee with the Committee for Interchurch Relations, and meeting at the annual NAPARC gathering is effective for the active engagement with the ERQ under the rules that have been adopted for Ecclesiastical Fellowship.
- 5.3 Specific requests for assistance on matters of confession, church polity, and liturgy have been addressed. The committee both respects the autonomy of the ERQ and its own duty to promote the reformed faith.
- 5.4 When appropriate, matters of confession and practice, especially regarding admission to the Lord's Supper and supervision of the pulpit, have been addressed. Sensitive to the internal circumstances of the ERQ, the committee deems that it would be wise not to continue a mandate that focuses explicitly on these two matters, which should not be belaboured unnecessarily. Moreover, the committee is sensitive to the fact that pressing concerns within the ERQ often require immediate attention from a small number of ministers and elders, with the consequence that consideration must be granted to time-scheduling and resources within the federation. In the context of Ecclesiastical Fellowship, matters of confession and practice will arise naturally and when appropriate, and the committee will be careful to execute its responsibilities at such times.
- 5.5 Informing the churches by means of direct communication with consistories regarding the developments in our relation with the ERQ, supported by a press release in *Clarion* appear to be effective in keeping the churches up to date.
- 5.6 In light of discussions at Synod and of CICR meetings, the committee deems that promotion of closer ecclesiastical ties between individual congregations on the model of Owen Sound-St. Georges is both impractical and undesirable at this time. While eager to foster closer relations, your committee respects the wishes, needs, and opportunities within the ERQ. It would be ill-advised to cause even a perception of overwhelming the relatively small federation, or of imposing upon it. Discussions revealed that it is not feasible for other ERQ congregations to embark on collaboration of the sort currently practised by St. Georges and Owen Sound. However, our committee is prepared to facilitate contacts if so desired by the churches in Québec.

6. Recommendations

The CCCNA recommends that Synod decide:

6.1 The CCCNA has fulfilled the mandate regarding the ERQ;

The CCCNA also recommends that Synod mandate the committee to:

6.2 Continue actively engaging in the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the ERQ under the adopted rules;

6.3 Continue discussion when appropriate on existing differences in confession and practice, keeping in mind Considerations 5.4.

CCCNA Report to Synod Burlington-Ebenezer 2010

REPORT 2: Orthodox Presbyterian Church

1. Mandate

With respect to the OPC, General Synod Smithers 2007 decided: (*Acts 2007*, p. 125)

(4.3) To continue the Relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC under the adopted rules. As the CCCNA fulfils its mandate according to these rules, the outstanding matters of confessional membership and supervision of the Lord's Table are to be raised when appropriate;

(4.4) To endeavour to meet with the CEIR at least once a year.

2. Correspondence and Communication

2.1 We received copies of the *Minutes* of the 74th (2007) and 75th (2008) General Assemblies;

2.2 Upon publication, copies of the *Acts of General Synod Smithers 2007* were passed on to the Committee for Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations (CEIR);

2.3 We received monthly issues of *New Horizons*, the OPC's periodical;

2.4 In November 2007, we sent copies of the Proposed Joint Church Order and the Augment to the Hymnary;

2.5 Invitations were received to attend the General Assembly in 2007, 2008 and 2009;

2.6 A letter of fraternal greeting was sent to the 75th General Assembly of the OPC in June, 2008;

2.7 In November 2008 we received an update from the CEIR summing up decisions of the General Assembly and other developments;

2.8 In April 2008 the CEIR provided written feedback on the Proposed Joint Church Order, which was forwarded to the committee dealing with this.

3. Meetings of CEIR and CCCNA

3.1 On November 14, 2007, delegates of the CEIR and CCCNA met at NAPARC in Newark, NJ. Part of the meeting was devoted to sharing and discussing highlights of Synod Smithers 2007 and of the 74th General Assembly of the OPC. The CEIR was particularly appreciative of the direction and decision of Synod Smithers regarding the OPC, and of the way that the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship is presently functioning. Other matters of mutual concern included relationships with other churches in North America and Europe.

- 3.2 On November 11, 2008, delegates of the CEIR and CCCNA met at NAPARC in Taylors, SC. Items for discussion included the NAPARC Comity Agreement, churches with which each federation has ecclesiastical fellowship or is considering ecclesiastical fellowship, as well as the Revised Directory for Public Worship.

4. General Assemblies of the OPC

- 4.1 On June 14-15, 2007, br. John Jonker (Owen Sound) and Rev. Richard E. Pot attended the 74th General Assembly of the OPC, held at Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa. They were well received, and when given the opportunity to address the Assembly, expressed gratitude for the evidence of a clear desire to be faithful to the Reformed confession and submissive to Christ as the Head. They offered encouragement to make the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship a meaningful and living reality.
- 4.2 In June 2008, the 75th General Assembly was held in Tacoma, Washington. Reports from the various committees make it evident that the OPC continues to be active in the areas of education, home mission, and foreign mission. Special note was made of the fact that a large number of active ministers are near retirement age. The report from the CEIR led to a decision to invite the IPB (Brazil) into a corresponding relationship with the OPC. By far the greatest amount of time at this Assembly was dedicated to the ongoing approval of the revised Directory for Public Worship (DPW) with a view to it being sent to the presbyteries for ratification. This work was nearly finalized, with work on the final parts of the revision to resume at the 76th General Assembly.
- 4.3 In June 2009, the 76th General Assembly was held in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Rev. John Ludwig was found willing to serve as a delegate along with Dr. R. Faber. The *Minutes* of this General Assembly have not yet been received and reviewed, but our delegates reported gratitude for the continued adherence to Scripture and the Westminster Confession in the deliberations and decisions of the Assembly. They further indicated that both the official and informal statements regarding our relationship demonstrate that the OPC continues to hold the Ecclesiastical Fellowship with our federation in high regard. As well as being able to observe and report on proceedings, they had opportunity to address the GA with fraternal greetings. This General Assembly adopted the revised DPW, which will now be proposed to the presbyteries for approval.

5. Considerations

- 5.1 Through the regular attendance at broader assemblies, review of minutes, and discussion of the same in meeting with the CEIR,

your committee can affirm that the OPC continues to be faithful to the Reformed confessions and seeks to live up to her calling to submit to Christ and His Word as a faithful church of Jesus Christ (BC Art. 29). Annual meetings in conjunction with NAPARC, as well as other contacts and correspondence, serve to keep one another abreast of developments within our respective church federations, and thus assist each other in the maintenance, defence and promotion of the Reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline, and liturgy, and be watchful for deviations (cf. Rule #1 for Ecclesiastical Fellowship).

- 5.2 Both the CanRC and OPC are informing each other of the decisions of their broadest assemblies by sharing *Acts* and *Minutes*, and reviewing and discussing the same in meetings (cf. Rule #2 for Ecclesiastical Fellowship).
- 5.3 Both the CanRC and OPC are committed to receiving one another's members (Rule #4 for Ecclesiastical Fellowship) and in principle opening their pulpits for each other's ministers (Rule #5 for Ecclesiastical Fellowship). Discussion about the NAPARC "Comity Agreement" and NAPARC "Agreement on Transfer of Members and Congregations" has served to confirm this.
- 5.4 Both the CanRC and OPC communicate openly together about proposed changes to ecclesiastical documents for church polity and worship (such as the Proposed Joint Church Order and the Directory for Public Worship), and this consultation and discussion has been of mutual benefit (cf. Rule #6 for Ecclesiastical Fellowship).
- 5.5 When fulfilling the mandate to continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship according to the adopted rules the committee has had some opportunity to raise the "outstanding matters of confessional membership and supervision of the Lord's Table." These matters arise naturally from time to time as the Committee seeks to fulfil the primary goal for determining the agenda for discussions, namely the mandate to "assist each other in the maintenance, defence and promotion of the Reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline, and liturgy, and be watchful for deviations" (See Rule # 1 for Ecclesiastical Fellowship).

6. Recommendations

The CCCNA recommends that Synod decide:

- 6.1 To thank the Lord for the way in which the OPC actively seeks to provide a faithful Reformed witness in this world, by spreading the gospel in faithfulness to the Reformed confession;
- 6.2 To mandate the CCCNA to continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC under the adopted rules, dealing with outstanding matters as appropriate, and continuing to meet with the CEIR annually.

CCCNA Report to Synod Burlington-Ebenezer 2010**REPORT 3: Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA)****1. Mandate**

With respect to the FRCNA, Synod Smithers decided: (*Acts 2007*, p.97)

(4.1) To cease from pursuing discussions with the FRCNA;

(4.2) To ask the CPEU to send a letter to the FRCNA informing it of this decision and expressing the desire to resume contact when there is an interest from their side.

As part of a restructuring of Committees, this task was assigned to the CCCNA (*Acts 2007*, p. 217).

2. Correspondence

2.1 In a letter dated September 12, 2007, we informed the Interchurch Relations Committee of the FRCNA of the restructuring of various Committees by Synod Smithers and that contact with the FRCNA had been entrusted to our Committee. In accordance with the decision of Synod Smithers, we communicated the decision to cease pursuing discussions along with the desire to resume contact when there is interest from their side.

2.2 In a letter dated November 3, 2007, the Interchurch Relations Committee of the FRCNA suggested that “as we meet at international church conferences and councils, such as NAPARC and ICRC we should make attempts to reconnect.” They further requested “that our future discussions focus on getting to know each other, e.g. in our various ministries and doctrinal distinctives...” They also requested that “all communication take place between committees and their secretaries.” They concluded by expressing the hope that with “the Lord’s blessing, our future talks may lead to the re-establishment of the *Limited Contact* relationship.”

2.3 In a letter dated December 14, 2007, we responded to their letter of November 3, 2007. We listed the seven meetings held between the respective Committees from 1999-2005, along with the topics discussed and indicated that we did not wish to duplicate previous discussions. We requested that they indicate how to move forward.

2.4 We received a letter dated May 17, 2008. They suggested that “[i]nstead of continuing a time consuming correspondence” there be a meeting between representatives at the next scheduled meeting of NAPARC. At this meeting, they suggested, “we begin by expressing our perception of each other” and that “[p]erhaps some misconceptions can be corrected.”

CCCNA Report to Synod Burlington-Ebenezer 2010

REPORT 4: Orthodox Christian Reformed Church (OCRC)

1. Mandate

With respect to the OCRC, Synod Smithers decided: (*Acts 2007*, p. 98)

(4.1) to instruct the CPEU to send a letter to the OCRC asking if there is interest in further discussions.

As part of a restructuring of Committees, this task was assigned to the CCCNA (*Acts 2007*, p. 217).

2. Correspondence

2.1 A letter dated September 14, 2007 was sent to the Ecumenical Relations Committee of the OCRC asking if there was any interest in further discussion.

2.2 In a letter dated April 29, 2008, we were informed that the OCRC was considering an invitation to join the URCNA. In light of that, they were not in a position to consider resuming discussion.

3. Considerations

3.1 The OCRC accepted the invitation to join the URCNA.

4. Recommendations

The CCCNA recommends that Synod decide:

4.1 The CCCNA has fulfilled the mandate regarding the OCRC;

4.2 No further efforts need to be undertaken as many churches of the OCRC are now part of the URCNA.

CCCNA Report to Synod Burlington-Ebenezer 2010

REPORT 5: Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)

1. Mandate

General Synod Smithers 2007 gave the following mandate to the CCCNA for its dealings with the RCUS: (*Acts 2007*, p. 102-103)

(4.2) To continue the Relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the RUCS under the adopted rules. As the CCCNA fulfils its mandate according to these rules, matters of concern raised by the churches (see Obs. 2.7-2.11) may continue to be raised when appropriate;

(4.3) To endeavour to meet with the RCUS Interchurch Relations Committee at least once a year.

2. Contacts with the RCUS

2.1 Meeting with the RCUS Inter-Church Committee at NAPARC 2007;

2.2 Meeting with the RCUS Inter-Church Committee at NAPARC 2008;

2.3 RCUS 263rd Synod, May 11-15, 2009 (Appendix 1 – Dr. A.J. Pol and br. A. Poppe)

3. Fulfilling the Mandate

The CCCNA was not represented at the RCUS Synod 2007 since there was a scheduling conflict with several of our delegates having to attend Synod Smithers 2007. A letter of greetings was therefore sent instead. Since we intended to meet with the Interchurch Relations Committee at NAPARC in 2008, it was also decided not to send a delegation to the RCUS Synod 2008 given our obligations to attend other assemblies in the same year. Again, a letter of greetings was sent, highlighting the decisions of Synod Smithers 2007 and expressing the desire for further contacts and discussions not only as committees but between members of our respective churches.

3.1 Church Unity Paper

The Church Unity Paper is now in the RCUS *Acts of Synod* (2008), pages 47-55. It can also be found on their website (<http://rcus.org/>). We are thankful that they took note of and clearly worked with suggestions that were made to make the language more consistent with the Three Forms of Unity.

4. Further topics of interest

4.1 Church Visitation

There is an increasing desire in the RCUS to implement a system of church visitation. This form of mutual accountability goes beyond the "constitutional questions" normally asked at a classis, questions that we would normally associate with church visitation. A committee was given the mandate to look into this and reported to the 263rd RCUS Synod in 2009. It studied the Scriptural background, historical development and implementation of church visitation and concluded that it is biblically warranted and historically justifiable to move forward on this. However, there was no unanimity on the best way to go about it. After hearing the report and discussing it, Synod decided to ask the committee to study the matter further and submit another report to the next Synod. Since then, members of that study committee from the RCUS have approached members of CCCNA Subcommittee West requesting further information from the Canadian Reformed Churches on the topic of church visitation.

4.2 Theological Education

At RCUS Synods reports are given by those who are either involved as board members or as representatives from various educational institutions. The RCUS does not have its own official seminary, drawing its future ministers from a variety of seminaries. It does, however, have ministers who serve as board members of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and Mid-America Reformed Seminary and report to Synod. They also have New Geneva Seminary listed as one of the seminaries supported by the RCUS. A number of RCUS ministers have established Heidelberg seminary and hope to serve the RCUS in this way. Noteworthy was also that one particular RCUS church in Sacramento, California, has established "City seminary," which operates under the authority of the local RCUS consistory in Sacramento. Funding comes from local businesses. City seminary has attracted about 25 students from a variety of church backgrounds, introducing some for the first time to theology developed along the lines of the Reformed faith. The local RCUS hopes in this way to exert a positive influence among future leaders of the churches in Sacramento.

Given the fact that the RCUS sends students to a variety of institutions for training, our committee has recommended to the RCUS that they also consider the possibility of sending students to the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

APPENDIX 1

263rd Synod of the RCUS

By Dr. A.J. Pol

The RCUS has a long history in North America, going back to the mid-18th Century. It was our privilege to attend their 263rd Synod, which was convened May 11-14, 2009, in the St. Paul's Evangelical Reformed Church in Hamburg, Minnesota. Before the sessions of Synod began, there was a worship service conducted by Rev. Herman Van Stedum, with Rev. George Syms preaching on Romans 1:16-17. He stressed the power of the gospel and the need to preach it with the view to the salvation of sinners instead of adapting it to the demands of a culture that often relies on special programs and techniques to achieve its goals. Salvation by faith alone does not mean that our faith centres on our experiences but that it focuses on Jesus Christ as the object of our faith, for it is through Him that we are justified.

The president of Synod was the Rev. V. Pollema, vice president was Rev. J. Sawtelle, Rev. P. Treick served as stated clerk, while elder T. Griess is treasurer. Since all the congregations of the RCUS are represented at Synod, certain items appear on the agenda that we would not see at Canadian Reformed Synods. This includes a variety of administrative items, as well as, for example, the official reception at Synod of new ministers who have been ordained in the RCUS during the preceding year.

It was clear during synod as well as through informal contacts that the RCUS appreciates its contacts with other churches. At this 263rd Synod, br. A. Poppe and I represented the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Education

The RCUS does not have its own seminary. It does, however, have ministers who serve as board members of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and Mid-America Reformed Seminary and who reported to Synod. A report was also received from a minister who serves as board member of Dordt College. Representatives from those institutions as well as one from City seminary in Sacramento, California, received the opportunity to give presentations to the synod. City seminary operates under the authority of the local RCUS consistory in Sacramento. Funding comes from local businesses. This seminary has attracted about 25 students from a variety of church backgrounds, introducing some for the first time to theology developed along the lines of the Reformed faith. The local RCUS hopes in this way to exert a positive influence among future leaders of the churches in Sacramento. There were also presentations from New Geneva seminary and Heidelberg seminary.

Mission work

Rev. T. Mayville reported on his work at Knox Theological Seminary in Uganda and on the work of the Free Reformed Church of Kenya. Although the work of the RCUS takes place in different areas than the Canadian

Reformed Churches, it became clear that it faces similar challenges in leading people and churches on mission fields toward the goal of becoming independently functioning churches that are able to sustain themselves.

The discussions during Synod in regard to mission work in Africa also highlight familiar themes of challenges involved in promoting the development and maturity of churches in the Congo. The RCUS works in tandem with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated) who are active in the same country.

At Synod we also had the opportunity to speak with Rev. Eric Kayayan about the French language broadcasts (Reformed Faith and Life) that he is involved with in South Africa, reaching various parts of Africa as well as Quebec City (via Rev. Ben Westerveld of the ERQ). Although there is the desire to expand the radio broadcasts beyond Quebec City, insufficient finances are currently a limiting factor. During the sessions of Synod, Rev. Kayayan gave a speech on "The Catholicity of John Calvin," and preached a sermon in which he shared many of Calvin's insights on the text. On the final day of Synod, he gave another lecture on John Calvin.

Church visitation

It was interesting to hear the discussion of a report on church visitation. The RCUS does not have church visitations as we do, although at classis delegates of individual churches are called to respond to "constitutional questions" that we would normally associate with church visitation. A committee studied the Scriptural background, historical development and implementation of church visitation, and reported to Synod that it is biblically warranted and historically justifiable. Although there was a desire to open the way for the churches to move forward on this, there was no unanimity on the best way to go about it. After hearing the presentation and discussing it, Synod decided to ask the committee to study the matter further and submit another report to the next Synod.

Financial aid

Various financial matters are dealt with at RCUS Synods that we deal with through other channels. For example, there were discussions concerning "benevolent aid" for ministers (comparable to what we achieve through our superannuation fund) and for particular churches (our "needy churches fund") as well as financial aid for students of theology (comparable to our "Needy Students funds").

Ministerial aid for retired ministers and wives is taken care of on a case by case basis by decision of synod and the amounts vary according to circumstances, thereby giving it the character of a "gift" that is not a taxable amount for the recipient and not an "entitlement" or a fixed amount from a "retirement fund."

Interchurch Relations

Rev. P. Waterval spoke on behalf of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated). He touched on the cooperation in mission work in the Congo as well as on the Dutch Synod 2008.

As delegate from the Canadian Reformed Churches I received the opportunity to address Synod, highlighting some aspects of Canadian Reformed history and explaining the decisions of Synod Smithers 2007 in regard to the RCUS. The speech also included some suggestions as to ways in which the relationship with the RCUS could become more fruitful. In addition to this there was an overview of current activities of the Canadian Reformed Churches in the areas of mission work at home and abroad. Mention was made of the proposed revised text of the Genevan Psalms that can be found on the internet. Finally there was also an invitation to the RCUS to send fraternal delegates to attend Synod Burlington 2010.

In response to a question about church visitation, given the discussion at the RCUS Synod on this topic, I explained how this is done among the Canadian Reformed Churches. In view of the concern of some RCUS brothers that there is potential for a hierarchical approach in church visitation I stressed that it is not a matter of classis deputies "lording it" over a local church. Their role is advisory and focuses first of all on preventing problems and if necessary to help defuse situations. Feedback later from various delegates showed that they found the explanation enlightening and helpful for their further discussions. They also expressed the desire for further input in the process of learning how to implement church visitation in a responsible way. Br. Poppe and I promised to follow up on this.

Rev. R. Potter responded to the address, expressing the desire for more contact. He emphasized that we share mutual concerns. He also noted with thankfulness the faithfulness of the Canadian Reformed Churches and said that the RCUS is looking forward to more cooperation, giving as an example mission work.

Rev. Larry Johnson from Prinsburg, Minnesota, addressed Synod on behalf of the URCNA. He stressed the importance of adhering to Scripture and the Reformed confessions, highlighting the fact that the URCNA Synod does not make extra-confessional statements, although it did address the matter of federal vision. It is left up to the local church to determine how to deal with matters that arise. There is also freedom in regard to the liturgy of the local churches. This is a matter of trusting each other. Time will tell how things work out.

Rev. Johnson also touched on the merger with the Canadian Reformed Churches and that various issues are being worked on. The URCNA and RCUS have been working together in the Mid-West, with pulpit supply. The more things like this take place at the local level, the more familiar the churches will become with each other and this will promote the cause of unity.

As to church visitation, he explained that the purpose is to prevent problems rather than dealing with them after the fact. It is therefore important to see the nature of the contact in terms of a pastoral rather than a legal perspective, since everyone is "guilty" before the law. If there are difficulties, it is therefore important to work on reconciliation, focusing on healing in the relationships rather than placing the emphasis on who is right and who is wrong. He suggested it would be good to ask an older minister to visit with younger ministers and to ask church visitors also to visit separately with the elders without the ministers.

CCCNA Report to Synod Burlington-Ebenezer 2010**REPORT 6: Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America****1. Mandate**

General Synod Smithers 2007 gave the following mandate to the CCCNA for its dealings with the RPCNA: (*Acts 2007, Considerations and Recommendations, p.200-201*)

Considerations

- (3.1) Christ prayed that his followers would be one in faith. It is our duty to observe where the Lord Jesus Christ is busy gathering his church, and unite with those who are obedient to him.
- (3.2) The initial conclusion of the CCCA is that the RPCNA exhibits the marks of the church. Therefore we are called to consider further whether one can in fact recognize the RPCNA as a church of the Lord, and if Yes, to pursue unity.
- (3.3) Carman East's concern and Ottawa's recommendation are worthy of pursuit. The CCCA should be instructed to study the status and content of the *Testimony* in the RPCNA, including what it says about the covenant. This demonstrates that Spring Creek's request to establish ecclesiastical fellowship with the RPCNA is premature.
- (3.4) The CCCA's concern about exclusive psalmody ought to be investigated further, as ought their views on ordaining women as deacons.

Recommendation

Synod decide:

- (4.1) To thank the CCCA for the extensive work they have done in researching the RPCNA.
- (4.2) To mandate the CCCA:
 - (4.2.1) To confirm whether the marks of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ are evident in the RPCNA.
 - (4.2.2) To explore further whether the matters mentioned in Considerations 3.3 and 3.4 are a hindrance to the establishment of ecclesiastical fellowship.
 - (4.2.3) To submit its report to the next general synod.

2. Interaction with Inter-church Relations Committee (IRC) and RPCNA Synods

1. Letter responding to five questions posed by the CCCNA from Rev. Bruce Parnell, IRC chairman, Oct 29, 2007 (Appendix 1)
2. Report on meeting with IRC at NAPARC, November 14, 2007 (Appendix 2 – Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer)
3. Report on observation of RPCNA Synod, June 23-27, 2008 (Appendix 3 – Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer)

4. Report on meeting with IRC at RPCNA Synod, June 25/26, 2008 (Appendix 4 – Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer)
5. Report on meeting with IRC at NAPARC, November 12, 2008 (Appendix 5 – Rev. R.E. Pot)

3. Fulfilling the Mandate

3.1 *Confirmation of the Marks of a True Church*

A great deal was written about the marks of the true church in the Committee's report to Synod 2007 and need not be repeated in detail here.¹ In short, that report described how the RPCNA believes the Bible to be God's infallible Word and is committed to upholding the purity of the Word in her preaching, her administration of the sacraments and in church discipline.

Ministers, as all office bearers, must subscribe to the Westminster Standards (plus also their unique "Testimony;" more on that below) and all their teaching and preaching must be in accordance with these confessions. The sanctity of the Lord's Supper is carefully protected by the local elders. This is done by having only those participate who are members of a true church. Casual visitors are not invited to attend and elders are even charged not to "assume" that regular communicant church members are, by that fact alone, eligible to attend.² Vigilance among the elders is called for.

In accord with this, the further exercise of church discipline is implemented according to Christ's command in Matthew 18:15-18. Zeal to protect the Lord's Table is paralleled in the zeal to protect the Lord's Church from the influence of sin. Discipline is exercised through the preaching, through mutual censure, but then also in the elders' exercise of this key by way of admonitions, suspension from the sacraments and excommunication when necessity calls for it.³

3.1.1. *Marks Observed*

Since this report, a subsequent visit to an RPCNA synod⁴ has only confirmed the existence of at least two of these marks. Each day of their General Synod was opened with the preaching

¹ *Reports to General Synod Smithers: Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas (CCCA)*. To access this report, go to our federation website at www.canrc.org and follow the links in the Resource section. The precise location is: <http://www.canrc.org/resources/govdocs/gs2007/CCCAAmericas.pdf>. It is Report #6, pages 196-226. From this point on it is cited simply as *Report* along with a page number.

² *Report*, p.209.

³ *Report*, p.213.

⁴ See this report in Appendix 2.

of the Word. Sprinkled throughout the day were also various meditations on Scripture. Each explanation and application of the Word showed a faithful and responsible exegesis in a manner which glorified God and edified the listeners.

In addition, we were able to observe (in part) two different examinations for a candidate to the ministry. These examinations were as rigorous as the ones in our federation and even had the added advantage of being spread over a longer period of time. That is, the presbyteries, as is their custom, were involved with overseeing these potential candidates for the ministry from the time they made that desire known. This process includes interviews and continued contact throughout the education process. On this occasion, the student's sermon we heard was scripturally sound.

The manner in which the RPCNA guards the pulpit shows a high regard for both the purity of preaching and the administration of church discipline. A church which is not concerned about holding her *members* to the standard of God's Word would have little interest in holding her *ministers* to that same standard. When the latter is clearly in evidence, the former must also be a reality.

With respect to the administration of the sacraments, we of course had no opportunity to observe the practice of either one of these at their General Synod. We also have not had (to date) the opportunity to visit worship services in the RPCNA where these were part of the liturgy. Ultimately we can only judge a church by her official documents and from these we've seen clearly that they have a high regard for the sanctity of the sacraments. It can also be said that where the Word is in practice preached faithfully and discipline is exercised biblically, the sacraments can be expected to be administered in a biblical manner as well. The three marks ultimately function as a unit since they are all rooted in the faithful adherence to the Word of God.

3.2. *The Testimony*

The RPCNA, like many Presbyterian bodies, holds to the Westminster Standards of 1648. However, they also hold to a confessional document called The Testimony of the Reformed

⁵ See the RPCNA website www.reformedpresbyterian.org under the tab "convictions" and then "constitution." It is grouped in with a series of key documents for the RPCNA which altogether are called the *Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*.

Presbyterian Church of North America,⁵ a document unique to them. It originates in the early 19th century in the American context. After various modifications and augmentations over the years, General Synod 1980 declared the revised Testimony to be the law and order of the church.

Naturally such a document is of great concern to us for it raises the question as to whether the doctrine confessed in the Westminster Standards is still upheld. It begs such additional questions as: what is the purpose of the Testimony and what impact does it have on both the Reformed doctrine and relationships with other church bodies which do not subscribe to the Testimony?

3.2.1. *Purpose of the Testimony*

The stated objective of the Testimony is to support and enhance the teaching of the Westminster Standards by enforcing them and applying them to the issues of the day. This is clear from the Introduction to the Testimony as follows:

The Westminster Confession of Faith is one of the historic creeds of the Presbyterian and Reformed churches. The RPCNA believes that this confession is based on, and subordinate to, Scripture. The truth it presents is of inestimable value for contemporary society.

However, changes in the application of truth are needed because of changing situations in each generation. Some topics of vital importance for the Christian Church were unknown in the 17th Century. Therefore the RPCNA presents its Testimony applying Scripture truth to the contemporary situation. (*Introduction:9,10*)

From this it is clear that the Testimony does not add any *new* doctrine to the Westminster Confession but endeavours only to elucidate and apply the *existing* doctrine to the realities of the present day.

3.2.2. *The Status and Function of the Testimony*

The status of the Testimony is spelled out in the Introduction:

All of these documents, the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the *Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church*, and the *Larger and Shorter Catechisms*, are of equal authority in the church; except that where noted, earlier documents are to be interpreted by the later ones. (*Introduction:4*)

From this it is clear that the Testimony is a confessional document and is even the controlling lens through which the Westminster Confession of Faith is interpreted.

In answer to our further inquiries about the standing of the Testimony and how it functions as an interpretive lens, the

Inter-church Relations Committee (IRC) of the RPCNA provided this helpful explanation:

The RPCNA affirms its full commitment to the WCF as its doctrinal standard. At no point does the church alter its stand on the place of Scripture or the theological position of the WCF. However, in developing the Testimony, the Church seeks to meet the need to help our people to understand, follow and apply the Scriptures and the doctrines of the WCF in the context of daily life.

Along with each chapter of the WCF, the Testimony provides helpful commentary on the meaning of the doctrines set forth. In some cases, the Testimony develops additional aspects of doctrines such as the means of revelation (1:5-8)⁶

the work of the Holy Spirit (2:6-15), the error of the theory of evolution (4:3-5), the sin of gambling (5:4), evangelism (10:6-10), praise in worship (21:5,6), covenanting (22:8,9), response to civil government (23:2-31), marriage and the family (24:1-34), church officers (25:7-13), church membership requirements (25:15-17), the error of oath-bound societies (25:19), the error of enslavement to alcohol, tobacco or any habit forming drug (26:4-7), and the errors of teaching on purgatory and reincarnation (32:4,5).

In two cases – the duty of the civil magistrate (23:18 [cf. Also 31:2 - PHH]) and prohibition of marriage to a deceased wife's sister, etc. (24:21,22) - the Testimony rejects the position of the WCF. This would not close the door to confessional unity with other Reformed bodies that adhere to the WCF since other Presbyterian bodies have removed these sections from the WCF. To maintain historical integrity, we have not removed them, but have indicated our disagreement."⁷

While to our ears it may sound strange that the RPCNA takes pains to distance itself from certain statements within its own official Confession, yet within the history of Presbyterian churches this is more often done with the WCF and also on these same matters. For example, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church has gone further than the RPCNA by actually making changes to the WCF to correct the same points regarding the magistrate (WCF 23:3 and 31:2)⁸ and consanguinity (WCF 24:4). More importantly, the actual changes made by the

⁶ References are to the chapter and paragraph of the Testimony.

⁷ Letter to the CCCNA received from Rev. Bruce Parnell, chairman of the Interchurch Relations Committee, c. October 27, 2007. See Appendix 5

⁸ See the Westminster Confession of Faith as published by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church on their website: www.opc.org.

RPCNA to these doctrines through its Testimony are fully justified as they are in complete harmony with Scripture. Indeed, we would have a great deal of difficulty with any denomination that would uphold those points of the original Westminster Confession of Faith.

3.2.3. *The Testimony and Other Churches*

A natural concern we might have when encountering a unique confessional document like the Testimony is how its adoption within the RPCNA may affect relationships with other faithful churches which do not have the Testimony. Does the adoption of the Testimony distinguish the RPCNA from other churches to the point where it creates barriers between themselves and other true churches? Is the intention to isolate themselves?

We are particularly sensitive to this issue as we have encountered such a situation with the Protestant Reformed Churches in the 1950s. These matters were discussed with the IRC with the following results:

Discussion addressed how the RPCNA's use of the Contemporary Testimony might be similar to what the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRCNA) did in adding a Declaration of Principles in 1951 as an additional confessional document. In the case of the PRCNA, their Declaration of Principles became a thing to distinguish them from other Reformed churches, and they used it to create barriers between themselves and other Reformed Churches. The RPCNA does not use their Contemporary Testimony in this kind of sectarian manner. For example, the RPCNA believes in exclusive psalmody, but this does not prevent them from having fellowship with other Reformed believers. It also does not prevent them from participating in NAPARC. Thus the Contemporary Testimony functions differently in the RPCNA than the Declaration of Principles does in the PRCNA. The aim of it is not to try to distinguish the RPCNA from other Reformed churches, but more to present a clear and contemporary witness to the world. One of the vows for office-bearers includes an acknowledgement that the content of faith must be confessed as it applies to the modern day. This is what the RPCNA tries to do in the Testimony.⁹

The RPCNA does not hold the Testimony out as binding on those churches which desire to have ecclesiastical fellowship with her. While the Testimony would need to be adopted in the

⁹ Report on meeting with IRC representatives of the RPCNA, November 12, 2008, by Rev. R.E. Pot. See Appendix 3.

case of organizational merger with another denomination, they do not impose that requirement on churches seeking fellowship. With respect to individuals wishing to join one of their congregations, they would be required to *submit* to the teaching of both the Testimony and the Westminster Confession of Faith and office bearers would be required to *subscribe* to both.¹⁰

It seems clear that while the Testimony is a binding confessional document in the same way that the WCF is, it does not go beyond the WCF. In fact, it even restricts the WCF on two erroneous points (see above) and otherwise is basically a more detailed explanation and application of the original doctrine of the WCF. The fact that the Testimony is always presented in conjunction with the WCF (in parallel columns) demonstrates that it is directly tied to and dependent on the Reformed doctrine confessed there.

3.2.4. *The Testimony and the Covenant*

Some statements in the Testimony gave some cause to question whether its teaching is that God makes His covenant with the elect only. For example, in chap.7,5 it says, "By the Covenant of Grace, God brings the elect into fellowship with Himself." Later in chap. 12,1 we find, "All the elect, and only they, are adopted into the family of God." This raises the question: does the RPCNA hold to a view of the covenant that identifies only the elect as recipients of God's covenant promises?

The answer to that is: not at all. This is made clear when the Testimony makes statements about baptism in chap. 28. The basis for applying baptism to infants of believers is neither their presumed election nor their presumed regeneration (as Kuyper taught) but simply God's covenant. "The children of believing parents are to receive baptism because of their covenantal relationship" (chap. 28,4). This is strengthened in the following paragraph:

In administering baptism to her children the church recognizes their rightful place within the covenant, and her obligation to give them pastoral care and oversight, and to assist the parents in carrying out their covenanted responsibilities. In presenting them for baptism, parents not only claim for their children the nurture and benefits of the Church, but dedicate them to God in the service of Christ. (Testimony, chap.28,5)

From this it is unmistakable that God's covenant includes

¹⁰ Ibid, Appendix 3.

believers and their children.

3.2.5. *Covenant and Election*

The earlier quotations need to be understood both in their context and in light of the entire WCF and Testimony. The reality of life in God's covenant is that not every covenant child is one of God's elect. Not all those who receive the covenant promises and even participate in the communion of covenant life (the Church) actually benefit from those promises unto eternal life. There will always be weeds mixed in with the wheat (Matt 13:30). We confess this in Belgic Confession, Art. 29, "We are not speaking here of the hypocrites, who are mixed in the church along with the good and yet are not part of the church, although they are outwardly part of it." This is touched on again in Art. 35 on the Lord's Supper,

Those who are born anew have a twofold life. One is physical and temporal, which they received in their first birth and is common to all men. The other is spiritual and heavenly, which is given them in their second birth and is effected by the word of the gospel in the communion of the body of Christ. This life is not common to all *but only to the elect of God.* (Emphasis added).

To say it with the Apostle Paul, "Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel" (Romans 9:6). Those earlier statements in the Testimony are reflections of this scriptural truth.

The RPCNA takes very seriously both the promises and the obligations of the covenant. This is evident from the IRC's explanation:

Children of believers are in the Covenant in at least an external sense (1 Cor. 7:14; Acts 2:39; Romans 11:16; Genesis 17:7). We treat them objectively and in terms of covenantal inclusion regarding both privilege and responsibility. God is their God by covenant, because He is our God and He has right to everything we are and everything we have. At the same time, we teach our children their own obligation to personally repent of their sins and to receive and rest in Christ alone for their salvation....

Covenant children may "fall from grace" in the sense that they refuse the offer of the Gospel and reject Christ and His righteousness for them. Thus we may speak of them as being covenant breakers. But we would also affirm that, in the end, "they went out from us because they were never [truly...in the internal sense] of us" (1 John 2:19).¹¹

¹¹ Letter from Rev. Bruce Parnell, Appendix 1.

From this it is clear that the RPCNA does not identify covenant and election but distinguishes them and works with them in the same biblical manner as we do.

3.3. Exclusive Psalmody

The RPCNA is a psalm-singing church only. They believe that the regulative principle of worship forbids the singing of anything but the 150 Psalms of Scripture in the official worship services of the church. They also believe that musical accompaniment is forbidden. In our discussions we shared with them that while we place a priority on singing the Psalms we do not exclude the singing of thoroughly scriptural hymns in the worship services. We also do not believe the Bible forbids the accompaniment of musical instrumentation as an aid for the singing.

It is clear that these beliefs and practices differ but it has already been reported that from the RPCNA's side, the singing of hymns and musical accompaniment would not prevent the establishment of ecclesiastical fellowship.¹²

In that context they would not insist that their sister churches think and act as they do in this matter. However, when asked, they also made it clear that if organizational merger (full union) was in view, this matter would be an obstacle. In that case, they would not be willing to compromise as they view it as a matter of their obedience to the Lord.

From the Canadian Reformed side, we can only appreciate their love for the Psalms. While we do not agree with their rigorous application of the regulative principle in this area, there appears to be no obstacle here to the establishment of ecclesiastical fellowship.

3.4. Female Deacons

It is a fact that the RPCNA permits the ordination of women to the office of deacon. However, what needs to be understood is that their conception of the office of deacon is different from ours. For them it is strictly an office of administration and *not* of authority. It is not a ruling or teaching office. The deacons do not sit together with the elders as a governing body. The deacons remain under the oversight of elders. The Constitution of the RPCNA is clear about these distinctions:

The Diaconate is a spiritual office responsible for the ministry of mercy and stewardship of the congregation. It is neither a ruling

¹² *Report*, p.209 & 222.

nor a teaching office. Its exercise, like the whole life of the church, is under the oversight of the session and its function is administrative.¹³

3.4.1. *Origin of Female Deacons*

It is also helpful to grasp the origin of this development. The basis for allowing women to serve as deacons is the exegesis of biblical texts and not the pressures of feminism or any other ideology. Women have been admitted to this office since the 1800's, thus preceding the modern feminist movement. Some of the texts which form the basis for this position are the reference to "women" in 1 Timothy 3:12 (which others, they realize, understand as "wives" but which in the Greek can refer to "women"). Romans 16:1,2 is often cited where Phoebe is referred to as a "deacon" (and not a 'deaconess' as many English translations have it).¹⁴

While we may dispute the exegesis of these texts, we can appreciate that the RPCNA strives also in this to abide by the Word of God. Further, the IRC made it clear that within the RPCNA the presence of female deacons is a debated point, with some ministers declaring an exception to this at their ordination.¹⁵ What is clear is that the RPCNA, in obedience to Scripture, does not wish to place women in authority over men within the church. While we can continue to discuss whether female deacons as an administrative office is the best or most responsible understanding of the Scriptural data, this office as the RPCNA has it does not appear to contravene Scripture or Confession and so should not form an impediment to ecclesiastical fellowship.

4. **Additional Considerations Regarding Fellowship**

4.1 *Fellowship or Merger?*

From the above it will be clear that the issues flagged by Synod Smithers for further investigation have been sufficiently dealt with. The Committee is of the opinion that none of these issues should stand in the way of ecclesiastical fellowship. Since the RPCNA is largely an American body of churches (much like the OPC with only a few congregations in Canada), we are not out of line to regard her as a

¹³ *The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*, p.D-23. This can be found on the RPCNA website: under the tab, "Convictions".

¹⁴ Report on meeting with the IRC of the RPCNA June 25/26, 2008. See Appendix 4.

¹⁵ Report on meeting with IRC at NAPARC, November 12, 2008, Appendix 5.

foreign church. With foreign churches we have historically entered into ecclesiastical fellowship without seeking full organizational merger (e.g. OPC, RCUS). More recently we have done the same with the Église Réformée du Québec (ERQ), a sister church within our own country.¹⁶ While there are clearly some obstacles toward a full organizational merger (as noted above), the Committee is convinced that the way is open to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship.

4.2. *Meaningful Fellowship?*

As Committee we are of the view that ecclesiastical fellowship should be sought with churches that are of a close enough proximity that fellowship can actually be exercised. We all recognize that there are other (or at least potentially other) faithful churches that exist within North America (and the world at large) but in many cases there is virtually no contact with Canadian Reformed congregations. To pursue fellowship with such churches would serve little purpose. We may be aware of their existence and mix with their representatives at the “denominational level” at NAPARC, for example, but the reality is that in most cases meaningful fellowship cannot be exercised among the congregations and membership. To pursue fellowship in such instances would amount to little more than a paper relationship.

This, however, need not be the case with the RPCNA. Our congregations overlap in two cities: Ottawa and Denver. There is a third city (Waterloo, ON) where an RPCNA church plant exists in reasonable proximity to the Canadian Reformed Churches at Guelph, Fergus and Elora. There is opportunity in such circumstances for regular pulpit exchanges, joint meetings of consistories, sharing of Reformation rallies or special worship services (e.g. Good Friday, New Year’s Day), and youth rallies. In addition to this consideration, ecclesiastical fellowship could encourage efforts in establishing Reformed, Christian day schools.

5. **Consultation with Churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship**

In accordance with Rule #3 of the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship, the Committee has consulted (or attempted to) with the appropriate representatives from every denomination with whom we presently have ecclesiastical fellowship. Of the several responses received to date, none had any objection to the Canadian Reformed Churches pursuing contact with the RPCNA. The OPC brothers, being quite close with the RPCNA, advised us to seek clarity on several issues for our benefit. We did this and while we gained clarity on these matters, none of them, in our view, turned out to be obstacles for ecclesiastical fellowship.¹⁷

¹⁶ Art 75, *Acts of Synod Smithers, 2007*, p.48.

¹⁷ Report on meeting with IRC at RPCNA Synod, June 25/26, 2008, Appendix 4.

6. Outgoing Correspondence to RPCNA

1. Letter of greeting to 175th Synod of the RPCNA, 2007
2. Letter of greeting to 177th Synod of the RPCNA, 2009

7. Recommendations

The committee recommends that Synod decide:

1. To express gratitude to the Lord for the positive developments within our contact with the RPCNA;
2. That the Committee has confirmed that the marks of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ are evident in the RPCNA;
3. That the status and the content of the Testimony have been sufficiently studied, including what it says about the covenant, and that it does not present an obstacle to the establishment of ecclesiastical fellowship;
4. That the concern about exclusive psalmody has been investigated further and that it does not present an obstacle to the establishment of ecclesiastical fellowship;
5. That the views of the RPCNA with respect to ordaining women as deacons have been investigated and that they do not present an obstacle to the establishment of ecclesiastical fellowship;
6. That ecclesiastical fellowship with the RPCNA has the potential to be meaningful and practical at the local level;
7. To offer a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship to the RPCNA under the adopted rules.

8. Appendices

1. **Appendix 1** Letter responding to five questions posed by the CCCNA.
2. **Appendix 2** Report on meeting with IRC at NAPARC.
3. **Appendix 3** Report on observation of RPCNA Synod, June 23-27, 2008.
4. **Appendix 4** Report on meeting with IRC at RPCNA Synod, June 25-26, 2008.
5. **Appendix 5** Report on meeting with IRC at NAPARC, November 12, 2008.

APPENDIX 1

**Letter responding to five questions posed by the CCCNA
from Rev. Bruce Parnell, IRC chairman, Oct 29, 2007¹⁸**

Dear Brothers in Christ, [received via email c. Oct 29, 2007]

We pray that the Lord would bless you as His light shines through you. We look forward to continued encouragement in the Lord together.

Thank you for your patience. As you have asked important questions we wanted to give considered response. I have reprinted your questions below and then given our answers. As we anticipate meeting in person I hope that these answers will pave the way to a fruitful discussion.

1. What is the origin and status of the Contemporary Testimony in the RPCNA? Could you clarify this for us? From the RPCNA's web-site, we gather that it was adopted in 1980, and that it is a confessional document on an even higher level than other confessional standards. The RPCNA's observation that "earlier documents are to be interpreted by the later ones" implies that the Contemporary Testimony is your most important confessional document, and on some points it deviates from other confessional standards (for example, A73 explicitly rejects part of the Westminster Standards with respect to the civil magistrate.) Does this not result in an extra confessional binding which could close the door to confessional church unity with other Reformed (including Presbyterian) Churches that only adhere to the Westminster standards and not the Contemporary Testimony? One point that has our attention is that the Contemporary Testimony makes confession ally binding a view of the covenant which not all Reformed Churches share. A29#5, A40 seems to imply that God's covenant was only with the elect, rather than with his people as a whole. This is a restrictive statement that goes beyond what is stated about the covenant in our confessional standards. Do you not agree that God establishes His covenant with believers and all their children (Gen 17:7; Acts 2:39) and that there is not only a blessing but also a curse of the covenant, namely for those who do not keep it (Ps 103:18; 1 Cor 10:5; Heb 4:2)? If the covenant is only with the elect, does it not become impossible to speak of the covenant being broken?

The Contemporary Testimony makes many good points with which we could agree with respect to contemporary issues such as evolution, gambling, purgatory, reincarnation. However, the further certain points get defined, the more such a Testimony can lead to a parting of the ways rather than serving the cause of unity. Extra-confessional documents are not a minor matter, and have important consequences for church unity, as our

¹⁸ These five questions were sent by the CCCA via email on August 3, 2006 and can be found in the CCCA's 2007 report to Synod Smithers, p.220. The reply came after Synod Smithers 2007 and became a new starting point for discussions with the IRC in November, 2007.

history of relations with the Protestant Reformed Churches in North America shows. So in short, if the Contemporary Testimony is not a confessional document, this needs to be explained. On the other hand if it is a confessional document, we will need to discuss and evaluate its content more closely.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America has from its inception held to the doctrines and principles of the Protestant Reformation. It accepts the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the Word of God, the supreme and infallible rule of faith and life, and its subordinate standards as agreeable unto and founded upon them. These subordinate standards are: The Westminster Confession of Faith, the Catechisms, Larger and Shorter, the Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, the Directory for Church Government, the Book of Discipline and the Directory for Worship.

While commitment to the Westminster Standards came from the Reformed Presbyterian Churches of Scotland and Ireland, which were the background of the RPCNA, the Testimony of the RPCNA was initiated in the American Church. In the meeting of the Reformed Presbytery in 1802 there was reference to an earlier decision "to display a judicial testimony for truth and against error". In 1804, Presbytery ordered the preparation of a three-fold testimony, Historical, Declarative and Argumentative. In 1806, the Presbytery adopted the Historical View, with a Preface, and the Declaration and Testimony. The Declaration and Testimony was amended in 1823 by the addition of a chapter on Adoption. Proof texts were added in 1834. In 1861, sections were added on Secret Associations and Slavery. In 1883, a section was added on Temperance.

The Synod of 1969 gave approval to "the rewriting of the Testimony of the Church without change in the system of theology". In 1980, the Synod declared the revised Testimony to be the law and order of the church.

The objective of the Testimony is to support and enhance the teaching of the Westminster Standards by enforcing them and applying them to the issues of the day. This is stated in the Introduction to the Testimony as follows:

"The Westminster Confession of Faith is one of the historic creeds of the Presbyterian and Reformed churches. The RPCNA believes that this confession is based on, and subordinate to, Scripture. The truth it presents is of inestimable value for contemporary society.

However, changes in the application of truth are needed because of changing situations in each generation. Some topics of vital importance for the Christian Church were unknown in the 17th Century. Therefore the RPCNA presents its Testimony applying Scripture truth to the contemporary situation."
(Introduction:9,10)

The RPCNA affirms its full commitment to the WCF as its doctrinal standard. At no point does the church alter its stand on the place of Scripture or the theological position of the WCF. However, in developing the Testimony, the Church seeks to meet the need to help our people to

understand, follow and apply the Scriptures and the doctrines of the WCF in the context of daily life.

Along with each chapter of the WCF, the Testimony provides helpful commentary on the meaning of the doctrines set forth. In some cases, the Testimony develops additional aspects of doctrines such as the means of revelation (1:5-8), the work of the Holy Spirit (2:6-15), the error of the theory of evolution (4:3-5, the sin of gambling (5:4), evangelism (10:6-10), praise in worship (21:5.6), covenanting (22:8,9), response to civil government (23:2-31), marriage and the family (24:1-34), church officers (25:7-13), church membership requirements (25:15-17), the error of oath-bound societies (25:19), the error of enslavement to alcohol, tobacco or any habit forming drug (26:4-7), and the errors of teaching on purgatory and reincarnation (32:4,5).

In two cases - the duty of the civil magistrate (23:18) and prohibition of marriage to a deceased wife's sister, etc. (24:21,22) - the Testimony rejects the position of the WCF. This would not close the door to confessional unity with other Reformed bodies that adhere to the WCF since other Presbyterian bodies have removed these sections from the WCF. To maintain historical integrity, we have not removed them, but have indicated our disagreement.

The statement that "earlier documents are to be interpreted by the later ones" (Introduction: 12) does not place the Testimony on a higher plane than the WCF. The Scriptures are the supreme authority. The WCF is our definitive and authoritative standard in our understanding of Scripture. The Testimony is a servant of both the Scriptures and the WCF in applying theology to contemporary society. The Scriptures are infallible. The WCF is a historical document true to the Scriptures honed in the fires of Biblical Reformation. The Testimony lives and breathes the Scriptures and the WCF in "taking on the full armor of God" for today's Christian.

Regarding your question about the covenant, we believe that there is both an internal and external administration of the Covenant. God graciously administers the Covenant internally to the elect so that benefits of Christ's death are applied particularly (*WCF* 3.6). The elect belong to what the *WCF* calls the 'invisible church' (*WCF*, 25, Ephesians 1:10, 22-23; 5:23, 27, 32; Colossians 1:18). At the same time, the Covenant has an external administration so that the 'visible' church is said to be members of the covenant (*WCF* 25.2, LC 62).

Children of believers are in the Covenant in at least an external sense (1 Cor. 7:14; Acts 2:39; Romans 11:16; Genesis 17:7). We treat them objectively and in terms of covenantal inclusion regarding both privilege and responsibility. God is their God by covenant, because He is our God and He has right to everything we are and everything we have. At the same time, we teach our children their own obligation to personally repent of their sins and to receive and rest in Christ alone for their salvation. Our *Testimony* states (more fully than the *Confession*) that their baptism is on the basis of their inclusion in the covenant: "The children of believing parents are to receive baptism because of their covenantal relationship." "In administering baptism to her children, the church recognizes their rightful place within the covenant..." (*Testimony* 28.4 & 5, p. A-95).

Covenant children may “fall from grace” in the sense that they refuse the offer of the Gospel and reject Christ and His righteousness for them. Thus we may speak of them as being covenant breakers. But we would also affirm that, in the end, “they went out from us because they were never [truly...in the internal sense] of us” (1 John 2:19). From God’s sovereign perspective we would say that no one who is truly in the Covenant of Grace (internally) can ever break it and fall from it (Romans 8:31-39; *WCF* 17.1-3). At the same time, we also affirm that in the historical administration of the Covenant of Grace, there are both wheat and tares (Matthew 15:24-30, 36-43). Thus we would say that the Eternal Covenant or Covenant of Redemption, which is back behind the Covenant of Grace (its historical manifestation) is absolutely unbreakable. But there is no perfection this side of glory and thus in the historical administration of the Covenant of Redemption, what we call the Covenant of Grace, there is not a pure and definitive sorting out of these matters...not all who are born into Israel are actually part of Israel in every sense (Romans 9).

In specific answer to your question, the Testimony does not state any disagreement with the *WCF* regarding the covenant. Our church accepts fully the doctrine of the Westminster standards on the covenant. The statement from the Testimony that you questioned is: “By the Covenant of Grace, God brings the elect into fellowship with Himself.” The fellowship in question is a saving relationship, as is indicated by the rest of the paragraph. Furthermore, the emphasis of the paragraph is upon fellowship. It is not addressing the question of who is included in the covenant. In other words, it does not limit the covenant absolutely to the elect. It only states that the covenant is the means by which the elect are saved. To give an analogy: The statement “by the preaching of the Word, God brings the elect into fellowship with Himself” does not imply that preaching is addressed exclusively to the elect. Interestingly, the *Larger Catechism*, Q. 31, states “The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed.” However, Q. 32 is broader: in the “second covenant” (the covenant of grace), God “freely provideth and offereth to sinners a Mediator, and life and salvation by him.” This is in harmony with the description of the covenant in the *Confession*, Chap. 7, Par. 3.

In our desire to understand your history and theology better, could you further define your understanding of the covenant especially as it applies to confessional unity. In Joel Beeke’s *Reformed Confessions Harmonized*, pp. 52-55, there is only one statement about the covenant of grace, from Head II of the *Canons of Dort*. That is a rejection of the error that “it was not the purpose of the death of Christ that He should confirm the new covenant of grace through His blood.” The *Heidelberg Catechism* #74 says that infants are to receive baptism because they are “included in the covenant.” Our understanding is that Covenant theology developed later in history than the *Belgic Confession* or the *Heidelberg Catechism*. The *Westminster Confession* and *Catechisms* are the only Reformed confessional documents to incorporate Covenant Theology into their structure. In your judgment, would this preclude confessional unity?

2. *In what way can the RPCNA reassure us / convince us that the RPCNA is committed to upholding the Word of God and the Reformed faith “not only in doctrine but also in practice”? How consistently do you work with your confessions and documents? Could you suggest ways in which we can ascertain this? There are many churches today that are Reformed in name and subscribe to Reformed confessions, but do not live up to their confessional documents. Experience tells us that we must be cautious, and to also provide clear and consistent evidence to our own churches that the RPCNA lives up to her confessions in practice.*

This will be best determined through a growing relationship between our denominations. There are places where our congregations are neighbors. In these cases we will have opportunity to get to know each other face to face and not just on paper. You may also sample any number of sermons from congregations by visiting their websites. Several congregations participate on Sermonaudio.com under the umbrella of the name ReformedVoice.com. I would also cite the common associations we have with fraternal churches and bodies, including NAPARC and ICRC. You may also subscribe to our magazine, *Reformed Presbyterian Witness* and we would be happy to send you annual copies of our *Minutes of Synod*.

3. *What other sources than the confessional standards and the decisions of Synod could be used as sources for supporting the observations and conclusions of our Report? We agree that we must judge a church firstly by her confessional standards and official decisions, but at the same time the more sources we have the better.*

Please see the answer to question number two.

4. *We are curious about interest from the RPCNA officially as a whole in pursuing contacts with the Canadian Reformed Churches in particular? The documentation we have seen shows that the RPCNA takes church unity seriously. But we would be interested to know what you as a church federation think about the Canadian Reformed Churches in particular, and whether (or to what extent) you are interested in pursuing unity with us. Is there interest in pursuing contact with the Canadian Reformed Churches only from individuals, or also from local churches at the grass roots level? (Some Canadian Reformed Churches are “neighbours” to those of some of yours in Ontario, Washington, and in Colorado).*

As you observe, our two federations overlap in a couple of places. That makes your federation familiar to us and loved where that overlap exists. It leads us to be desirous of pursuing more contact. Where there is no overlap our knowledge of you is less developed, for practical reasons, I’m sure.

5. *We have noted that the RPCNA does not have “full intercommunion” with the OPC (churches with which we have ecclesiastical fellowship). Is there any documentation explaining the reason for the state of the current relationship with the OPC? Are there prospects for closer unity? If not, why not?*

In our interchurch relations, our category of “full intercommunion” is defined as the following:

“The Reformed Presbyterian family of churches around the world has a unique bond, born of a common origin and confession and sealed in more than two hundred years of struggle. Although the RP Churches do not have identical confessional standards, we strive to operate in practice as if we were one church, separated only by national contexts and the expanse of the oceans. We therefore fully recognize one another’s ministry, order and discipline. For this reason, we particularly welcome the regular interchange of delegates and the exchanging of pulpits and personnel, and the sharing of counsel and consultation between North America and Ireland, Scotland, Australia, Japan and Cyprus” (Manual for Interchurch Relations).

We would envision full intercommunion with churches in the US to lead to church union. This has not taken place with the OPC, though efforts are ongoing to promote closer unity. At this time, the RPC has identified the ARP as a denomination where there is a great deal of common ground doctrinally and culturally. We have tried to concentrate our efforts in this relationship in the last 4-5 years.

In Christ,
Bruce Parnell (Chairman of RPCNA Interchurch Relations Committee)

APPENDIX 2

**Report on meeting with IRC at NAPARC, November 14, 2007, 7:30-8:15 AM
by Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer****Attendance:**

CCCNA: Peter H. Holtvlüwer, Eric Kampen; Jacob Kuik, Richard E. Pot
IRC: Doug Carson; Bruce Parnell, Bruce Martin

Meeting Summary:

This meeting was held over breakfast; time proved to be too short for all that we had hoped to speak about. Peter Holtvlüwer led the discussion as we were tailing off breakfast and we discussed three main points as follows:

1. After thanking the RPCNA brothers for their written responses to our five questions to them, we sought further clarity into the nature and standing of the Contemporary Testimony. We indicated that our concern relates to its binding character as compared to the confessions (i.e. the Westminster Standards) of the church. We asked whether entering into ecclesiastical fellowship would require us to adopt this Testimony. The clear answer was “no.” They see this Testimony as binding only upon their church membership and it does not directly impact fellowship with other churches. Related questions were asked to flesh out this matter:
 - a. The Testimony seems to be like the “position papers” of other denominations and yet something more as well. Strong language is used to describe it, for example, when Synod 1980 “declared the revised Testimony to be the law and order of the church.” How does the Testimony compare with “position papers”?
 - i. Answer: the Testimony is indeed something more permanent and binding than position papers. The Testimony is maintained as the official document which supports and enhances the teaching of the Westminster Standards by “enforcing them and applying them to the issues of the day.” It is also true that the earlier subordinate standards “except where noted...are to be interpreted by the later ones,”¹⁹ especially then the Testimony. This gives the Testimony considerable weight among the subordinate standards. It serves as the filter through which the earlier ones are understood.
 - b. Can an office bearer be suspended or deposed from office because he disagrees with something written in the Testimony?
 - i. Answer: It would depend on the nature of the disagreement. The Testimony is, like the WCF and Catechisms, one of the

¹⁹ Taken from the introduction to the *Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America* as found in the production in parallel columns of the *Westminster Confession of Faith (1648)* and the Modern Language Revision of the Westminster Confession of Faith (1985) and the *Testimony* (Pittsburgh, Crown and Covenant Publications, 2000).

authoritative subordinate standards of the RPCNA. Office bearers are asked upon ordination, “Do you believe in and accept the system of doctrine and the manner of worship set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, and the Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, as being agreeable to, and founded upon, the Scriptures?” Should an office bearer voice an exception to the Testimony it would be in the hands of the ordaining body to decide whether or not that exception threatened the system of doctrine. It is not uncommon for office bearers to voice a particular exception and still be accepted and ordained (two examples of such acceptable exceptions are objecting to: 1) the teaching of abstinence from alcohol and 2) that women be permitted ordination to the office of deacon.)

- c. If a CanRC member moved into the area of an RPCNA congregation (where there was no existing sister church), and sought church membership there but had some reservations about points in the Testimony, could he be received as a member in good standing?
 - i. The answer is “yes,” provided that he would submit to the teaching and governance of the church as being based on Scripture and summarized in the Constitution (which includes the WCF, Catechisms and Testimony). This is not a vow of subscription to the subordinate standards (as in the case of office bearers) but rather a promise of godly unity in the body of Christ, having in mind especially that such a person would not be divisive about points of difference.
2. The RPCNA brothers had asked us a question in the midst of their five responses: “Could you further define your understanding of the covenant especially as it applies to confessional unity?” They were aware of several references to the covenant in the Three Forms of Unity but wondered if we could define it more precisely.
 - a. Answer: We pointed out a few additional references to the ones they mentioned, particularly as the covenant is referred to in connection with the sacrament of baptism in the Belgic Confession Art. 34 and the Canons of Dort I, 17. We explained that the CanRC do not formulate position papers or statements beyond the confessions to explain any point of doctrine. We allow room for varying shades of opinion within the bounds of the confessions. The confessions express and provide the parameters for our unity in the true faith. Having said that, we explained that, generally speaking, ministers would teach on the covenant as it is revealed in Scripture in its historical outworking. That is to say, for example, we would explain how the Lord related to Abraham in that binding relationship of love known as the covenant, and that it included a promise and an obligation. This basic relationship continues right throughout Scripture and remains in place for God’s people in the new covenant as well. This is reflected, for example, in our Form for the Baptism of Infants. For this reason, the congregation is always pointed to both

God's promises *and* their obligations within the covenant. Covenant is not to be confused with election and not to be defined in terms of God's eternal decree. The covenant is a vibrant, living relationship that entails both blessings (in the way of obedience) and curses (in the way of disobedience). A few books written by ministers on this subject (e.g. Stam, *Covenant of Love*; Van Genderen, *Covenant and Election*) were cited for further information.

3. As time was running down, we had a brief discussion about women in office. Our question for them was: although the office of deacon is not a ruling office *per se*, yet is it not the case that any office carries with it a measure of authority? Thus, when women are ordained to the office of deacon, are they not given authority (in that sphere of church life) over men in the church?
 - a. Answer: Women do have authority already in various spheres of life: e.g. a mother in her home has authority over her children. Authority for women is not a strange thing in life or even in the Bible. [At this point our discussion came to a rapid close because NAPARC was beginning.] In a follow-up email, Rev. Parnell added the following explanation: "The RPCNA is committed to the teaching that the husband is the head of wife, and that the office of elder is reserved for men and commanded in Scripture and demonstrative of male headship. Deacons do not sit with the elders in ruling as in a consistory, but have a service of ministry."

The meeting drew to an end in a very brotherly spirit. Rev. Parnell indicated verbally that they would be pleased to receive our delegates at their next Synod in June 2008 in Beaver Falls for further discussion.

Discussion List

1. Internally review RPCNA's replies (above) re: nature and status of Testimony
2. Carry-on discussion with RPCNA on ordination of women to the office of deacon
3. Internally review the remaining replies of the initial five questions posed and see what needs to be discussed as yet with the RPCNA.
4. Internally discuss the value of entering into ecclesiastical fellowship with the RPCNA versus leaving the matter to relating with them at NAPARC.

P.H. Holtvlüwer,
November 20, AD 2007

[revised June 28, AD 2008 following discussions for clarification with the IRC at the RPCNA Synod, June, 2008 as well as one email for clarification]

APPENDIX 3

Report on observation of RPCNA Synod, June 23-27, 2008 by Rev. P.H. Holtviüwer

Hospitable Spirit

As representatives of our Committee for Contact with Churches in North America (CCCNA), br. Jacob Kuik and I arrived in Beaver Falls in the early evening of Monday, June 23. Though we were too late to take in the formal opening of Synod, we nevertheless were warmly welcomed by delegates who saw us arrive. That warm and friendly spirit was something we felt continually throughout our visit and which we very much appreciated. By coincidence we bumped into Rev. Bruce Parnell, chairman of the Inter-church Relations Committee (IRC) of the RPCNA and he made us feel very much at home. He took the time to show us our accommodations and even took us out for dinner, all of which showed to us the value the RPCNA places on the developing relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches.

The Synod Experience

For the next two days, br. Kuik and I sat in on the sessions of the 177th (annual) Synod of the RPCNA. It is markedly different from our own General Synod. Our General Synod has 24 delegates, a handful of fraternal delegates and a small crowd of observers. Though the RPCNA is smaller than our federation (some 6000 members in total spread over approximately 70 congregations), each church normally delegates a pastor and one elder. Add to that the theological students and fraternal delegates on hand to observe the proceedings and you find yourself in a room filled with over 130 men! This does not include the “gallery” of observers at the back of the room. It is a full room of delegates which means that practically speaking, much of the detailed business of Synod is conducted off the floor in appointed committees. Plenary discussions are limited to comments about the basic direction of committee reports while most comments about finer issues are passed directly on to the committee. The moderator of the Synod has a challenging task to keep the business of Synod flowing smoothly and in a timely fashion. Each issue is settled by oral vote of “Aye” or “Nay.” When the sound is too difficult to distinguish, the moderator will call for a “division” and have all votes counted as delegates stand up. For a body that size, it is an effective way to conduct the affairs of the church.

Synod is not all “business,” however. Each day’s session began with a devotional service involving the preaching of the Word. There is a prayer before each break. In addition, there were also specially designated times of intercessory prayer in which a list of items which Synod was dealing with would be the subject of prayer. These longer periods of prayer involved breaking up randomly into small groups of three or four sitting close together. Each person in the group would take an opportunity to address matters in prayer. At one point, after Synod heard from the fraternal and observing delegates, also the Canadian Reformed Churches were prayed

for! In addition to preaching and prayer there was also much singing of the Psalms without musical accompaniment, as is the practice in the RPCNA. One cannot leave without the feeling of a group of men sincerely committed to the worship of the Lord and the service of His church.

Topics Under Discussion

One of the biggest topics up for debate and discussion was the revision of the Directory for Worship. Close behind that was the subject of the revision of the Psalm lyrics and tunes in an effort to bring them up to date, accurate to the biblical text, and in understandable language. As one might imagine, these were “hot” topics since they touch the week-to-week service of the church. It was encouraging to witness another Psalm-loving church taking such care to preserve and promote the singing of the Psalms for the future by way of a careful revision. The vigorous debates over the best kinds of alterations to make both in the Directory and the Psalter showed that the regulative principle of worship mandated in the Westminster Standards (see also our Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 35) is alive and well.

The RPCNA also takes seriously the calling to witness to the world, both locally and abroad. They are involved in numerous church plants within North America and also have growing mission works in Japan, Cyprus and Sudan. As well, they have become increasingly involved in the same far-eastern country as we have through our home missionary in the Fraser Valley. Discussions with delegates involved in that work showed an almost identical approach to the work there. They expressed an interest in discussing this work with our people who are on the front lines of it. I have since put them in touch with each other. This is a clear example of one potential area of cooperation with each other. At the very least, we can learn from each other and perhaps help each other avoid mistakes.

The RPCNA also has one pastor dedicated to serving within the US military as a chaplain. He made it clear that he has all the freedom to speak about the gospel of Jesus Christ in accordance with his Reformed convictions. This work is being done in coordination with the United Reformed Churches of North America and one other Presbyterian church body. The military chaplain was on hand to address Synod and stressed how great an opportunity there is in the US military to witness for Christ. There are many lost and hungry people. It made me think that this may be an area the Canadian Reformed Churches could investigate with respect to establishing a chaplaincy within the Canadian Armed Forces.

Addressing Synod

As one of the invited observers to Synod, I was called upon to briefly address the body and give some information as to life in the Canadian Reformed Churches. I took the opportunity to inform the delegates about matters of mutual interest such as the state of our relationship with the URCNA, the growing mission work in Brazil, the present revision of Psalm lyrics in the Anglo-Genevan Psalter as well as our recent application for membership in NAPARC.

With a view to developing our relationship, I suggested and encouraged the following areas for possible practical cooperation with each other: 1. Building ties between our local churches in Denver, Ottawa, and Guelph/Kitchener with a special eye toward covenantal Reformed education for school children; 2. Work together or share ideas in local evangelism and church plants; 3. Share ideas and perhaps work together in the far-eastern country in which we each are currently busy. From comments afterward it appeared that the address was well-received and that there is a desire among the RPCNA to further get to know our federation.

Meetings of Presbyteries

Since all churches are represented at Synod, delegates make the most of their time together by also meeting separately as local presbyteries. We were able to sit in on a couple of different meetings and were able to witness various stages of examination for men wishing to become ministers in the RPCNA. Some were at the beginning stage, seeking to be placed “under the care of presbytery,” and others were seeking to enter as full-fledged ministers from another denomination altogether. The range of questions asked during the portions of the exams we observed seemed to parallel the kinds of questions either a consistory or a classis might ask of aspiring students or candidates in our midst. I also heard a candidate present an Old Testament sermon that was Christ-centered, text-specific and adroitly applied. What became clear is that in their system there is, right from the beginning, close involvement and scrutiny by the local session and presbytery with and over the student. This official involvement begins prior to the student’s formal education and continues until he sustains his final exam to become a minister (should the Lord grant that).

Meetings with the Inter-Church Relations Committee

We also had two very good meetings with the IRC of the RPCNA. We appreciated their openness and the frank discussions we could have. In accordance with our committee mandate from Synod Smithers 2007, we asked questions about exclusive psalmody, women in the office of deacon and the position of their Testimony and some of its contents. They responded with clear answers based on exegesis of Scripture passages and referred to parts of the Testimony and the Constitution for further clarification of their position on these matters. They in turn asked questions about the Canadian Reformed Churches and our views on various items. Br. Kuik and I have reported extensively on these meetings in a separate account. The outcome of these and other discussions with the RPCNA will be published once our committee (CCCNA) has finished its report for General Synod 2010.

Conclusion

After taking our leave early on June 26, brother Kuik and I could look back with much favour upon our time at the RPCNA Synod. Personal interactions in addition to all our observations were pleasant and informative. Many were genuinely interested in Canada and the Canadian Reformed Churches. We felt essentially on the “same page” with these

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brethren and were very glad of that. Indeed it is good and pleasant when brothers dwell in unity! May the Lord continue to bless our relationship that we may be servants of one another in the mutual goal to advance Christ's kingdom and glorify our God!

Respectfully submitted,

Peter H. Holtvlüwer

APPENDIX 4

Report on meeting with IRC at RPCNA Synod, June 25-26, 2008 by Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer

Attendance:

CCCNA: Peter Holtvlüwer, Jacob Kuik

IRC: Bruce Parnell, David Reese, Ian Wise, Matt Kingswood

Meeting Summary:

We were able to meet twice with the IRC, once over dinner on June 25 and a second time over dinner on June 26. This latter meeting was with the IRC's of all churches which had sent fraternal delegates to the Synod (i.e. Associate Reformed Presbyterian, Canadian Reformed Churches, Free Church of Scotland, Free Church of Scotland – Continuing, Orthodox Presbyterian Church).

In our first meeting, we had an opportunity to review the answers to our questions as supplied by their IRC at NAPARC, 2007 and summarized by our Committee in order to ensure that we understood them correctly. This was fruitful for it led to both a confirmation of some points of understanding and also a clarification of other points. The result is that the original report on our meeting at NAPARC 2007 could be revised and considered an accurate representation of the views of the RPCNA on those points. Please see that revised report (dated June 28, 2008) for the issues addressed on that occasion.

Additional Questions Asked During the Present Meetings

1. *Exclusive Psalmody* - The CanRC holds to the principle of the priority of the psalms while allowing for hymns faithful to Scripture to also be sung in the worship services. The RPCNA holds to the position of exclusive psalmody. Our understanding is that such a difference in positions would not, from the side of the RPCNA, prohibit ecclesiastical fellowship but it would prohibit full organizational unity. Is this correct?
 - a. Answer: Yes.
2. *Internal/External Covenant of Grace* - Prior to our meeting at NAPARC, we received a written explanation of what the *Testimony* means when in chap. 7, #5 (as cited in the book of parallel columns²⁰ or p.A 29 #5 on website version) it appears to imply that the covenant of grace is only with the elect. The reply made clear that believers and their children are in the covenant in "at least an external sense." It was also

²⁰ See the production in parallel columns of the *Westminster Confession of Faith (1648)* and the Modern Language Revision of the Westminster Confession of Faith (1985) and the *Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America Testimony* (Pittsburgh, Crown and Covenant Publications, 2000).

stated that, "We believe that there is both an internal and external administration of the Covenant." Could you elaborate on the meaning of this internal/external administration of the Covenant?

- a. Answer: It's a way to express the reality that "*not all who are descended from Israel are Israel*" (Romans 9:6). The covenant does extend to believers and their children but the grim reality is that some do grow up to reject God's covenant and so show that they never truly belonged to "Israel" or to "the church." Every covenant child receives God's promises in the same manner but not every covenant child benefits from God's promises in the same manner. A rejection of the covenant promises makes that covenant child all the more liable to God's judgment since he is throwing away riches which those outside of God's covenant of grace never had. Every covenant child has the obligation to respond to God's gracious promises by trusting and obeying God, and yet some do not. By this they show themselves to be part of the true covenant community, the true Israel in name only, in an outward sense only. Election is not identical with God's covenant of grace but rather the decree of election cuts across or through the line of the covenant.
- b. Origin of the Question: We were asked both why the expression "internal/external" caught our attention as well as how we would explain the realities of covenant children going astray. We replied that in our ecclesiastical history we have encountered a dogmatic distinction (originated by Abraham Kuyper) between internal and external (or inner and outer) covenants which led to viewing the covenant of grace through the lens of the doctrine of election. Such teachings have, in the past, led to the unfounded notions that children are baptized on the basis of a presumed regeneration and that baptized children who thus grew up with no signs of regeneration were thought to never have truly been in the covenant at all. This teaching became so dominant in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in the first half of the 20th century that it was adopted and forced upon the churches by the General Synod during WWII. This forcing directly led to the Liberation of many individuals and churches (i.e. their separation from the false churches as represented by the General Synod) in 1944. This experience continues to loom large in the minds of Canadian Reformed believers.
- c. Canadian Reformed Understanding: Although the Canadian Reformed Churches do not officially hold to a particular understanding of God's covenant of grace, the common understanding is to keep the covenant distinct from the decree of election. We commonly view it quite simply as God's binding relationship of love with His people established in the course of time. The Bible speaks simply of God's covenant wherein he makes promises and presents obligations for His people. The Bible does not distinguish between inner/outer, internal/external covenants and

so we try to speak as the Bible does about it. The covenant of grace is a real relationship with *all* members of the covenant (believers and their children) and the promises are genuinely held out to each covenant child in the same manner. However, not all covenant children respond in faith and obedience and for this they will face God's judgment (unless they repent, of course). Indeed, the decree of election is worked out through the avenue of the covenant so the two are related and yet distinct. The responsibility of man is to respond to the covenant promises in faith and not to pry into the hidden things of God (Deut 29:29). The RPCNA brothers could agree wholeheartedly with such an explanation and we concluded together that although we use different terms, we both think of the covenant in virtually the same manner.

3. *The Covenant of 1643 and the Kingship of Christ* – In our consultations with the OPC (according to our Rule #3 for Ecclesiastical Fellowship), the brethren from their IRC suggested we inquire into the Covenant of 1643, the Kingship of Christ and the ordination of women to the office of deacon. To begin with the first two, can you tell us about this Covenant of 1643 and how that is linked to the Kingship of Christ?
 - a. Answer: The Covenant of 1643 is a reference to an event in the history of the Church of Scotland, a direct ancestor of the RPCNA. In 1643, the Church of Scotland entered into a “Solemn League and Covenant” with the English Parliament. In this agreement, the Scots promised to send men to help fight alongside of the English Parliamentarians against the forces of Charles I. In return, the English Assembly was to fight politically for the rulership of Christ over the church in Scotland (over against the idea that the king was ruler over the church, as favoured by the monarch of the day) and the re-establishment of the Presbyterian form of church government. The English Assembly failed to help the Scots achieve that goal and for more than 50 years afterwards the Church of Scotland was oppressed by a hierarchical form of church government under the king's authority. This history has bred a strong commitment down to the present time to Christ's authority over both state and church. The church and state are both instituted by God. Jesus Christ, as Mediator, exercises lordship over each. Church and state are separate institutions having their own spheres of sovereignty. At the same time, they are also complementary institutions and have areas where they influence each other. This is the origin of the popular slogan, “For Christ's crown and covenant” and can be seen in the name of the denomination publishing company, “Crown and Covenant Publications.”
 - b. *Christ as King over All Nations* - More broadly, this historic act of covenanting between parties of men under God was a display of the idea that Christ is King over all nations (bar none) and has by decree a civil covenant with them. This is not a reference to the

covenant of grace but rather to a broader sense of covenant in that Christ has been given rulership over all the nations (as per Psalm 2, for example). The Father gave the Son all these nations as His own inheritance and thus the Son is said to have a covenant with them, to be Lord over them, even though they may not recognize His Lordship as such. At stake during this tumultuous time in Scottish Church history was the relationship between church and state. The Lord used the covenanter church to articulate this relationship and in doing so she used the well-known idea of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King. As ascended Christ, Jesus continues to function as: our mediating Priest, our Prophet who reveals Himself through His Word and Spirit and our King who rules over all, including both church and state.

4. *Ordination of Women to the Office of Deacon* – Since we only began this discussion at NAPARC, we desired to discuss it more and come to greater understanding on this matter. We understand that the office of deacon is not a ruling office but wonder about the very idea of office as a position of authority by definition. Is not any office in the church one of some authority?
 - a. *Answer* – The conception of the office of deacon in the RPCNA is clearly that it is an office of administration and not of authority. It is not a ruling or teaching office. The deacons do not sit together with the elders as a governing body. The deacons remain under the oversight of elders. The Constitution of the RPCNA is clear about these distinctions: “The Diaconate is a spiritual office responsible for the ministry of mercy and stewardship of the congregation. It is neither a ruling nor a teaching office. Its exercise, like the whole life of the church, is under the oversight of the session and its function is administrative.” (p.D-23 in the version downloaded from the RPCNA homepage). In these distinctions the RPCNA brothers felt there was not much difference from the OPC or the Continental Reformed.
 - b. *Basis for Women as Deacons* – The IRC brothers wished to stress that the basis for allowing women to serve as deacons is the exegesis of biblical texts and not the pressures of feminism or any other ideology. They pointed out that women have been admitted to the office of deacon since the 1800s, thus preceding the modern feminist movement. Some of the texts which form the basis for this position are the reference to “women” in 1 Timothy 3:12 (which others, admittedly, understand as ‘wives’ but which in the Greek can refer to “women”). Romans 16:1,2 is often cited where Phoebe is referred to as a “deacon” (and not a ‘deaconess’ as many English translations have it). Phoebe was clearly there in some sort of official capacity and the brethren in Rome were instructed by Paul to give her what she needed. It was mentioned as well that there is some witness of female deacons in the early church, that Calvin held to the position of deaconesses (though not as an office in the church),

and that B.B. Warfield held to women serving as deacons (though he admitted it was on the 'slimmest of grounds').

- c. *Some Inconsistencies?* – In further discussion we were pointed to the Constitution to see a more detailed description of the office of deacon. This we did in the days following Synod. It may be worthwhile to quote the list of duties for deacons mentioned therein (p.D-24) with attention drawn (by underlining) to the activities which suggest a certain exercise of authority within the congregation and involving some measure of teaching:

“The duties of deacons include:

1. Regular attendance and participation in the meetings of the deacon board.
2. Meeting jointly with the session periodically for prayer, evaluation and growth in their respective ministries.
3. Maintaining an active ministry of mercy, such as:
 - a. Leading the congregation in discerning and ministering to needs such as:
 - (1) local needs of individuals and institutions,
 - (2) national and international needs.
 - b. Gathering and distribution of funds.
 - c. Training the congregation in the use of the members' gifts in the ministry of mercy.
 - d. Helping the congregation evaluate requests for funds by organizations outside the denomination.
4. Maintaining an active ministry of stewardship, such as:
 - a. Overseeing the work of the treasurer.
 - b. Appointing a finance committee as needed.
 - c. Keeping the congregation informed at least quarterly of financial needs.
 - d. Securing an annual audit of all the congregation's accounts.
 - e. Preparing an annual budget in conjunction with the session.
 - f. Offering family budget counselling.
 - g. Teaching principles of giving.
 - h. Overseeing the maintenance of property.
5. Developing these ministries by personal visitation.
6. Performing other duties assigned to them by the session, congregation or presbytery.”

It is clear that the intention of the RPCNA is to make the office of deacon a position of assistance and administration but in practice it seems to have some measure of authority over and the calling to teach also the men of the church. This may still be worthy of more discussion with the RPCNA brothers in an effort to serve as iron sharpening iron (Proverbs 27:17).

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Conclusion

Our meetings with the IRC were productive and helpful to bring clarity to various issues. We were able to openly discuss all the topics on our list. We enjoyed our discussions together and experienced a harmonious working environment. We look forward to our next meeting and to the development and maturing of our relationship together in the Lord.

Respectfully submitted,

Peter H. Holtvlüwer

June 28, AD 2008

APPENDIX 5

Report on meeting with IRC at NAPARC, November 12, 2008 by Rev. R.E. Pot

Attendance:

CCCNA: Eric Kampen, Andrew J. Pol, Richard E. Pot, Jacob Kuik

RPCNA: Ian Wise, Bruce Martin, Matt Kingswood, David Smith

The purpose of the meeting was mainly to maintain a positive connection with one another and informal discussion. Most official questions have been raised and discussed in previous meetings. Initial discussion was held about the process that would be followed with respect to a recommendation for entering into relations, the way such a recommendation would be brought to our respective Synods, and the need to communicate clearly to our churches.

The Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (adopted August 1980)

1. *How is this Testimony distinct from the Westminster Standards?*

There are only about four places where the Testimony deviates from the WCF, for example:

1. Degrees of consanguinity with respect to marriage (ch. 24 par 4)
2. Identification of the Pope as the Antichrist (ch. 25 par 6).
3. Civil magistrate's calling of ecclesiastical assemblies (ch. 31 par 2)
4. Civil magistrate's authority over the local church (ch. 32 par 3)

The RPCNA does not change the text of the Westminster Standards, but just states where they disagree with it. The Testimony also adds to the Westminster Standards, e.g. rejecting Darwinism. The Confession is more basic in that it covers everything, but the testimony adds helpful and applicatory comments. One of the reasons for the Contemporary Testimony was because of a love for the Confession. According the Directory for Church Government, Chapter 1.4, "Children should be encouraged to memorize the *Shorter Catechism* and urged to read and study the *Testimony* and *Confession of Faith* as they come to years of fuller understanding." Youth of the church are instructed in the Confession primarily, but also in the Testimony.

2. *The status of the Testimony.*

The Testimony does have a confessional character. The primary document is Scripture; secondary are the Westminster Standards and the Testimony alongside one another. The Testimony thus has the same status and level as the Confession. Some in the RPCNA might even say it is even higher than the confession, because in some instances it supersedes the Confession. Office bearers must *subscribe* to it, and members of the congregation must *submit* to it (just as with the Westminster Standards).

In an earlier communication from the RPCNA, it was noted that the Testimony is a "servant" to the Confession. In our meeting, the RPCNA

brothers observed some hesitation about this formulation and expressed that they would prefer to use the words from the Introduction to the Testimony #4: "All of these documents, the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the *Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church*, and the *Larger and Shorter Catechisms*, are of equal authority in the church; except that where noted, earlier documents are to be interpreted by the later ones."

3. *The Function of the Contemporary Testimony in Relation to Church Unity.*

Discussion addressed how the RPCNA's use of the Contemporary Testimony might be similar to what the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRCNA) did in adding a Declaration of Principles in 1951 as an additional confessional document. In the case of the PRCNA, their Declaration of Principles became a thing to distinguish them from other Reformed churches, and they used it to create barriers between themselves and other Reformed Churches. The RPCNA does not use their Contemporary Testimony in this kind of sectarian manner. For example, the RPCNA believes in exclusive psalmody, but this does not prevent them from having fellowship with other Reformed believers. It also does not prevent them from participating in NAPARC. Thus the Contemporary Testimony functions differently in the RPCNA than the Declaration of Principles does in the PRCNA. The aim of it is not to try to distinguish the RPCNA from other Reformed churches, but more to present a clear and contemporary witness to the world. One of the vows for office-bearers includes an acknowledgement that the content of faith must be confessed as it applies to the modern day. This is what the RPCNA tries to do in the Testimony.

Female deacons

In the Constitution of the RPCNA the following is noted in the Testimony on page A-88 in regard to the office of deacons: "The diaconate is a spiritual office subordinate to the session and is not a teaching or ruling office. The deacons have responsibility for the ministry of mercy, the finances and property of the congregation, and such other tasks as are assigned to them by the session."

The presence of female deacons is a debated point in the RPCNA. Some ministers declare an exception to this at their ordination. Having female deacons is a practice that has been in the RPCNA for over 100 years, so it has not arisen under the influence of feminism. Some of the practices of the RPCNA with respect to how deacons function were highlighted, and it was asked whether this is consistent with their principle that it is not an authoritative office. In response the brothers stressed that deacons operate under the oversight of the session. Under a Presbyterian church government, this oversight carries more weight than in Reformed church government, since the authority of the session is decisive.

General comments

It is noted that the RPCNA committee for ecumenicity only meets once a year.

Closing

Eric Kampen closed in prayer.

R.E. Pot, November 12, 2008

CCCNA Report to Synod Burlington-Ebenezer 2010

REPORT 7: The North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC)

1. Mandate

General Synod Smithers 2007 decided to give the instruction to the CCCA “to apply for membership in NAPARC” (*Acts 2007*, p. 155).

2. Meetings

Members of the CCCNA (formerly called CCCA) attended the annual meeting of NAPARC in 2007 and 2008. It was decided that in order to use these gatherings as opportunities to meet with Interchurch Relations committees of other churches attending NAPARC, it would be useful to send four delegates each time, two from Subcommittee West and two from Subcommittee East. In this way it was possible to arrange meetings with churches with which we have ecclesiastical fellowship in North America. The Revs. E. Kampen, R.E. Pot and P.H. Holtvlüwer and br. J. Kuik attended the meeting in 2007. The Revs. E. Kampen, R.E. Pot, and Dr. A.J. Pol, as well as br. J. Kuik represented the Canadian Reformed Churches at the 2008 meeting.

3. Results

At NAPARC 2007, the application of the Canadian Reformed Churches for membership was submitted. In the meantime, the delegates were seated as observers. It was informative to receive updates on developments in member churches and observers as they reported to NAPARC. Rev. R.E. Pot received the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches. At the 2007 meeting it became clear that Federal Vision theology was a shared concern among various churches and that those who addressed the issue made it a point in this regard to uphold the confessional teaching of justification by faith alone in Christ alone and through grace alone.

At NAPARC 2008, it became apparent that the application of the Canadian Reformed Churches to become members of NAPARC had received the required ratification of at least two-thirds of the member churches. As a result, we were officially welcomed as full members and could be seated as such at this assembly.

Attending these annual meetings has proven to be beneficial in giving further insight in what is happening among the churches with which we have ecclesiastical fellowship or with which we have contact with a view to the possibility of establishing such a relationship. During the days that NAPARC was convened, there were meetings with the Interchurch Relations Committees of the ERQ, RCUS, OPC, and the RPCNA. Relevant details concerning these meetings can be found in the reports of contacts with the Interchurch Relations Committees of

those churches. However it can be noted here that attending NAPARC has already repeatedly shown its usefulness in exercising the bonds of fellowship with these churches.

It should be noted that Dr. A.J. Pol has been appointed to be involved in the work of the Interim Committee of NAPARC, which prepares the agenda for the plenary sessions of this assembly and comes with recommendations for the decision-making process.

The next NAPARC meeting is scheduled to take place at the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, MI, on November 17th and 18th, 2009.

4. Recommendation

The committee recommends that Synod decide to mandate the CCCNA to continue representing the Canadian Reformed Churches at NAPARC.

5. Appendices

- 1. Report on Visit to NAPARC 2007 - Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer.
- 2. Report on Visit to NAPARC 2008 - Dr. A.J. Pol

APPENDIX 1

Report on Visit to NAPARC 2007 November 12-13, 2007 in Newark, New Jersey

By Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer

Introduction

Four members of the CCCNA, two from sub-committee east and two from sub-committee west, attended this meeting as observers: Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer, Rev. E. Kampen, br. J. Kuik, and Rev. R.E. Pot. NAPARC membership has grown in recent years from six member churches in 2001 to a present total of nine leading up to the present meeting. The three most recent admissions were: United Reformed Churches of North America (2005), Free Reformed Churches of North America (2006) and L'Église Réformée du Québec (2002). They now sit together around one table with the following churches:

Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church
Korean American Presbyterian Church
Orthodox Presbyterian Church

Presbyterian Church in America
Reformed Church in the United States
Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America.

An Expanding NAPARC

It is noteworthy to observe that NAPARC continues to grow. This year marked the 33rd annual meeting of NAPARC. For most of those thirty-three years, the number of church groups involved was relatively small, around half-a-dozen with only minor fluctuation. However, since the turn of the millennium, the council has attracted more interest from various Reformed and Presbyterian bodies so that by the end of its meeting in 2007, NAPARC consisted of fully ten member churches with two more approved for membership. The Lord willing, this will make for virtually a doubling of NAPARC's membership in approximately eight years!

Perhaps the reason for the sudden spike in membership lies in the expulsion from NAPARC in 2000 of the Christian Reformed Church, one of the founding member churches. The CRC was expelled because it decided in 1995 to allow the ordination of women to the ruling offices of the church (elder, minister). Such a move by NAPARC showed that the Council was seriously committed to upholding the Reformed faith. This likely did much to open the doors for those who felt they could not be joined with the CRC in such an organization. Whatever the precise reason(s), it is encouraging to see confessionally-committed Calvinistic churches drawing more and more together. Such cooperation and unity is surely pleasing to the Lord of the church!

New Membership 2007

After the newly appointed chairman, Rev. George W. Knight III (OPC), took over from outgoing chairman Rev. James Kim (KAPC), one of the first items of business was to formalize the acceptance of the Heritage Reformed Congregations as a new member church. With their application approved by majority vote at NAPARC 2006, NAPARC had only to determine whether two-thirds of the member churches supported this action in their own General Synods or General Assemblies. Since many member churches meet annually in a General Assembly, and some had met in their tri-annual General Synod earlier in 2007, it could be confirmed by the chairman that enough support was present to admit the new body into the Council.

Regular Business

A large percentage of each meeting of NAPARC is spent reviewing reports from each member church. Written reports are submitted in advance to delegates and observers and then a short summary is provided orally by one of that church's delegates. Delegates then have opportunity to ask questions about anything in the report. This mutual sharing of information is important to develop awareness of and concern for each other. It also opens the possibility for assisting one another. Such assistance comes immediately at the meeting itself in the form of mutual prayer for each church body. However, it can go beyond that to share ideas for various forms of ministry and even to cooperate in such things as mission and evangelism work.

A good example of such cooperation took place this year when one of L'ERQ congregations through their NAPARC delegate asked the body to help fund an exhibit in Québec City on the Huguenot (French Reformers) heritage of the province. An elaborate exhibit is planned to be part of much activity to help mark the 400th anniversary of Québec City's founding in 2008. In a province dominated by Roman Catholicism, it is a wonderful opportunity to showcase the long history of God's reforming work there and, with His blessing, to open the door to a renewal of that work in the present. NAPARC granted this request which helped to lighten the load for a resource-challenged L'ERQ.

Membership Applications

Later in the meeting, as mandated by General Synod Smithers 2007, the CCCNA applied for formal membership in NAPARC on behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches. This process includes submitting a summary concerning the applicant church's historical background, confessional documents, statistical details, worship practices and any "distinctives" that set a church apart from other churches. This written report, combined with a short oral presentation by Rev. R.E. Pot (attached), was considered by the delegates. An opportunity was given for questions from the floor. Responses were given by Rev. Kampen who had a considerable hand in assembling the application.

Notably, questions were few, which is not always the case. Likely that is the fruit of much familiarity with member churches over the years of observation and the fact that we have ecclesiastical fellowship with four

member churches. Of interest is the fact that one delegate asked why we had left the box marked “distinctives” on the application form empty. The answer given was, “Because we have none!” As a federation we may have historical and cultural identity markers but none of these is held out as a distinctive we would not do without (e.g. exclusive psalmody, experiential preaching). We seek to be bound by God’s Word summarized in the confessions, nothing more nor less. All delegates voted in favour of admitting the Canadian Reformed Churches into membership. Hopefully this can be ratified in the next year by at least two-thirds of member churches so that in 2008 we can be received into full membership in NAPARC.

Following our application came one from the Presbyterian Reformed Church. This is a very small denomination of some seven congregations with a total membership of less than 400. Here, many delegates had questions including: “*Can you explain why you are a separate denomination? Why not consider joining one of the other Presbyterian and Reformed bodies?*” As CanRC delegates we could appreciate that question since it shows that the basis for NAPARC is alive and well, namely, “...to hold out before each other the desirability and need for organic union of churches that are of like faith and practice.” Further questions brought out that the PRC had a historically unique origin and holds dearly to the practice of experimental (or: experiential) preaching, an emphasis which has served already to bring them into close contact with the Free Reformed Churches of North America. They also hold to the original version of the Westminster Standards and employ exclusive Psalmody. In the end, NAPARC delegates voted unanimously to admit the PRC to membership.

Other Issues

Several churches mentioned in their reports that they had either begun or completed studies on the new teaching known as the Federal Vision. Federal Vision theology appears to be a significant concern in the OPC, PCA, URCNA and RPCNA. All completed reports found this doctrine to be deficient in different respects and all made efforts to clarify the confessional teaching of justification by faith alone in Christ alone through grace alone. Good works contribute nothing toward salvation but serve to provide proof that faith is living. While we have not been touched by this controversy as yet in the CanRC and we do not think “position papers” are the best way to go, we can appreciate the vigour with which these church bodies want to defend and uphold this critical teaching of Scripture re-discovered in the Reformation.

Some time was spent discussing ways to improve the NAPARC website which had become somewhat stagnant. All members wanted to insure a more active and up-to-date website. In the end the content was left under the supervision of the NAPARC executive while a web-master would be appointed to do the actual work. This decision has already born fruits as a revitalized web-site since the meeting is in clear evidence at:

An evening speech was given by Dr. Sung-Il Steve Park, adjunct professor of Apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, on the history of Presbyterianism in Korea. The Christian faith only came to

Korea in the late 19th century but its development shows the same hallmarks of struggle as the Christian faith anywhere: liberalism, persecution, and internal division. The unique character of the Korean approach to worship (i.e. deeply emotional) was brought out as well and helped us to better understand our Korean brethren.

Fellowship and Interaction

As in past years, our attendance at NAPARC allowed for many opportunities to mix and mingle with delegates and observers from the various churches. We took the opportunity and organized four formal meetings with Inter-church Relations Committees of four churches: L'ERQ, RCUS, RPCNA and OPC (see separate reports elsewhere). Having four members of our CCCNA present was very beneficial for this and conducting four meetings in two days was a good use of time and money. Although some meetings were more productive than others for various reasons, this format should lend itself to increased productivity in inter-church relations.

Beyond such formal meetings, each of us spent time speaking with representatives from still more churches. Such informal interaction does a great deal to help understand one another and helps open the way for possible formal ecclesiastical relationships. A clear example of this came with br. Kuik's conversations with Rev. James Alderman, an observer from the Korean Presbyterian Church (Kosin). He is one of the few native-born American pastors (and thus fluent in English) in this church which is a "daughter" church of our sister church in Korea (Korean Presbyterian Church). Rev. Alderman was happy to reconnect with Canadian Reformed delegates and hopes to assist in formally renewing contacts between our churches. Those contacts had more or less come to an end in recent times due to a lack of ability to communicate with each other.

Reception throughout NAPARC both formally and informally was always warm, cordial and brotherly. Participation in NAPARC as observers has been fruitful for ecclesiastical relations but we look forward to still more fruitfulness as we may become full member participants in the years ahead, the Lord willing.

APPENDIX 2

Report on Visit to NAPARC 2008

By Dr. A.J. Pol

Membership accepted

General Synod Smithers 2007 instructed the Committee for Contact with Churches in North America (CCCNA) to seek membership in the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC).²¹ As a result, an application was submitted. The 34th meeting of NAPARC was convened at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in South Carolina from November 11-12, 2008. At that meeting it was announced that a sufficient number of member churches of this organization had approved of the Canadian Reformed application for membership. Accordingly, the delegates from the Canadian Reformed Churches, the Revs. E. Kampen, A.J. Pol, R.E. Pot, and br. J. Kuik were invited to be seated as full voting members of this Council.

Member Churches

So far, the following Churches are also members of NAPARC: The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARP), the Église Réformée du Québec (ERQ), the Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA), the Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC), the Korean American Presbyterian Church (KAPC), the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS), the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America (RPCNA), and the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA). Observer delegates were present on behalf of the Korean Presbyterian Church in America (Kosin) and the Presbyterian Reformed Church. The latter church has a membership request that is pending.²²

Meeting

The meeting took place under the leadership of Rev. B. Westerveld of the ERQ, with Rev. L. Bilkes (FRCNA) serving as vice chairman, while Rev. Ron Potter (RCUS) functioned as secretary and Rev. M. Koerner (RCUS) as treasurer. Reports were received from each of the member churches and after each report a delegate from another member church led in prayer for the reporting church. A similar procedure was followed with the observer churches.

In the evening of the first day Dr. John Carrick (OPC) gave a lecture on “Jonathan Edwards and his Preaching” for those present as well as for

²¹ *Acts - General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches – Smithers, BC, 2007*, p. 255.

²² Quick links to member church directories can be found at: <http://www.naparc.org/directories.html>

guests from the community. Dr. Carrick is a professor at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

The following day the minutes of the 2007 plenary session were declared approved as corrected.²³ Communications from various member churches were dealt with, followed by various housekeeping matters. Work on the NAPARC website is ongoing. Hopefully in the future more up to date and complete information will be available.

A report was given on Foreign and Home Missions consultations. Information on various activities made it clear that it is desirable for the member churches to be in touch with each other in regard to their activities since sharing of information can lead to a beneficial sharing of resources and prevent unnecessary duplication of certain activities. The next meeting for such consultation is scheduled for January 2010 in Orlando, Florida.

The 35th meeting of NAPARC is scheduled to be hosted by the Heritage Reformed Congregations from November 17-18, 2009 at the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Contacts with Churches

As pointed out by the CCCNA to various Canadian Reformed Synods, attending NAPARC meetings is not only beneficial because of the exchange of information during the formal sessions. Next to this there are also opportunities to meet with delegates from churches with which we have ecclesiastical fellowship. The Canadian delegates made use of the occasion to meet with delegates from the ERQ, the FRCNA, the OPC, the RCUS, and the RPCNA. Details of these visits will be made available in reports to the next Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches. However, some information derived either from the sessions of NAPARC or from the separate meetings with delegates of individual churches can be highlighted here.

ERQ

The ERQ has celebrated the 20th anniversary of its existence. It currently consists of only five congregations, but the desire is strong to reach out to the people of Quebec. It has recently adopted a liturgy for the baptism of covenant children. This is a significant step forward in ensuring that this sacrament is administered in an orderly way. Discussions have also taken place at their "synode" in regard to the admission to the Lord's Supper. The federation covets prayers for harmonious deliberations leading to decisions that accords with God's will.

It was also reported that the Lord has blessed the various activities related to the *Quebec 400* project of the Église Réformée St-Marc de Québec. The exhibit concerning the Huguenots of New France has been well received by many and the hosting museum announced that the exhibit would be continued for six months longer than originally planned.

²³ Downloads of the *minutes* of the meetings of 2007 and 2008 can be found at: <http://www.naparc.org/downloads.html>

FRCNA

The FRCNA has 4461 members distributed over 20 congregations and one preaching station in Toronto. During NAPARC 2008, two meetings between the CCCNA delegates were held with the Revs. L. Bilkes and J. Lewis, delegates from the FRCNA. The first meeting focussed on how we view each other and how we understand the status of our relationship. The second addressed the question of how to proceed in the future. The Canadian Reformed delegates indicated willingness to have further contact but left the initiative for this with the FRCNA.

OPC

The OPC now has 28,799 members, with 263 congregations and 57 mission works. At its last assembly, substantial progress was made in revising their Directory of Public Worship. There were discussions as to how much should be put in it. The concern was that if not enough direction is given to local churches, the next generation may forget why certain things are done in a certain way. The assembly also decided to invite the Presbyterian Church of Brazil (IPB) to enter in to a corresponding relationship with the OPC. This was motivated by the fact that the IPB had a major house-cleaning in 2002, with conservative men now in their headquarters.

In discussion about ecumenical efforts some attention was focused on the question to what degree organic unity between federations can and should be pursued. How can we best use the resources God has given us?

RCUS

The report from the RCUS indicated that their membership is now at 3,857, as compared to 3,423 forty years ago. In the meantime, they now have twice as many churches as then, which means that the average church size has decreased. They noted that as the result of an overture from a classis, a committee has been appointed to look into instituting church visitation as practised in many other Reformed/Presbyterian churches. This will be discussed further at their Synod in May, 2009. The RCUS also noted a shift in their view of Christian college education, now regarding this as the responsibility of parents rather than the Synod to establish which institutions are worthy of special consideration.

During the meeting between the delegates from the Canadian Reformed Churches and the RCUS committee, the RCUS brothers inquired about our position in regard to Shepherd and "federal vision." A fruitful and clarifying discussion ensued about these topics with attention being focused on what our confessions say.

RPCNA

The RPCNA is known for its emphasis on singing Psalms exclusively. This body of churches has recently completed a revision of their *Book of Psalms for Singing*, in which they have made an effort to eliminate archaic wording. During the meeting with the delegates from the RPCNA at NAPARC, attention was devoted to the relationship between their Testimony and the Westminster Standards. Some attention was also given to their Constitution.

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Attendance at NAPARC has again shown its value, enabling the delegates of the CCCNA to interact with committee members of other churches in various ways. May the LORD continue to bless such work, using it to promote mutual understanding and to further the cause of unity in the faith. "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (Pr 27:17).

**Reports to
General Synod Burlington-Ebenezer
2010**

Committee on Women's Voting

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Report, Committee on Women's Voting

*Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church, Hamilton
3 February 2009*

1. Introduction

1.1 Mandate

At the meeting of General Synod 2007 in Smithers, the churches established a committee "to finish the mandate extended by Synod Smithville 1980" on the matter of women's voting (Acts of General Synod 2007, Art. 136, 5.1). The Committee on Women's Voting was mandated to "Examine the biblical teaching on headship and voting and also [to] study the following questions":

- 5.2.1.1 With regard to headship: What is the position of widows and single female communicant members?
- 5.2.1.2 With regard to headship: What is the relationship between husband and wife when they discuss who to vote for – doesn't the husband therefore show and practice equality as joint heirs of the grace of God?
- 5.2.1.3 With regard to voting: What do the Bible and our Church Order say about congregational participation in electing office bearers?
- 5.2.1.4 With regard to voting: What is the relationship between congregational (a) nomination, (b) election process, (c) ratification/approbation, and (d) the final appointment by council?

Similar questions were discussed by Synod Smithville (1980) and again by Synod Cloverdale (1983), but have remained formally unanswered by the churches. From Synod Toronto (1974) to Synod Neerlandia (2001), the churches have not been able to provide a definitive conclusion to the request from individuals and congregations alike to advise the churches on the role of women in the voting for office bearers. It is clear that the mandate of Synod Smithers is an invitation for the churches to settle – on the basis of Scripture and Church Order – a matter that continues to concern the federation on congregational, classical and synodical levels. In Art. 159.8, Synod Smithers appointed the church of Hamilton to serve as this 'Committee on Women's Voting'.

1.2 Overview of findings

While the report will spell out the Committee's response to the questions in detail below, in general it found that the best manner of addressing the persistent questions about headship, equality, submission,

authority, and governance was to step away from a modern, secular view of election which emphasizes the casting of a ballot and which characterizes election as exercising some form of authority. In keeping with the Church Order (Art 3), this report understands **the process of election to be the means by which God calls men to office in the church of Christ**. The emphasis in this report is therefore more on *calling* than on *election* in order to change the focus that still characterizes this discussion in our churches – a focus that sees the election of office bearers in terms of a democratic process. Whether or not the emphasis on the element of voting in the process of calling men to office arises from 20th-century ideas of political governance and gender roles, voting continues to dominate our language in talking about the calling of office bearers. This report hopes that a renewed emphasis on **calling** will deepen the spiritual aspect of electing brothers for office in the church and will honour the work of the Holy Spirit in the governance of the church of Christ. The language of the secular political realm in modern democratic states consistently refers to voting as a “right”; the language of the church, as we find it in the Forms for the Ordination of Ministers, Missionaries, Elders and Deacons, indicate that election is a matter of responsibility for church members and is the means by which God calls men to office. In the Forms for Ordination, the first question asked of men who are to be ordained is: “do you feel in your heart that God Himself, through His congregation, has called you to this holy ministry [or these offices]?” Members of the congregation have the responsibility to participate in the calling of men to that office through the process outlined in Art. 3 of the Church Order.

The churches have an opportunity to clarify the Biblical practice of calling men to office as it was restored by the Reformers and as it is outlined in the Church Order. Further, the churches have here an opportunity to assert a truly Biblical understanding of the roles of men and women in the church of Christ. Against both modernist and postmodernist conceptions of authority and gender, which continue to tempt the church to rely on *traditional* rather than *biblical* views of election to office in the church, the churches now may demonstrate positively the place of women in the calling of men to office on the basis of Scripture. This report stands by the biblical confession that all members and office bearers are in submission to the Head of the Church, our Lord Jesus Christ. Male and female communicant members alike act in submission to the governance of Christ’s church by men who are called, appointed and ordained to office.

2. Headship and Voting (5.2.1.1 and 5.2.1.2)

- 5.2.1.1 *With regard to headship, what is the position of widows and single female communicant members?*
- 5.2.1.2 *With regard to headship, what is the relationship between husband and wife when they decide for whom to vote? Are they not to show and practice equality as joint heirs of the grace of God?*

2.1 Introduction

The questions 5.2.1.1 and 5.2.1.2, which pertain to headship and voting, demand an answer that is rooted in the overall biblical perspective concerning gender roles. A biblically formed world-view acknowledges both the equality of men and women before God and yet their different roles. We will see how this is taught both in the Old Covenant and the New and draw conclusions that seek to respect the overall biblical perspective on gender, equality, and headship. From this overall perspective, we will provide an answer to the specific issues raised in the questions 5.2.1.1 and 5.2.1.2.

2.2 Biblical teaching on equality and headship

2.2.1 Old Covenant: equality

Gender was created by God in the beginning, as he created humanity “male and female” (Gen 1:27). Man and woman were both created in the image of God and given the charge to increase in number on the earth and subdue it (Gen 1:28). Thus, Adam and Eve together were charged as God’s vice-regents to expand the kingdom of God, starting from the Garden of Eden and extending all over the face of the earth. Man and woman together share this position of dominion over the earth and share in the calling to rule and subdue it. When Eve was created, she was called a “help” (Gen 2:18) for Adam, one that would assist him in carrying out the divine mandate.

In the Old Covenant, there was thus a high place for women, especially in comparison with the surrounding nations of the Ancient Near East. A few examples will suffice: the fifth commandment tells children to honour both their father and their mother; women like Rahab, a prostitute, and Ruth, a young Moabite widow, receive prominent places in the history of redemption; and the book of Proverbs extols the instruction of both father and mother and concludes with a description of a noble woman (Prov 31).

2.2.2 Old Covenant: headship

However, in the Old Covenant there were also divinely ordained differences between men and women. In the very beginning, the LORD made Adam the head of his wife, Eve. Adam’s abdication of this God-given leadership role is a key part of the biblical teaching about the fall into sin. The overturning of the creation order is clear in Genesis 3: the serpent (an animal over which Adam and Eve were called to have dominion) deceived Eve, who in turn led her husband astray. Fallen Adam did not take responsibility for his actions but blamed his wife and implicitly blamed God Himself (Gen 3:12). The LORD makes it clear that there were two parts to Adam’s sin when he begins to address him with these words: “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree” (Gen 3:17). The prior charge (“because you listened to your wife”) reflects Adam’s neglect of his responsibility as the head of his wife. In the New Testament, the apostle

Paul clearly teaches that the responsibility for original sin ultimately lies with Adam (Rom 5:12-21). Thus the headship of the husband is at the heart of the original creation order, and has been subverted by the entrance of sin.

However, it was not only in the home that men in the Old Covenant were called to leadership. The special offices were also as a general rule reserved for men. Priests, from the tribe of Levi, are without exception men in the Old Testament, and the legitimate Messianic king from the line of David was also always male. All but one of the judges was male, and Deborah was raised up by God at a low point in the history of Israel, in part as a condemnation of the lack of male leadership (cf Judges 4:9). All of the writing prophets were male as well, though there were prophetesses such as Huldah (II Kings 22:14). However, the general rule from the Old Covenant is clear: the special offices are reserved for men. Only in exceptional circumstances, at the LORD's direction, did this general principle not apply.

2.2.3 New Covenant: equality

In Christ, we are a new creation (2 Cor 5:17), and believers have been restored to the image of God (Col 3:10, Eph 4:24). There are greater blessings for women in the New Covenant as well. In the Old Covenant, only baby boys received the sign of circumcision, but now baptism is extended to all. The wider extension of covenant blessing was already promised by the LORD in Joel 2:28: "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy." This prophecy was fulfilled at Pentecost, as the apostle Peter says (Acts 2:17). Clearly the New Covenant blessings are broader in scope than those of the Old Covenant, so that the apostle Paul declares, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).

The above verse has often been abused, as if the apostle Paul were seeking to abolish all distinctions between men and women. In context, we observe that the main argument of the epistle to the Galatians is that the covenant blessings are to be extended to Gentiles without the requirements of the Mosaic Law having to be met. Analogous to Jew and Gentile, man and woman are also equally recipients of the new covenant blessings, and the blessings of baptism and the promise of the Spirit are two examples of this. Thus Paul's emphasis here is not revolutionary, but is in fact in line with the prophecy of Joel as fulfilled at Pentecost. Therefore, the Heidelberg Catechism also teaches that in the new covenant all those who are in Christ have been anointed as prophets, priests, and kings (LD 12, Q&A 32). It will be argued later that the task of voting belongs properly to the office of all believers, rather than to the special offices Christ has instituted.

2.2.4 Headship

Nevertheless, the New Covenant does not supersede the creation order; it restores believers to the image of God rather than over-riding it. For this reason there are still created and divinely ordained differences in the role of men and women. In the New Covenant, we see that there are two

spheres in which special roles of authority are limited to men: that of the family, and that of the church, which is the household of God.

2.2.4.1 New Covenant: headship in the household

In the household, wives are called to submit to their husbands, and husbands are called to love their wives sacrificially (Col 3:18,19; Eph 5:22-30; I Pet 3:1-7). The headship of a husband over his wife is a picture of the relationship between Christ and his church. Submission thus occurs in the context of a relationship characterized by love and mutual service (cf Eph 5:21). Women are not called to submit to men in general; rather, it is specifically within the context of the relationship between husband and wife that a woman must be submissive.

2.2.4.2 New Covenant: headship in the Church

Analogously, in the church, which is the household of God, men are called to special leadership roles and women are not. This is maintained very clearly by Paul in 1 Tim 2:11-15:

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing – if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

In context, the focus of this chapter is the worship of the church. Paul is directing Timothy, a young pastor (cf I Tim 4:12), with respect to how the worship in the congregation at Ephesus should be conducted. There are to be prayers and intercessions for all men (I Tim 2:1-7). Men are to lead in prayer with a spirit of harmony; there is to be no quarreling (I Tim 2:8). Women are to dress appropriately for worship, and are to learn “in quietness and full submission” (I Tim 2:11). It should be noted that the prohibition Paul makes here is that of having women exercise the special teaching and ruling office in the church, the office of elder and minister (cf I Tim 5:17, which shows that this is one office with a two-fold aspect). The two verbs relate to this two-fold office are clear in v.12: “I do not permit a woman to *teach* or to have *authority*.” The latter verb, *αυθεντειν*, “to have authority” makes it abundantly clear that this prohibition relates to the special offices. Paul bases this prohibition on the creation order (1 Tim 2:13,14). This is in line with the biblical emphasis we have noticed thus far, that is, in the New Covenant, the creation order is restored but not superseded.

The other text we must discuss here is 1 Cor 14:33b-35:

As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

We note the following: First, the context again limits the application of this verse to the official public worship of the church (cf v. 26, “When you come together...”). Second, the apostle’s main concern in this passage is *orderly* worship. This is based on the nature of God himself: God is not a God of disorder but of peace (v.33, cf also v.40). There are two main instructions based on this principle: the first is that one person should speak at a time (vv.27-33), and the second that women should not speak in the worship service (vv.34-35). Third, we need to set these instructions against the broader background of the problems Paul was dealing with in Corinth. The Corinthians considered speaking in tongues to be the greatest gift, and this led to competition and rivalry precisely when the congregation should have been building each other up. They were “thinking like children” (1 Cor 14:20), immature in their faith and therefore their worship. Thus, the two imperatives – that one person speak at a time, and that women are not permitted to speak – are clearly intended to undercut the attitude of competition and rivalry present in Corinth.

We must therefore be very careful in how we apply this word of the apostle. When scripture is not carefully handled, it can promote false teaching and unnecessary discord (cf 2 Tim 2:14-15). This prohibition, which is against women unlawfully seizing honour for themselves by speaking in tongues and prophesying in the church, is misused when applied to the issue of women’s voting today. We note the following differences: 1) The apostle is referring to speaking in worship, as the context clearly shows; 2) The apostle claims that such speaking is contrary to a woman’s place of submissiveness and is therefore an unlawful arrogation of authority, whereas the congregational vote is an exercise of the congregation’s submission to the special office-bearers and not an example of authoritative speaking; 3) The apostle refers to public and vocal disorder, while our voting process is silent and orderly; 4) The apostle refers to individual women arrogating a function that is not theirs, while voting is not a matter of the individual’s rights but of the voice of the congregation.

2.2.4.3 Headship in the New Covenant: conclusion

In conclusion, we have seen that the headship of men in the New Covenant is not absolute, but operates within relationships ordained by God: that of husband and wife, and that of office-bearer and communicant member. The New Testament emphasizes that *wives* must submit to *husbands*, and all communicant members (both men and women) must submit to male office-bearers, but it does not teach the submission of women (in general) to men (in general). Rather, headship and submission occur within the framework of the loving *relationships* Christ has ordained, both in the household and in the household of faith.

2.2.5 Biblical Teaching: Conclusions

The foregoing discussion leads to the following conclusions. 1) In the New Covenant, men and women are equal before God and receive all

the blessings and privileges of being members of that covenant and united to Christ (Col 3:10-11, Eph 4:24, Gal 3:28). We therefore confess that male and female believers equally share in the office of all believers as prophets, priests, and kings (HC LD 12, Q&A 32). Women too have minds filled with the Spirit and thus can exercise the New Covenant gifts of discernment and wisdom (I Cor 2:15). 2) In the New Covenant, the special offices in the church, which pertain to teaching and ruling, are reserved for men.

Placing these two conclusions next to each other makes it clear that women too have a God-given responsibility to vote at congregational meetings in Christ's church. This is an obligation placed on communicant members – those who have the office of all believers – and is not tied to the exercise of the special office. The vote is not authoritative, but is a part of the advice of the congregation. Because of this, women ought to be allowed and encouraged to participate fully in congregational life and exercise the gifts they have received as members of Christ and partakers in the Holy Spirit (HC LD 21, Q&A 55). Based on the conclusions above we may now briefly address the two scenarios of questions 5.2.1.1 and 5.2.1.2.

2.3 The position of widows and single female communicant members

Question 5.2.1.1: What is the position of widows and single female communicant members?

In the social world of the New Testament, women who didn't have the economic and social protection of a man were vulnerable and easily preyed upon. Therefore Jesus condemns Pharisees as those who "devour widows' houses" (Mk 12:40). James teaches us that true religion partly consists of looking after "orphans and widows in their distress" (Jas 1:27), showing that the social position of widows was analogous to that of an orphan, easily oppressed and downtrodden. To be sure, not all widows lacked financial security, which is why Paul counsels Timothy to "give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need" (I Tim 5:3). Furthermore, the families of such widows are directed to help them first of all, so that the church may prioritize those widows that lack any other means of support (I Tim 5:4-8, 16).¹

In terms of headship, it is important to emphasize that the problem faced by many widows in the early church was that they lacked a male head of the household. Against this background, we can appreciate the significance of Jesus' miracle in raising the dead son of the widow of Nain (Lk 7:11-15): not simply restoring a boy to life, but also ensuring the future livelihood of the widow.

¹ It should be noted that I Tim 5:3-16 provides an excellent biblical basis for the distinction we have made above between the sphere of the household and that of the church.

We may thus conclude that widows and single female communicant members are not under the headship of any man in terms of the sphere of the household. They are thus properly the heads of their own houses, as Lydia seems to have been (Acts 16:15). Nevertheless, these women remain under the authority of the office-bearers, and so in God's household they are still called to submission to male leaders. However, the brothers in the congregation who are not office-bearers are similarly called to such submission. Therefore, it is inconsistent that all the brothers should have the privilege of voting, while single women and widows are prohibited from such privileges. The brothers and these sisters share equally in the office of all believers, and together have all the responsibilities that come from this office.

2.4 The relationship between husband and wife in voting

Question 5.2.1.2: What is the relationship between husband and wife when they decide for whom to vote? Are they not to show and practice equality as joint heirs of the grace of God?

We have shown that the New Testament clearly calls wives to be submissive to their husbands. However, such submission is certainly not intended to override the responsibility that women have as members of Christ in the congregation. In principle, the question of whether to grant the sisters the privilege of voting does not relate to the sphere of the household; rather, it involves the responsibility of the sisters in the congregation.

The following objection is commonly raised with respect to extending the vote to the sisters: What if a wife were to vote differently than her husband? First, this line of objection is not germane to the discussion of what the Bible teaches about the place of women in the congregation. Second, it imports the issue of a husband's authority into the discussion in order to suggest that the sisters should not vote. Such reasoning depends for its validity on a notion that has already been rejected, that of the vote as authoritative, and therefore as properly belonging to one who has a leadership role (hence, a husband and not a wife). In fact, the authority of the husband does not suggest that the wife is no longer to have any opinions or preferences of her own, and certainly cannot be used to suggest that the wife need not exercise her office in the congregation as a Spirit-filled believer. There does indeed remain the possibility that a wife votes differently than her husband, but this potential scenario is not relevant to the question of whether or not women *ought* to exercise such responsibilities in congregational life.

2.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that our investigation into the biblical teaching on gender, headship, and equality has not proposed any changes to our understanding of scripture. We continue to affirm the full inclusion and equality of women in the New Covenant, while maintaining that the special

offices are for men alone. As a methodological point of principle, we have made every effort to provide contextual interpretations and sensitive applications of the key texts in this debate. This report has sought to show that extending to the sisters the privilege to vote is in fact consistent with the biblical relationship between equality and headship. The present system that is practiced in most Canadian Reformed churches is inconsistent with a full understanding of the scriptural teaching about headship. In particular, this report has emphasized the extension of the blessings of the new covenant to the sisters of the congregation. We know that every covenant member receives both promises and obligations. It is the conclusion of this report that, should the consistory seek the guidance of the congregation in an election, it is the covenantal obligation of the sisters also to fully partake in congregational life and, led by the Holy Spirit, participate in the voting of office-bearers.

3. Scripture and Church Order (5.2.1.3)

5.2.1.3 With regard to voting: What do the Bible and our Church Order say about congregational participation in electing office bearers?

3.1 Biblical teaching with regard to voting

3.1.1 Old Testament

While there is no obvious corollary in the Old Testament for the New Testament offices of minister, elder and deacon, the Old Testament provides a number of important principles for the selection of leaders in the Christian church. Before the institution of the monarchy, the people of Israel knew of two classes of regular office beside the extraordinary positions held by Moses and Joshua: **spiritual** and **political**. The Levites were specially chosen by God (Numbers 8) to minister in the tabernacle and to atone for the sins of the people. The second class of regular office in Israel, variously described as “elders”, “heads of families [clans]”, and “judges”, were appointed by Moses to function as political leaders – in the sense of providing leadership in social, judicial, and other organizational areas. The two offices can be seen in Deut. 31:9: “So Moses wrote this law and gave it **to the priests**, the sons of Levi who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and **to all the elders** of Israel.” Two distinct offices, distinguished both in their appointment and their function – yet unified in their common submission to the law of God’s covenant.

Three months after the exodus from Egypt, Moses chose and appointed judges to whom he delegated the task of deciding legal cases (Exodus 18: 25-26); these appointments addressed the immediate need of lifting the burden from Moses, while also laying the foundation for the office which the LORD established more formally two years later (Num 1). Forty years later, when Moses gave the law to the new generation of Israelites about to enter Canaan, Moses described the appointment of these judges. (In

Exodus, the focus is the narrative of deliverance, whereas in Deuteronomy the purpose of recounting the appointment of judges is more legislative than narrative.)

“how can I bear your problems and your burdens and your disputes all by myself? Choose some wise, understanding and respected men from each of your tribes, and I will set them over you.” You answered me, “What you propose to do is good.” (Deut. 1:12-14)

What follows in Deuteronomy 1 is similar to what we read both in Exodus 18 and in Numbers 1. In Num. 1, God instructed Moses and Aaron to institute the political (and, at times, military) leadership by choosing a representative from each of the twelve tribes with local, regional and national responsibilities:

These were the men appointed from the community, the leaders of their ancestral tribes. They were the heads of clans of Israel. Moses and Aaron took these men whose names had been given, and they called the whole community together on the first day of the second month.

In each of these passages relating to the choosing of leaders, we see three important principles: the men were *chosen from the community, for the community, and appointed by Moses and Aaron*. To anticipate the perspective of the Church Order, these men were called to leadership by God by means of the congregation, for the congregation, and under the authority of the ordained officers.

It is instructive to see that “the community” in the Old Testament is inclusive. When the people of Israel returned from exile to rebuild Jerusalem, the congregation that assembled to hear the law of God is described as consisting of “men and women and all who were able to understand.”

all the people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded for Israel. So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law. (Nehemiah 8:1-3)

Again, in Nehemiah 10, when the people vowed to keep their covenant obligations, the text clearly indicates that, while specific offices and functions remain distinct, the corporate responsibility for the ordering of God’s household belonged to the community as a whole:

*The rest of the people – priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, temple servants and all who separated themselves from the neighboring peoples for the sake of the Law of God, **together with their wives and all their sons and daughters who are able to understand** – all these now join their brothers the nobles, and bind themselves with a curse and an oath... We will not neglect the house of our God (Nehemiah 10: 28-29, 39; emphasis added)*

Throughout the Pentateuch, as in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, the covenant community listened and spoke as one – hearing the law and responding with one voice in renewal of covenantal obligations (Josh. 8:35; Neh. 10). While ceremonial and other distinctions between men and women existed – see **2.2** above – none of these gender distinctions relate to the selection of leaders in Israel.

3.1.2 New Testament

All three principles in the choosing of leaders in the Old Testament continue in the New Testament. In the passage in Acts that speaks most clearly to the issue of the election of office bearers, one sees that men were chosen from among the congregation and by the congregation, to be appointed (and ordained) by the apostles:

“Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility [care for the needy] over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, et al.... They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid hands on them. (Acts 6: 3-6)

As it is in many other places in the New Testament, the Greek word here for “brothers” (*adelphoi*) is inclusive, signifying “brothers and sisters”. That this is a correct interpretation is evident from the context, for the text later says that the proposal pleased “the whole group” (NIV), “the whole gathering” (ESV), or “the whole multitude” (KJV) (παντος του πληθους). The same gender-inclusive word (“plethous”) is translated in Acts 4: 32 as “all the believers” (NIV) or “the whole multitude” (KJV) to describe the entire community of believers. In this the single most instructive passage in the New Testament on the election of office bearers in the apostolic era, election is by the gathering of believers as a whole, irrespective of gender, as it was in Acts 1:23.

One notes, too, that, just as the office of elder in the New Testament continues important characteristics of that in the Old Testament, so do the principles for the *choosing* of elders. While there are clear and significant differences between the governance of the church in the Old and New Testaments, there is no distinction between Old and New Testaments in terms of community. In fact, the ceremonial distinctions between men and women, as well as between Jews and Gentiles, are removed with the

completed atonement of Christ Jesus, allowing a more active participation for women in the work of the church in the New Testament. Not only is the sign of the covenant graciously extended to women in the new covenant by baptism, women are called to important functions in the gathering work of Christ; this is clear from the significant contributions made by believing women such as Lydia, and others in the Book of Acts who are acknowledged warmly by Paul in his letters. The diaconal function of women in the New Testament church is another indication of the central place of women among God's people. Thanks to Christ's work of removing the curse, the promise to Abraham is fulfilled:

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.... There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3: 26-29)

But it is also important to note that, although Scripture makes no distinction between men and women as members of Christ's body (Gal. 3: 28), distinctions do remain in the function between men and women in the church and in society. The creational ordinances are not removed by the work of Christ (indeed, they are renewed by Him), nor is the calling of men as "heads" in the church and family rescinded in the New Testament. Paul explicitly makes this point in 1 Timothy 2: 11-15 and Ephesians 5: 22-33, as does Peter in 1 Peter 3: 1-17. In the Old and New Testament alike, when Scripture speaks of the qualifications for office (Exodus 18: 21; Titus 1; 1 Timothy 3), the ordained offices are exclusively *male*: clearly, in the institution and practice of the offices, God appointed men to fill positions of authority. Women are to "remain silent" (1 Tim. 2:12) in the context of orderly worship, teaching and prayer. Yet nowhere in the New Testament are these distinctive roles of men and women invoked in the context of choosing office bearers.

Unfortunately, however, the choosing of leaders from among the congregation and for the congregation has in the modern era been characterized in political terms as "voting". In a liberal democratic context, voting is regarded as a right of citizenship and as an expression of authority: after all, "democracy" means "rule by the people." If women are not to have authority in the church (the argument goes), they ought not to be given a vote. This is a completely secular understanding of election which is foreign to the Bible since the act of choosing leaders in the Old and New Testament never abrogates the authority of those who appoint men to office. Just as the New Testament does not refer to gender distinctions in the context of choosing office bearers (as in "the whole multitude", Acts 6), so the New Testament nowhere associates the election of office bearers with speaking, exercising authority, or headship – functions in the church which are distinctly assigned to *male* members. The Bible says that the whole congregation participates in the choosing ("voting") of office bearers.

3.2 Church Order with regard to voting

At the Reformation, the church returned to the Biblical practice of choosing and appointing office bearers by involving the congregation. In response to the abuse of power by the popes, cardinals and bishops (who frequently made clerical appointments along political lines that did not serve the people well), the Reformers returned to the principles of election found in the Old and New Testaments. In fact, the reformation of the unscriptural means of clerical appointment was an important expression of the biblical ecclesiology of the Reformers. This reformation of the election of ministers, elders and deacons is

- A. spelled out by John Calvin [3.2.1]
- B. reflected in the church polity of the Belgic Confession [3.2.2]
- C. practised in the voting procedures at the Reformation [3.2.3]
- D. maintained by the Church Order [3.2.4]

3.2.1 Calvin on the reformation of clerical appointments

Calvin deals specifically with the vote of the congregation in the calling and appointing of ministers, elders and deacons in Institutes of the Christian Religion, IV.iii.15 (“The Doctors and Ministers of the Church, Their Election and Office”):

*Someone now asks whether the minister ought to be chosen by the whole church, or only by his colleagues and the elders charged with the censure of morals, or whether he ought to be appointed by the authority of a single person. ... For they [i.e, clergy] were over the rest only to give good and salutary advice to the people, not that they alone, in disregard of all the rest, might do what they pleased! ... Therefore, the above passages [which instruct Titus and Timothy to ‘appoint’] are to be understood as not to diminish any part of the common right and freedom of the church.... We therefore hold that this call of a minister is lawful according to the Word of God, when those who seemed fit are created **by the consent and approval of the people**.... (McNeill and Battles, Vol 2, pp.1065-66, emphasis added)*

In the following chapter, Calvin describes this practice of consent in the ancient church before the introduction of the papacy:

In ancient times no one was even received into the assembly of the clergy without the consent of all the people.... The freedom of the people to choose their own bishops was long preserved: no one was to be thrust into office who was not acceptable to all. (1078-79) [Note: Calvin uses “bishop” in the New Testament sense of “overseer”.]

In the examples that Calvin cites of this practice in the early Christian church, whether the participation of the people comes in the form of election, consent and affirmation, the principle of consent by the people is consistent. In the phrase that Cyprian uses, the election of overseers is “by the suffrage of the whole people”, “with the calling together of the whole of the people.” Calvin emphasizes that the consent of the people will not descend to ‘mob rule’ since the ecclesiastical (and, when necessary, civil) leaders are required to give approval of the election of office bearers by the people: as with the election and appointment of elders in the Old and New Testaments, the choosing of overseers by the people leads to the appointment by ordained leaders in Calvin. In the area of the calling and appointment of office bearers, Calvin and the Reformers returned to the Scriptural practice of the early church: rather than being radical innovators in doctrine and practice, the Reformers turned the church back to biblical and historical orthopraxy. The Reformation wrested the authority over the church from the pope, cardinals and bishops in order to give Christ His rightful due as Head of the church.

3.2.2 Voting in the Belgic Confession (1561)

While the Reformed confessions do not address the matter of voting procedure at any length, the doctrine of the church summarized in the confessions provides the frame for understanding the Reformed practice of involving the congregation in the election of office bearers. Articles 27-32 deal with the nature, composition, governance and discipline of the church, beginning with the confession of the church as “a holy congregation and assembly of the true Christian believers, who expect their entire salvation in Jesus Christ”. These articles flow from the confession (also found in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 19) that Christ in heaven is the Head of His church, and that true believers constitute the church: the church is the “assembly” or “gathering” of believers, not an institution that exists apart from the members of which it is comprised.

In Art. 30, we confess that the church is to be governed “according to the Spiritual order which our Lord has taught us in His Word”: “By these means everything will be done well and in good order when faithful men are chosen *in agreement with the rule that the apostle Paul gave to Timothy*”:

*We believe that ministers of God’s Word, elders, and deacons ought to be chosen to their offices **by lawful election of the church**, with prayer and in good order, as stipulated by the Word of God. (Article 31, emphasis added)*

While Art. 30 refers to the *qualifications* for overseer in I Timothy 3, Art. 31 refers to the *process* by which men are chosen. The proof texts for this article rightly point to Acts 1: 23-24 and Acts 6: 2-3, which describe the participation of the whole gathering of believers. This is what “lawful election of the church” entails. As a summary of what the Bible teaches about governance in the church, the Belgic Confession does not present the voting of officers in the church as an expression of authority. To the contrary, the Belgic Confession

honours Christ as the only Head of the church, with the ministers, elders and deacons as exercising His authority and discipline in the church. These men are chosen “by lawful election of the church”, which the preceding articles make clear is comprised of *all* believers, irrespective of gender.

3.2.3 Voting procedures in the sixteenth century

The Reformed church in Scotland approved Calvin’s polity in Geneva and followed his understanding of election for office bearers in its voting procedure. An excerpt from the relevant portion of The Form of Prayers and Administration (Geneva?, 1584) illustrates how the church in Edinburgh practised what the Belgic Confession called “lawful election of the church”:

*they [i.e., retiring office bearers] should name and give up in election such persons as they in their consciences thought most apt and able to serve in that charge: providing that they should nominate double more persons than were sufficient to serve in that charge, **to the end that the whole Congregation might have their free voice in their election.** And this order hath bin ever observed since that time in the Church of Edinburgh: that is the old Session before their departing nominates a certain sufficient number according to the want of the Church: which persons nominated are publicly proclaimed **in the audience of the whole Church** upon a Sunday before noon after Sermon, with admonition to the Church, that if any man know any notorious crime or cause that might unable any of those persons to enter into such a vocation, that they should notify the same, the next Thursday to the Session: or if any know any persons more able for that charge, they should notify the same unto the said Session, to the end that no mane without the Church, should complain that he was spoiled of his liberty in election.*

*The Sunday following in the end of the Sermon before noon, **the whole Congregation** are commanded to be present at after noon, to **give their voices as they will answer before God, to such as they think most able to bear the charge of the church** with the Ministers. The **voices of all** being received, the scrolls are delivered to any of the Ministers, who keepeth the same secret from the sight of all men, till the next Thursday, then in the Session he produceth them that the lots may be counted, where the manyest lots or voices without respect of person, hath the first place in the Eldership: and so proceeding, till the number of their want be complete.² [E7v-E8r; emphasis added]*

² The Forme of Prayers and administration of the Sacramentes, vsed in the Eng. Church at Geneua, approued & receiued by the Churche of Scotland. Wherevnto besides that which was in the former bookes, are also added sundrie other prayers (Geneva?, 1584), STC-16581. <Early English Books Online: 1315: 14>

Upon their appointment, the new office bearers are called “to accept that charge, that God by the plurality of voices had laid upon them.” Clearly, the Scottish church after the Reformation implemented the teaching of Calvin in the Institutes as it was also understood in the Belgic Confession, namely, by hearing the whole congregation.

3.2.4 Voting in the Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches

The foregoing exploration of Calvin, the Belgic Confession and the church in Scotland at the Reformation provides the doctrinal and historical background to the second component of the question posed by Synod Smithers in 5.2.1.3 of Art. 136: ***What does our Church Order say about congregational participation in electing office bearers?*** Art. 3 describes the process:

The election to any office shall take place with the cooperation of the congregation, after preceding prayers, and according to the regulations adopted for that purpose by the consistory with the deacons.

The consistory with the deacons shall be free to give the congregation the opportunity beforehand to draw the attention of the consistory to brothers deemed fit for the respective offices.

The consistory with the deacons shall present to the congregation either as many candidates as there are vacancies to be filled, or at the most twice as many, from which number the congregation shall choose as many as are needed.

Prior to the ordination or installation the names of the appointed brothers shall be publicly announced to the congregation for its approbation or at least two consecutive Sundays.

In each of the three steps in the process of choosing ministers, elders and deacons (nomination, election, and approbation), the “congregation” participates without distinguishing between male and female communicant members at any point. The “congregation” or “assembly” in Art. 3 of the Church Order is the same body that is mentioned in Numbers 1, Nehemiah 8 and Acts 6, the same “gathering” of Art. 27 of the Belgic Confession. Simply put, the nomination, election and approbation of men in Art. 3 of the Church Order is the responsibility of the whole congregation, the body of believers assembled to form the local church.

In the second stage of the process (which we typically call “voting”), the congregation chooses men from a slate of nominees presented by the consistory with the deacons. The consistory with the deacons does not abrogate its authority in any way when it calls the congregation to choose men from those nominated for office, just as the election of deacons by the whole group in Acts 6: 3-6 did not diminish the authority of the apostles. Choosing men does not constitute governance, and the exercise of the responsibility to choose men does not imply authority. The logic is

straightforward: the Bible as summarized in the Belgic Confession teaches that “congregation” means all believers; the Church Order calls the “congregation” to choose men qualified for office; therefore, all believers are to participate in the choosing of office bearers.

3.4 Conclusion

In both the Old and New Covenants, all mature members of the covenant community are called to participate in the choosing of leaders in the congregation. The election of office bearers as described in the Belgic Confession and the Church Order follows biblical principles and practices. Furthermore, there is no evidence that Scripture views election by the congregation as an expression of authority. Instead, election is a participation in the orderly regulation of the congregation and a responsibility of communicant membership.

4. The Process of Election in Art. 3, Church Order (5.2.1.4)

5.2.1.4 With regard to voting: What is the relationship between congregational (a) nomination, (b) election process, (c) ratification/ approbation, and (d) the final appointment by council?

4.1 The stages of election

Article 3 of the Church Order describes the process by which men are nominated, elected, approbated and appointed to office (see **Section 3.3.4** above). It is important to note that council calls on the congregation to participate in each of the steps of the calling process, thereby retaining its authority over the complete process. Authority remains with the council of the congregation at all times. Thus, council gives the congregation the opportunity to nominate; council presents the candidates for election; council announces the names of chosen candidates for the purpose of approbation; and council appoints those elected. While the Church Order indicates that the same “congregation” that shall nominate brothers in Step 1 also “shall choose as many as needed” in Step 2, the current practice in the Canadian Reformed Churches excludes the female communicant members from the second step of *voting* in the election process.

During the nomination process, the congregation is asked to help council identify men who are fit for the office as elder or deacon. The congregation is encouraged to give biblical reasons for their preference. Council, upon examining the nominations, presents a slate of names to the congregation by which it is inferred that any one of those men is deemed eligible for the office to which they are nominated. Council has exercised authority in vetting the various names that the congregation has presented. The female communicant members can and do participate in the proposing of names.

Based on the list of names for the office of elder and deacon the congregation is invited to arrange in order of preference those whom they wish to serve. The congregation takes the list of men who are already deemed to be worthy by council to serve in their respective office and now place them in an order of preference.

Council, having heard the congregation, takes those deemed to be elected and appoints them to their office and again requests the congregation's input into whether there may be any lawful objections to their installation into their office. Again both male and female communicant members may participate in this process. Council, however, retains the authority in determining whether or not an objection is legitimate.

All three steps in the process (nomination, election, and approbation) are related by the involvement of the congregation and by Council retaining complete authority in each step of the election process, from nomination to ordination. In our current system the sisters are encouraged to take part in nomination and approbation, but are barred from voting. This is an inconsistency that this report seeks to address. All three steps ought to include the full involvement of the congregation, while council's supervision over the entire process is also to be retained.

Some may argue that the vote of the congregation binds the consistory by virtue of the phrase in the Church Order (Art. 3) that those elected "*shall be appointed by the consistory with the deacons*". These take the phrase to mean that the consistory must comply with the election by the congregation; if women are given the vote, consistory must also follow their say in the election, thereby granting women an "authority" that contradicts Paul in I Tim. 2:12.

This is a mistaken understanding of the language of the Church Order. When "shall" is used in the third person in a semi-legal situation, it expresses "determination, promise, obligation, or permission, depending on the context" (The American Heritage Book of English Usage, 1.56). It is often used to describe the expectations and obligations of a contract or agreement ("The party of the third part shall..."). It has the connotation of typical or usual practice for the duration of the contract according to the purpose for which the agreement is made. It is in this sense that the word "shall" is used throughout the Church Order, not only in Art 3.

Even if one were to understand this obligation as "binding" the consistory to the election by the congregation, one cannot construe this obligation as granting **authority** to the congregation, since communicant members select men from a list of candidates nominated and approved by consistory with deacons, normally by majority vote. At no point in the process in the Church Order, from the invitation to submit names of eligible men to the appointment of the men elected, does consistory rescind its authority to the congregation. In the words of the Proposed Church Order (Art 22), the consistory is the only assembly which exercises direct authority within the congregation, since the consistory receives its authority directly from Christ.

5. Conclusion

This report concludes that female communicant members have the responsibility to participate in the election of office bearers, no less than male communicant members, under the supervision of the consistory. This responsibility extends to the voting no less than to the nomination and approbation of men for office. The committee, therefore, recommends

- 5.1 *that Synod Burlington (2010) accept the findings of this report and agree with its conclusion that the participation of female communicant members in all aspects of the calling of office bearers is in accordance with Scripture and the Church Order.*

**Reports to
General Synod Burlington-Ebenezer
2010**

Minority Report

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MINORITY Report

From a member of the
 Council, Canadian Reformed Church, Hamilton
 The Committee on Women's Voting

1. Introduction

1.1 Mandate

General Synod 2007 Smithers, appointed the church at Hamilton (Acts of General Synod 2007, Art. 159, 8) as The Committee on Women Voting "to finish the mandate extended by Synod Smithville 1980" on the matter of women's voting (Acts of General Synod 2007, Art. 136, 5.1). Specifically the committee was mandated to "Examine the biblical teaching on headship and voting and also study the following questions":

- 5.2.1.1 With regard to headship: What is the position of widows and single female communicant members?
- 5.2.1.2 With regard to headship: What is the relationship between husband and wife when they discuss who to vote for - doesn't the husband therefore show and practice equality as joint heirs of the grace of God?
- 5.2.1.3 With regard to voting: What do the Bible and our Church Order say about congregational participation in electing office bearers?
- 5.2.1.4 With regard to voting: What is the relationship between congregational (a) nomination, (b) election process, (c) ratification/approbation, and (d) the final appointment by council?

These questions were raised at Synod Smithville (1980) and reiterated at Synod Cloverdale (1983), but have remained formally unanswered by the churches. From Synod Toronto (1974) to Synod Neerlandia (2001), the churches have struggled to provide a definitive conclusion to the requests from individuals and congregations alike in giving recommendations to the churches on the role of women in the voting for office bearers. Broader assemblies have determined that the issue of women's voting is a matter of the churches in common. Presently the churches adhere to a decision of General Synod Toronto 1974, article 84, which has denied women's voting to be granted. It is clear that the mandate of Synod Smithers is an invitation for the churches to further study the matter on the basis of Scripture and Church Order because it continues to be raised by some in the churches within the federation.

This minority report is structured similarly to the majority report to facilitate the discussion.

1.2 Overview of findings

This minority report for reasons of convenience and clarity will follow the majority report format and some of its wording in fulfilling the GS appointed Hamilton Church committee mandate. However an opposing biblically and church orderly faithful conclusion will be reached – to maintain previous general synod decisions and existing regulations restricting voting to male communicant members [GS Toronto 1974, article 84; GS Burlington 1986, article 120].

This minority report will highlight the God given creation order, the equality of status but difference of responsibility for male and females as shown in the biblical practice of men making decisions on behalf of the whole community. It will be suggested that it is important to maintain the 450 year church orderly practice of male voting in this age of feminism in order to maintain decency and with good order in the churches.

The majority report spells out their response to the mandate in logical argumentation. However, its findings to the persistent questions on headship, equality, submission, authority, and governance appears to reflect a modern, secular world-view, a sociologically driven responsive. Sociologically, the spirit of the times is reflected in viewing election as a matter of participating and not as exercising some form of authority or equality. The Canadian Reformed Churches maintain a historical practice few other churches maintain in a politically correct post-modern world – that of only allowing the male communicant members to vote for office-bearers. This practice is being maintained in a society where a feminist orientation towards equality between the genders and entitlement in all areas of life is evidenced. The last number of decades has seen numerous denominations increase the participation of women in worship services and in three church offices. The majority response to the GS mandate does not present us with a far-reaching doctrinal issue but would initiate a change in the application of biblical understandings and practices.

In keeping with the Church Order (Art 3), the majority report understands **the process of election to be the means by which God calls men to office in the church of Christ**. The emphasis upon *calling* rather than *election* indicates a desire to change the focus that characterizes this discussion in our churches. By changing the emphasis from “headship and voting” to “calling” the majority report subtly refocuses the election of office bearers away from the decision making germane to voting.

Historically and sociologically women voting for office bearers is part of a pattern of liberalism culminating in women functioning in some and then in all the ecclesiastical offices [e.g. United Church of Canada, the Christian Reformed Church of North America]. If a recent report can be indicative, even our sister churches in the Netherlands the Gereformeerde Kerken ‘Vrijgemaakt’ { Reformed Churches “Liberated” <http://synode.gkv.nl/data/download/837.pdf> } are dealing with overtures encouraging the consideration of giving women increased responsibility, involvement and authority for i.e. diaconal work.

Specifically the majority report suggests,

“... our emphasis and language ought to be on **calling**, as it is in the Forms for the Ordination of Ministers, Missionaries, Elders and Deacons. There the first question asked of men who are to be ordained is: “do you feel in your heart that God Himself, through His congregation, has called you to this holy ministry [or these offices]?” Members of the congregation have the responsibility to participate in the calling of men to that office through the process outlined in Art. 3 of the Church Order.”

This rationale deflects their report away from the given mandate to ‘examine the biblical teaching on headship and **voting**’. Voting and election is in fact redefined and equated with the term calling.

Calling should rather be considered as the whole of a process and **voting** be recognized as one of the steps in what Art.3 C.O. calls “The Calling to office”. The “Form for the ordination of office-bearers” in its opening paragraphs highlights that it is a matter of election and appointment that culminates in ordination. It is in fact the biblical teaching on voting in the process of calling to office that, according to the mandate of GS Smithers, needs to be examined and will be dealt with in this minority report.

The majority report has ornately redefined its mandate in their introductory “overview of findings”. This has been accomplished by replacing a word or phrase with another term that better frames and strengthens a preconceived point of view – voting and electing has become participating in calling.

The mandate is and remains to “examine the biblical teaching on headship and voting and to study the following questions”.

2. Headship and Voting (5.2.1.1 and 5.2.1.2)

5.2.1.1 *With regard to headship, what is the position of widows and single female communicant members?*

5.2.1.2 *With regard to headship, what is the relationship between husband and wife when they decide for whom to vote? Are they not to show and practice equality as joint heirs of the grace of God?*

2.1 Introduction

The detailed questions 5.2.1.1 and 5.2.1.2, which pertain to headship and voting, demand an answer that is rooted in the overall biblical perspective concerning gender roles. A biblical perspective acknowledges both the equality of status of men and women before God and yet their different responsibilities. We will see how this is taught both in the Old Covenant and the New and draw conclusions that seek to respect the overall biblical perspective on gender, equality, responsibility and headship. From this overall perspective, an answer will be provided to the specific issues raised in the questions 5.2.1.1 and 5.2.1.2.

2.2 Biblical teaching on equality, responsibility and headship.

2.2.1 Old Covenant: equality

Gender was created by God in the beginning, as he created man “male and female” (Gen 1:27). Man and woman were created in the image of God and given the charge to increase in number on the earth and subdue it (Gen 1:28). Thus, Adam and Eve together were charged as God’s vice-regents to expand the kingdom of God, starting from the Garden of Eden and extending all over the face of the earth. When Eve, however, was created she was given a unique responsibility. She was to be “help” (Gen 2:18) for Adam, one that would assist him in carrying out the divine mandate. This is a clear example of equality of status with different responsibilities.

Throughout the Old Covenant, there was indeed a high regard for the status of women, especially in comparison with the surrounding nations of the Ancient Near East. A few examples of women of high status having important responsibilities will suffice: the fifth commandment tells children to honor both their father and their mother; women like Rahab, a prostitute, and Ruth, a young Moabite widow, receive prominent places in the history of redemption; and the book of Proverbs extols the instruction of both father and mother and concludes with a description of a noble woman (Prov 31).

2.2.2 Old Covenant: responsibility

Equality can exist while different responsibilities are practiced. One of the responsibilities God gives to Adam is to name his wife Eve – “... the man said... she shall be called woman...” (Gen 2:23). This indicates a responsibility for “headship”. From the beginning the man had specific decision-making responsibility towards the woman. To explain this concept further the following quote is instructive: “During the subsequent years leading up to the Flood of Noah’s day, and down through the days of the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God continued His system of giving responsibility to the covenant head of the family who made decisions for the whole. When ‘Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord’, for example, that grace came upon his whole family. Again, the sons of Jacob called upon him to make the decision of whether to go down to Egypt or not.” [Rev. R.Grossman, “Reformed Herald”, Dec 2005] The male in a role of headship made decisions on behalf of his family and for the community as a whole – including widows, single females.

Some further examples may clarify. It is (see Numbers 1:45-46) 600,000 mature men in Israel who are asked by Moses to take part in decisions on behalf of the whole congregation regarding the Promised Land (Num 13:26). A collective decision was made by the ‘mature men’ for which God held them responsible (Num 14:29). In Deut 17:15 Israel is empowered to set their own king over themselves. They do so in 1 Samuel 8 – 10 they choose their own king. In this instance the congregation under the direction of an office bearer makes a choice. Making selection, what we today would call voting, can be traced back to the church of the Old Testament as being the responsibility of men who act on behalf of the whole community.

2.2.3 Old Covenant: headship

In the Old Covenant there were divinely ordained differences between men and women. Headship can be further shown after Adam gives his wife the name "Woman". The Fall into sin itself in part resulted from Adam's neglect of his headship role. The overturning of the creation order is clear in Genesis 3: the serpent (an animal over which Adam and Eve were called to have dominion) deceived Eve, who in turn led her husband astray. Fallen Adam did not take responsibility for his actions but blamed his wife and implicitly blamed God Himself (Gen 3:12). It was Adam who abdicated his leadership role, as the LORD makes clear, saying, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree" (Gen 3:17). These words clearly show that part of Adam's fault was not exercising his God-given leadership or headship.

In the Old Covenant, the special offices were as a general rule reserved for men. Priests, from the tribe of Levi, are without exception men in the Old Testament, and the legitimate Messianic king from the line of David was also always male. All but one of the judges was male, and Deborah was raised up by God at a low point in the history of Israel, in part as a condemnation of the lack of male leadership (cf Judges 4:9). All of the writing prophets were male as well, though there were prophetesses such as Huldah (II Kings 22:14). Isaiah curses Israel by saying that "women shall lead them" (Isa 3:12). A general rule from the Old Covenant is clear: the special offices are reserved for men. Only in exceptional circumstances, at the LORD's direction, did this general principle not apply. Equality of status before the Lord, then and now in the office of all believers does not therefore mean equality of responsibilities towards headship while in office, nor in coming to an office.

2.2.4 New Covenant: equality

In Christ, we are a new creation (2 Cor 5:17), and believers have been restored to the image of God (Col 3:10, Eph 4:24). There are greater blessings for women in the New Covenant as well. In the Old Covenant, only male children received the sign of circumcision, but now baptism is extended to all. This great covenant blessing is connected to the anointing promised in Joel 2:28: "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy." This prophecy was fulfilled at Pentecost, as the apostle Peter says (Acts 2:17). Clearly the New Covenant blessings are broader in scope than those of the Old Covenant, so that the apostle Paul declares, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). The foregoing reasoning has many potential applications to church life today in reflecting on the questions at hand and the role of men and women, husband and wives. However, men and women remain equal but not interchangeable.

The above verse from Galatians has often been abused, in promoting the role of women, as if the apostle Paul were seeking to abolish all distinctions between men and women. In context, we observe that the main

argument of the epistle to the Galatians is that the covenant blessings are to be extended to Gentiles without the requirements of the Mosaic Law. Analogous to Jew and Gentile, man and woman are also equally recipients of the new covenant blessings, and the blessings of baptism and the promise of the Spirit are two examples of this. Thus Paul's emphasis, it is implied, is not revolutionary, but is in fact in line with the prophecy of Joel as fulfilled at Pentecost. The Heidelberg Catechism it is noted, also teaches that in the new covenant all those who are in Christ have been anointed as prophets, priests, and kings (LD 12, Q&A 32).

It will be argued [in the majority report] that the task of voting belongs properly to the office of all believers, rather than to men only. However, one cannot from the above conclude that, in the office of all believers, both men and women have a similar responsibility towards voting for office bearers. Again, equality of status does not correlate to equality of responsibility- not for widows, single females, or husbands and their wives.

2.2.5 New Covenant: responsibility

In the New Testament we are instructed in the principle that "the head of the woman is the man" (1 Cor 11:3). It is clear that Paul teaches us here about responsibilities within the family. However this principle is rooted in the point that every woman does not have the same authority as every man – see verses 3,7,10. If we would give men and women the same authority and responsibility for voting in the congregation we are contradicting this understanding.

The apostle Paul's strict requirement simply adds weight to this conclusion: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first; then Eve" [1 Tim2:12ff]. The creation order mentioned as "...Adam was not the one deceived it was the woman..." gives a rationale for accepting different responsibilities for men and women.

Male responsibilities are also highlighted elsewhere. In Acts 1:16, where Judas is replaced among the congregation it is the brothers not the women who are addressed as those who have the responsibility to choose one of the men (Acts 1:21). Males are given responsibility on behalf of the whole community.

2.2.6 New Covenant: headship

The New Covenant does not supersede the creation order; it restores believers to the image of God rather than over-riding it. For this reason there still are created and divinely ordained differences in the role of men and women. In the New Covenant, we see that there are two spheres in particular in which special roles of authority are limited to men: that of the family, and that of the church, which is the household, the Family, of God.

2.2.6.1 New Covenant: Headship in the household

In the household, wives are called to submit to their husbands, and husbands are called to love his own wife as himself (Col 3:18,19; Eph 5:22-30; I Pet 3:1-7). The headship of a husband over his wife is a picture of the relationship between Christ and his church. Submission thus occurs in the context of a relationship characterized by love and mutual service in the family context. This kind of “love and mutual service” is observed in the family structure, may not simply extend to the relationship within the household of faith, but does show a parallel. Women are not called to submit to men in general; rather, it is first and foremost within the context of the relationship between husband and wife that a woman must be submissive. In the household of faith, furthermore, headship also functions.

2.2.6.2 New Covenant: Headship in the church

Analogously, in the church, which is the household of God, men are called to special leadership or headship responsibilities and women are not. This is maintained very clearly by Paul in 1 Tim 2:11-15:

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission.¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve.¹⁴ And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.¹⁵ But women will be saved through childbearing – if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

Paul bases this prohibition on the creation order (1 Tim 2:13,14). The present general prohibition of women voting in the congregation for office bearers, as maintained for several centuries, needs to be considered within the context of the specific teaching prohibition. This is in line with the biblical emphasis that in the New Covenant the creation order is not superseded.

The other text to be discussed is 1 Cor 14:33b-35:

As in all the congregations of the saints,³⁴ women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says.³⁵ If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

Noted by some is that the “general principle” introduced here is to be limited in application to the official public worship of the church (cf v.26, “When you come together...”). Second, the apostle’s main concern in this passage is said to be *orderly* worship. There are two assumed instructions based on this reasoning: the first is that one person should speak at a time (vv.27-33), and the second that women should not speak in the worship service (vv.34-

35). Third, one needs to set these instructions against the broader background of the problems Paul was dealing with in Corinth. The Corinthians considered speaking in tongues to be the greatest gift, and this led to competition and rivalry precisely when the congregation should have been building each other up. They were “thinking like children” (1 Cor 14:20), immature in their faith and therefore their worship. Thus, the two instructions – that one person speaks at a time, and that women are not permitted to speak – are clearly intended to promote order and decency.

However that conclusion does not address the difference in responsibility, in headship, for men and women “as the voice of the congregation”. This mandate needs to be maintained especially in worship. As per our mandate, however, it is simply the difference in responsibility of men and women which needs to be considered in the context of the decision making, the voting for those who control the worship within the congregation – the office bearers.

2.2.6.3 Headship in the New Covenant: conclusion

In conclusion, the headship of men in the New Covenant is not absolute, but operates within relationships ordained by God: that of husband and wife in a household, and that of office-bearer and the congregation, including all communicant members, in the household of faith. A general principle can be applied to the responsibility of voting as practiced in the Old and New Testament. The New Testament emphasizes that *wives* must submit to *husbands*, and all communicant members (both men and women) must submit to male office-bearers. Headship and submission to one another occurs within the framework of the loving *relationships* Christ has ordained, both in the family and in the household of faith. These specific points of emphasis should be considered in the context of the gender relationships.

According to Acts 14:23 voting within the congregation at that time, based on the Greek word *cheirotoneo*, literally involved an extending the hand [to vote] to one who is to serve as office-bearer with qualifications to lead the congregation as based on for example Acts 1:21-22, Acts 6:3, 1 Tim 3:1-12.

Nowhere in the NT is there a specific reference to women selecting or voting for an office-bearer.

2.2.7 Biblical teaching: conclusions

The foregoing discussion leads to the following conclusions: 1) In the New Covenant, men and women are equal in status before God and receive all the blessings and privileges of being members of that covenant and united to Christ but have different responsibilities (Acts 1:15ff, 1 Cor 11:3, Col 3:10, 1 Tim 2:12ff, Eph 4:24, Gal 3:28). Women too participate in the sacraments and have minds filled with the Spirit and can exercise the New Covenant gifts of discernment and wisdom (1 Cor 2:15). 2) Moreover, in the New Covenant, the special offices in the church, which pertain to teaching and ruling, are reserved for men – the creation order ought not to be super-ceded.

Placing the two conclusions, mentioned above, next to each other may tempt some to conclude that women ought to be encouraged to vote at congregational meetings along with the elders and the deacons. The general “office of all believers” and specific “special office” descriptions of congregational involvement in decision making does not however give biblical grounds to change the present practice of restricting voting in congregational meetings for office-bearers to the communicant men only.

Voting is an obligation placed by the consistory on all the male communicant members. The consistory gives the male members a responsibility, the use of a vote. This authorization is for the restrictive responsibility of men functioning as male communicant members a function founded upon the creation order concept. We can conclude that women ought not to be encouraged to vote for office bearers.

Based on this conclusion one can now briefly address the two scenarios addressed in questions 5.2.1.1 and 5.2.1.2.

2.3 The position of widows and single female communicant members (5.2.1.1)

5.2.1.1: What is the position of widows and single female communicant members?

Meanwhile, in the social world of the New Testament, women who didn't have the economic and social protection of a man were vulnerable and easily preyed upon. Therefore Jesus condemns Pharisees as those who “devour widows' houses” (Mk 12:40). James teaches us that true religion partly consists of looking after “orphans and widows in their distress” (Jas 1:27), showing that the social position of widows was analogous to that of an orphan, easily oppressed and downtrodden. Leaders of the church needed to provide for those oppressed. To be sure, not all widows lacked financial security, which is why Paul counsels Timothy to “give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need” (I Tim 5:3). Furthermore, the families of such widows are directed to help them first of all, so that the church may prioritize those widows who lack any other means of support (I Tim 5:4-8, 16). This passage highlights the responsibility of households and of the congregation, specifically via the office bearers, for the relationships in each household.

In terms of headship, it is important to emphasize that the problem faced by many widows in the early church was that they lacked a male head of the household. Against this background, we can appreciate the significance of Jesus' miracle in raising the dead son of the widow of Nain (Lk 7:11-15): not simply restoring a boy to life, but also ensuring the future livelihood of the widow.

We may note that widows and single female communicant members were not under the headship of any man in terms of the sphere of the household. Though this situation often brought economic difficulty in the first century, with a few exceptions such as Lydia (Acts 16:15). Nevertheless, these women remain under the authority of the office-bearers, then and now,

and so in God's household they are still called to submission to male leaders. The brothers, single and married, in the congregation who are not office-bearers are similarly called to such submission and all fall under the headship of office-bearers. It is inconsistent to conclude that male office-bearers should be elected to office by the voting of single women and widows because they are not under the headship of a man in their household. Again, brothers and sisters are equal in status before the Lord but have different responsibilities, at home and in the church, also in the office of all believers.

2.4 The relationship between husband and wife in voting (5.2.1.2)

5.2.1.2: What is the relationship between husband and wife when they decide for whom to vote? Are they not to show and practice equality as joint heirs of the grace of God?

In principle, the question of whether to grant the sisters the privilege of voting in the congregation does not directly relate to the sphere of the household; rather, it involves the congregation. However the concept of headship cannot be proven to be exclusively true for those in the marriage state and not in their responsibilities towards one another within the congregation in the relationship with office-bearers.

The question to be discussed raises the issue: What if a wife was to vote differently than her husband? This question is considered to be germane to the discussion of what the Bible teaches about the authority of women in the congregation. It imports the issue of a husband's authority into the discussion in order to suggest that the sisters should not vote. Admittedly, a marriage would exhibit unity and harmony if the husband and wife were to vote for the same brothers. A husband could even use his leadership role to demand that his wife vote in same way he does, though one might question whether such an order would be an expression of love and service. The authority of the husband certainly does not suggest that the wife is no longer to have any opinions or preferences of her own. His vote could indeed be negated by hers. However, the possibility that a wife votes differently than her husband is peripherally relevant to the prior, more important, question, whether or not women are to be given such responsibilities in congregational life in the first place.

2.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that investigating the biblical teaching on gender has not advanced anything new. One can readily affirm the status quo regarding voting by men for office bearers in the congregation while not questioning the equality of status of women in the New Covenant. The interpretations of the key texts provided may indeed be controversial. Biblical passages and do not show that doctrinally vital matters are involved. Indeed, the raising of the women voting issue in the Canadian Reformed Churches has in many discussions remained on the level of raising a

contemporary social consciousness based on selective biblical passages. A general malaise among church members regarding the arguments raised should also not by default result in change to the present practice.

This [minority] report has sought to show that extending to the sisters the privilege to vote is in fact inconsistent with biblical practice [re Gen 2;23; Numbers 1-14, 1 Tim 2:14] and a biblical understanding of the relationship between equality, responsibility and headship. Biblically we may conclude that men make decisions on behalf of the whole community. The practice of excluding female communicants is consistent with a long held faithful understanding of the scriptural teaching about headship. In particular, this minority report has emphasized an opposite point of view from the majority report. All can agree that every covenant member receives both promises and obligations in the office of all believers. However, it is the contention of this report that, a consistory should not seek to include the women in the election of office-bearers based on at best inconclusive contemporary interpreted biblical considerations suggested as an 'obligation to participate'.

3. Scripture and Church Order (5.2.1.3)

5.2.1.3 With regard to voting: What do the Bible and our Church Order say about congregational participation in electing office bearers?

3.1 Biblical teaching with regard to voting

3.1.1 Old Testament

This section will highlight that the male members made decisions on behalf of the whole community. Three months after the exodus from Egypt, Moses chose and appointed judges to whom he delegated the task of deciding legal cases (Exodus 18: 25-26); these appointments addressed the immediate need of lifting the burden from Moses, while also laying the foundation for the office which the LORD established more formally two years later (Num 1). Forty years later, when Moses gave the law to the new generation of Israelites about to enter Canaan, Moses described the appointment of these judges. (In Exodus, the focus is the narrative of deliverance, whereas in Deuteronomy the purpose of recounting the appointment of judges is more legislative than narrative.)

“how can I bear your problems and your burdens and your disputes all by myself? Choose some wise, understanding and respected men from each of your tribes, and I will set them over you.” You answered me, “What you propose to do is good.” (Deut. 1:12-14)

What follows in Deuteronomy 1 is similar to what we read both in Exodus 18 and in Numbers 1. In Num. 1, God instructed Moses and Aaron to institute the

political (and, at times, military) leadership by choosing a representative from each of the twelve tribes with local, regional and national responsibilities:

These were the men appointed from the community, the leaders of their ancestral tribes. They were the heads of clans of Israel. Moses and Aaron took these men whose names had been given, and they called the whole community together on the first day of the second month.

In each of these passages relating to the initial choosing and instituting offices, we see three important principles: the men were *chosen from the community, for the community*, and *appointed by Moses and Aaron*. These men were initially called to their God given offices by the congregation, for the congregation, and under the authority of the ordained officers.

It was, it should be noted, the men in the congregation who are involved in decision making to enter Canaan (Num 13:26, 14:29) or not and to choose a king (Deut 17:15 - 'allowed to set their own king'). In 2 Sam 2:4, 5:3 it is the 'men of Judah', the 'elders of Israel' who make David king. It is instructive to see that "the community" in the Old Testament is inclusive but that it is the fighting/mature aged men over 20 years of age who make decisions (Num 1:45-46; 14:29). The male members make decisions on behalf of the whole community.

When the people of Israel returned from exile to rebuild Jerusalem, the whole congregation that assembled to hear the law of God is described as consisting of "men and women and all who were able to understand." In Nehemiah 10, when the people vowed to keep their covenant obligations the text clearly indicates that the corporate responsibility of God's household is addressed by the community as a whole (*Nehemiah 10: 28-29, 39*)

Throughout the Pentateuch, as in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, the covenant community listened and spoke as one in response to instructions — hearing the law and responding with one voice in renewal of covenantal obligations (Josh. 8:35; Neh. 10) – highlighting the involvement of the whole congregation men, women and children. It may however be assumed that similar to earlier examples from the book of Numbers the male members on behalf of the congregation as a whole were not only instructing but leading the whole congregation in decision making.

3.1.2 New Testament

Directly involving the brothers, in the choosing of leaders in the Old Testament continues in the New Testament. In the passage in Acts that speaks most clearly to the issue of the election of office bearers, one sees that one of the brethren was chosen by the men, there is no indication to think otherwise, from among the congregation (Acts 1:15-16), in order to be appointed (and ordained) by the apostles:

"Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility [care for

the needy] over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, et al.... They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid hands on them. (Acts 6: 3-6)

As it is in many other places in the New Testament, the Greek word here for “brothers” (*adelphoi*) may apparently be considered inclusive, signifying “brothers and sisters” – the whole congregation, all the members. That this may be a correct interpretation is then said to be evident from the context, for the text later says that the proposal pleased “the whole group” (NIV), “the whole gathering” (ESV), or “the whole multitude” (KJV) (παντος του πληθους). The same gender-inclusive word (“plethous”) is translated in Acts 4: 32 as “all the believers” (NIV) or “the whole multitude” (KJV) to describe the entire community of believers.

It can however not be conclusively shown that it was not the male members only who actually elected the office bearer by casting a vote. In this the single most instructive passage in the New Testament on the election of office bearers in the apostolic era, election is by the gathering of believers as a whole, yet no mention is made to suggest all voted irrespective of gender. No firm conclusion can be made indicating that women voted for office-bearers, in fact it is most logical to suggest, given the spirit of the time, at that time, that only the men voted or ‘elected’.

One also notes that, just as the office of elder in the New Testament continues important characteristics established in the Old Testament, so do the principles for the *choosing* of elders. While there are clear and significant differences between the governance of the church in the Old and New Testaments, there is no distinction between Old and New Testaments in terms of community. The ceremonial distinctions between men and women, as well as between Jews and Gentiles, are indeed removed with the completed atonement of Christ Jesus, allowing a more active participation of all those in the office of all believers including women in the work of the church in the New Testament. However, nowhere in the New Testament are these distinctive roles of men and women directly invoked in the context of choosing office bearers. Voting for office bearers by women does not warrant a doctrinal defense – the matter of “headship and voting” has not in the first place a doctrinal matter but is rather a matter of biblical application of biblical norms.

The choosing or electing of leaders from among the congregation and for the congregation has in the modern era, since the Synod of Dort, been characterized as “voting”. If women are not to have authority in the church, they ought not to be given a vote. This is (as the argument goes) a completely secular understanding of election. According to this view the act of choosing leaders in the Old and New Testament never abrogates the authority of those who appoint men to office. It is suggested, notwithstanding Acts 11:5ff and 1 Tim 2:12ff, that just as the New Testament does not refer to gender distinctions in the context of choosing office bearers (as in “the whole multitude”, Acts 6), so the New Testament nowhere associates the election of office bearers with speaking, exercising authority, or headship—functions in the church which are distinctly assigned

to *male* members. The suggestion is that the Bible says that the whole congregation participates in the choosing (“voting”) of office bearers. However, to suggest that voting by women did occur and that it was not men only who voted for office-bearers and made decisions for the whole community in the OT and NT cannot be conclusively deduced from scriptures.

3.2 Church Order with regard to voting

At the Reformation, the church returned to the Biblical practice of choosing and appointing office bearers. In response to the abuse of power by the popes, cardinals and bishops (who frequently made clerical appointments along political lines), the Reformers returned to the principles of election found in the Old and New Testaments.

In fact, according to the lengthy assertions of the committee serving Council as presented in the majority report, the reformation of the unscriptural means of clerical appointment was an important expression of the biblical ecclesiology of the Reformers.

The reformation of the election of ministers, elders and deacons - as deliberated upon in a parallel manner in the majority report – will be considered next. It is only in this lengthy comparison that the minority report can interact with and present with the relevant material and present a different conclusion. Considered is:

- A. **Calvin on the Reformation of clerical appointments**
- B. **Voting in the Belgic Confession (1561)**
- C. **Voting procedures in sixteenth-century Edinburgh**
- D. **Voting in the Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches**

3.2.1 Calvin on the Reformation of clerical appointments

Calvin during a time of transition deals specifically with the vote of the congregation in the calling and appointing of ministers, elders and deacons in Institutes of the Christian Religion, IV.iii.15 (“The Doctors and Ministers of the Church, Their Election and Office”):

Someone now asks whether the minister ought to be chosen by the whole church, or only by his colleagues and the elders charged with the censure of morals, or whether he ought to be appointed by the authority of a single person. ... For they [i.e., clergy] were over the rest only to give good and salutary advice to the people, not that they alone, in disregard of all the rest, might do what they pleased! ... Therefore, the above passages [which instruct Titus and Timothy to ‘appoint’] are to be understood as not to diminish any part of the common right and freedom of the church.... We therefore hold that this call of a minister is lawful according to the Word of God, when

*those who seemed fit are created **by the consent and approval of the people**.... (McNeill and Battles, Vol 2, pp.1065-66)*

In the following chapter, Calvin describes this practice of consent in the ancient church before the introduction of the papacy:

In ancient times no one was even received into the assembly of the clergy without the consent of all the people.... The freedom of the people to choose their own bishops was long preserved: no one was to be thrust into office who was not acceptable to all. (1078-79) [Note: Calvin uses "bishop" in the New Testament sense of "overseer".]

The majority report suggest that in the examples that Calvin cites of this practice in the early Christian church, whether the participation of the people comes in the form of election, consent and affirmation, the principle of consent by the people is consistent. Voting by members of the congregation, was re-established as an appropriate practice. Further, in the phrase that Cyprian uses, the election of overseers is "by the suffrage of the whole people", "with the calling together of the whole of the people." Calvin emphasizes that the consent of the people will not descend to 'mob rule' since the ecclesiastical (and, when necessary, civil) leaders are required to give approval of the election of office bearers by the people: as with the election and appointment of elders in the Old and New Testaments, the choosing of overseers by the people leads to the appointment by ordained leaders in Calvin. In the area of the calling and appointment of office bearers, Calvin and the Reformers returned to the Scriptural practice of the early church: rather than being radical innovators in doctrine and practice, the Reformers turned the church back to biblical and historical orthopraxy ('right practice').

The Reformation wrested the authority over the church from the pope, cardinals and bishops in order to give Christ His rightful due as Head of the church. However, to use this sound development during a transition period to conclude that women should vote for office bearers today and alter what has been a practice for over 400 years is not convincing.

3.2.2 Voting in the Belgic Confession (1561)

While the Reformed confessions do not address the matter of voting procedure at any length, the doctrine of the church summarized in the confessions provides the frame for understanding the Reformed practice of involving the congregation in the election of office bearers. Articles 27-32 deal with the nature, composition, governance and discipline of the church, beginning with the confession of the church as "a holy congregation and assembly of the true Christian believers, who expect their entire salvation in Jesus Christ". These articles flow from the confession (also found in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 19) that Christ in heaven is the Head of

His church, and that true believers constitute the church: the church is the “assembly” or “gathering” of believers, not an institution that exists apart from the members of which it is comprised.

In Art. 30, we confess that the church is to be governed “according to the Spiritual order which our Lord has taught us in His Word” ... “By these means everything will be done well and in good order when faithful men are *chosen in agreement with the rule that the apostle Paul gave to Timothy*”:

*We believe that ministers of God’s Word, elders, and deacons ought to be chosen to their offices **by lawful election of the church**, with prayer and in good order, as stipulated by the Word of God. (Article 31, emphasis added)*

While Art. 30 refers to the *qualifications* for overseer in I Timothy 3, Art. 31 refers to the *process* by which men are chosen. The proof texts for this article rightly point to Acts 1: 23-24 and Acts 6: 2-3, which describe the participation of the whole gathering of believers through the “brethren”. This is what “lawful election of the church” entails.

Article 32 regarding “order” highlights that “... we reject all human inventions and laws introduced into the worship of God which bind and compel the consciences in any way. We accept only what is proper to preserve and promote harmony and unity and to keep all in obedience to God.” Therefore, we ought to be very careful in introducing in our practices what may be considered a contemporary human development.

As a pre-modern summary of what the Bible teaches about governance in the church, the Belgic Confession does not present the voting of officers in the church as an expression of authority nor does it not do so. The Belgic Confession honors Christ as the only Head of the church, with the ministers, elders and deacons as exercising His authority and discipline in the church. These men are chosen “by lawful election of the church”, which since the Synod of Dort has in practice involved the male communicant members in voting.

3.2.3 Voting procedures in sixteenth-century Edinburgh

The majority report highlights that the Reformed church in Scotland approved Calvin’s polity and followed his understanding of election for office bearers in its voting procedure. An excerpt from the relevant portion of, a little known, The Form of Prayers and Administration (Edinburgh, 1584) illustrates how the church in Edinburgh practiced what the Belgic Confession called “lawful election of the church”:

*they [i.e., retiring office bearers] should name and give up in election such persons as they in their consciences thought most apt and able to serve in that charge: providing that they should nominate double more persons than were sufficient to serve in that charge, **to the end that the whole Congregation might have their free voice in their election.** And this order hath bin ever observed since that time in the*

*Church of Edinburgh: that is the old Session before their departing nominates a certain sufficient number according to the want of the Church: which persons nominated are publicly proclaimed **in the audience of the whole Church** upon a Sunday before noon after Sermon, with admonition to the Church, that if any man know any notorious crime or cause that might unable any of those persons to enter into such a vocation, that they should notify the same, the next Thursday to the Session: or if any know any persons more able for that charge, they should notify the same unto the said Session, to the end that no man without the Church, should complain that he was spoiled of his liberty in election.*

*The Sunday following in the end of the Sermon before noon, **the whole Congregation** are commanded to be present at after noon, to **give their voices as they will answer before God, to such as they think most able to bear the charge of the church with the Ministers.** The **voices of all** being received, the scrolls are delivered to any of the Ministers, who keepeth the same secret from the sight of all men, till the next Thursday, then in the Session he produceth them that the lots may be counted, where the manyest lots or voices without respect of person, hath the first place in the Eldership: and so proceeding, till the number of their want be complete. [emphasis added]*

{The Forme of Prayers and administration of the Sacramentes, used in the Eng Church at Geneva approved and received by the Churche of Scotland, where you to besides that which was in the former bookes, are also added sundrie other prayers [Geneva?. 1584), STC –16581 <Early English Books Online 1315:14>}] [- as quoted in the majority reoport]}

Upon their appointment, the new office bearers are called “to accept that charge that God by the plurality of voices had laid upon them.” Clearly, this sample from the Scottish church after the Reformation indicates they implemented the teaching of Calvin in the Institutes as it was also understood in the Belgic Confession, namely, by hearing the whole congregation.

However this assertion does not by itself give proof that both male and female communicant members then voted for office-bearers nor that the period of transition – immediately following the reformation during a non-normative transition period – should be anything more than interesting for us today. The existing practice of male communicant members exercising the vote has, according to all accounts, been in effect in the Reformed churches for more than 400 years.

3.2.4 Voting in the Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches

A questionable conclusion is reached or implied re Calvin, the Belgic Confession and the church in Scotland at the Reformation by the majority report to provide the background to the second component of the

question posed by Synod Smithers in 5.2.1.3 of Art. 136: **What does our Church Order say about congregational participation in electing office bearers?** Art. 3 describes the process:

The election to any office shall take place with the cooperation of the congregation, after preceding prayers, and according to the regulations adopted for that purpose by the consistory with the deacons.

The consistory with the deacons shall be free to give the congregation the opportunity beforehand to draw the attention of the consistory to brothers deemed fit for the respective offices.

The consistory with the deacons shall present to the congregation either as many candidates as there are vacancies to be filled, or at the most twice as many, from which number the congregation shall choose as many as are needed.

Those elected shall be appointed by the consistory with the deacons in accordance with the adopted regulations [note the majority report omits this clause].

Prior to the ordination or installation the names of the appointed brothers shall be publicly announced to the congregation for its approbation or at least two consecutive Sundays.

In each of the steps in the process of choosing ministers, elders and deacons (nomination, election, and approbation), the “congregation” participates without according to the majority report, distinguishing between male and female communicant members at any point. Nevertheless, the practice maintained since 1618-1619 has been consistent with our present practice in the Canadian Reformed Churches, upheld by recent synod decisions.

The “congregation” or “assembly” mentioned in Art. 3 of the Church Order is the same body that is mentioned in Numbers 1,14,23, Nehemiah 8 and Acts 1, 6, the same “gathering” of Art 27 of the Belgic Confession. Simply put the nomination, election and approbation of men in Art. 3 of the Church Order is the responsibility of the whole congregation, the body of believers assembled to form the local church. However this report asserts that it falls within the responsibility of the male communicant members on behalf of the whole, to directly elect those to be appointed by the consistory with the deacons as office-bearers.

In the stage of the process (which we typically call “voting”), the congregation elects men from a slate of nominees presented by the consistory with the deacons. The consistory with the deacons authorizes the congregation to elect men from those nominated for office. Similarly the election of deacons presumably by the male members on behalf of the whole group in Acts 6: 3-6 took place by way of the authority of the apostles.

Choosing men it is suggested does not constitute governance, and the exercise of the responsibility to choose men does not imply authority. However the logic for that conclusion is not biblically derived or historically reliable. The logic it is suggested is seemingly straightforward: the Bible as summarized in the Belgic Confession teaches that "congregation" means all believers; the Church Order calls the "congregation" to choose men qualified for office; therefore, all believers are to participate in the choosing of office bearers. However, that logic excludes the implications given in the elections described in Acts 1 and 6 and the creation order discussed in 1 Tim 2:12ff as well as the OT derived creation order and practices. Our present practice, historically consistent for centuries, appears most consistent with Old and New Testament knowledge and understanding.

3.3 Conclusion

In both the Old and New Covenants, mature male members of the covenant community participate in the choosing of leaders in the congregation. The present practices in the Canadian Reformed Churches for the election of office bearers follow biblical practices imbedded in the Belgic Confession and the Church Order. Furthermore, there is no evidence that Scriptural views of election by the congregation are transgressed by our present practice.

4. The Process of Election in Art. 3, Church Order (5.2.1.4)

5.2.1.4 With regard to voting: What is the relationship between congregational (a) nomination, (b) election process, (c) ratification/ approbation, and (d) the final appointment by council?

4.1 The stages of election

Article 3 of the Church Order describes the process by which men are nominated, elected, approbated and appointed to office (see **Section 3.3.4** above). It is important to note that council calls on the congregation to participate in each of the steps of the calling process, thereby retaining its authority over the complete process. Authority may be given to involve the congregation yet remains with the elders of the congregation at all times. Thus, the elders with the deacons [council] give the congregation the opportunity to nominate; council presents the candidates for election; council conducts an election with the cooperation of the male members; council announces the names of those elected for the purpose of approbation; and council shall appoint those elected. The Church Order indicates that the same "congregation" that is free to nominate brothers in Step 1 also "shall choose as many as needed". In Step 2 however, the current practice in the Canadian Reformed Churches excludes the female communicant members from the exercise of the vote in the election process.

During the nomination process, the congregation is asked to help council identify men who are fit for the office as elder or deacon. The congregation is encouraged to give biblical reasons for their preference. Council, upon examining the nominations, presents a slate of names to the congregation by which it is inferred that any one of those men is deemed eligible for the office to which they are nominated. Council has exercised authority in vetting the various names that the congregation has presented and authorizes the male members to exercise the vote. The female communicant members are free to draw the attention of the consistory to brothers deemed fit for the respective offices.

Based on the list of names for the office of elder and deacon the consistory together with the male members on behalf of the whole congregation, is invited to elect those whom they wish to serve. The consistory takes the list of men who are elected according to local regulations and appoints them. The elders and deacons, having appointed them to their office again requests the congregation's input into whether there may be any lawful objections to their installation into their office. Again both male and female communicant members may participate in this process. Council of course retains the authority in determining whether or not an objection is legitimate.

All three steps in the process (nomination, election, and approbation) are related by the involvement of the congregation and by Council retaining complete authority in each step of the election process, from nomination to ordination. In our current system the sisters are encouraged to take part in nomination and approbation, but are barred from voting. This apparent inconsistency highlights the importance given to the election by vote. This is a responsibility involving the male communicant members only. Although it may be argued that all three steps ought to include the full involvement of the congregation, male and female communicant members, while council's supervision over the entire process is retained, the unique decision making of the vote for male office bearers exists within the headship responsibilities of the male communicant members. They exercise this responsibility on behalf of all those in the congregation, as was the practice in the past.

It may be argued that the vote of the congregation binds the consistory by virtue of the phrase in the Church Order (Art. 3) that those elected "*shall be* appointed by the consistory with the deacons". This traditional understanding takes the phrase to mean that the consistory must comply with the election by the congregation; if women are given the vote, consistory must also follow their say in the election, thereby granting women an authority that contradicts Paul in I Tim. 2: 12ff – the creation order.

Some argue that this is a mistaken understanding of the language of the Church Order. When "shall" is used in the third person in a semi-legal situation, it expresses "determination, promise, obligation, or permission, depending on the context" (The American Heritage Book of English Usage, 1.56). They suggest that it is often used to describe the expectations and obligations of a contract or agreement ("The party of the third part shall..."). It has the connotation of typical or usual practice for the duration of the contract according to the purpose for which the agreement is made. It is in this sense, it is argued, that the word "shall" is used throughout the Church Order, not only in

Art 3. However, this view must be rejected when the word shall is more properly and commonly defined as indicating “compulsion” and “certainty” as per official legal documents – see Collins Dictionary of the English Language 2nd Ed. P.1402.

It is also argued that even if one were to understand “shall” as “binding” the consistory to the election by the congregation, one cannot construe this as granting **authority** to the congregation, since communicant members select men from a list of candidates nominated and approved by consistory with deacons, normally by majority vote. It is argued that at no point in the process, from the invitation to submit names of eligible men to the appointment of the men elected, does consistory rescind its authority to the congregation. However in the pivotal process of the calling to office, in the election, the consistory does accept the congregation to elect, by majority vote which male communicant member is to serve as an office-bearer. Authority is given [delegated if you will] by the consistory to the male communicant members participating in this decisive part of the process, the vote. The consistory is the only assembly to exercise direct authority within the congregation, the consistory receives its authority directly from Christ – they may involve the male members in that exercise of authority and accept that joint decision.

5. Conclusion

This minority report concludes based on this review of “headship and voting” that female communicant members do not have the responsibility according to biblical directives nor church orderly requirement, to participate in the election of office bearers. The creation order applied in decision making in the Old and New Testament gives males and females – while equal in status before the Lord – different responsibility in the congregation as well as in the family. Centuries of practice and church orderly considerations have applied a biblical understanding to the matter of “headship and voting” which the spirit of the time driven majority report ought not to reroute. Male members as biblically reasoned and historically practiced make decisions on behalf of the whole community.

The Canadian Reformed Churches should maintain the previous general synod decision and our present practice of allowing only male communicant members to vote for office bearers. Meanwhile the nomination and approbation of men for office remains within the jurisdiction of all church members. This minority report from a member of the Council of the Canadian Reformed Church at Hamilton, the Synod Smithers (2007) appointed “Women Voting Committee”, therefore, recommends that:

Synod Burlington (2010) upholds previous general synod decisions and present practices in the Canadian Reformed Churches and not allow the participation of female communicant members in the voting for office bearers.

Elder, Art Witten.

Council of the Cornerstone, Canadian Reformed Church at Hamilton.

March 9, 2009.

**Reports to
General Synod Burlington-Ebenezer
2010**

**The Pastoral Training Program
Funding Committee**

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Report by the Canadian Reformed Church at Guelph to
Synod Burlington-Ebenezer regarding the
Pastoral Training Program Funding Committee

General Synod Smithers (2007) appointed the Canadian Reformed Church at Guelph to establish a Committee for Pastoral Training Program Funding (art. 159 of the Acts). The Church at Guelph appointed the following members to the Pastoral Training Program (PTP) Funding Committee: Chairman: Dr. Cornelis Poppe, Vice Chairman: Mr. Simon Wildeboer, Treasurer: Mr. Colin Meerstra, and Secretary: Mrs. Susan Vanleeuwen. The Pastoral Training Program Coordinator and Liaison of the Committee with the Theological College is Dr. A.J. De Visser, PTP Coordinator.

The Committee commenced its work in the fall of 2007.

The Committee formulated a document entitled “The Committee for Pastoral Training Program Funding” describing its mandate, membership, duties of its members, the manner of appointment of Committee members and auditors of the financial records, and the requirement to prepare triennially a report to be sent to the Church at Guelph for submission to the Churches before the next General Synod (See Appendix 1).

One of the Committee’s tasks was “To determine a reasonable compensation for internship, and to develop guidelines for such compensation” (Acts of General Synod Smithers 2007, Art. 78:4.11.1.2). The Committee considered that the Pastoral Training Program is an educational program that endeavours to equip students more fully for their future task among God’s people. The committee obtained information from past participants in the Program, both students and churches, from students at the Theological College to be yet enrolled in the PTP program, and examined co-op programs at Canadian universities. Based on the information obtained, the Committee developed guidelines regarding compensation of students in the Pastoral Training Program, assessment of the Churches, how to help foreign students in fulfilling the requirements of the Pastoral Training Program and how to assist the Churches with advice regarding employment of students and payroll deductions. The 2008 updated version of the guidelines are attached as Appendix 2.

Both the document detailing the composition of the Committee and the tasks of its members (See Appendix 1) and the guidelines established in response to the Art. 78:4.11.1.2 of the Acts of Synod Smithers 2007 (See Appendix 2), have been approved by the consistory with the deacons of the Church at Guelph.

The Committee wrote a letter, dated November 3, 2007, to all the Can. Ref. Churches detailing the composition of Pastoral Training Program Funding Committee, how it intended to fulfill its mandate, the number of students who

would likely be enrolled in the Pastoral Training Program during the summer of 2008, and requested the Churches to pay an assessment of \$3.50 for each communicant member of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

During the summer of 2008 three students were enrolled in the Pastoral Training Program: Ken Bergsma (employed by the Maranatha Church of Fergus Maranatha; mentor Rev. Agema), Ryan deJonge (employed by the Church of Guelph; mentor Rev. VanWoudenberg), and Rodney Vermeulen (employed by the Church of Toronto; mentor Rev. Den Hollander). During that year the requirement was that the students in the Program would be employed for a minimum period of 10 weeks and would thereby fulfill the requirements of the Training Program. One of the students, although being an Australian citizen and therefore a foreign student, was able to obtain a work permit from the Canadian Department of Immigration and Citizenship. The Committee noted that this fact may constitute an implicit recognition by the Canadian government of the Pastoral Training Program as a Coop Student Program of Studies commonly administered by Canadian Universities.

During the year 2008 the Committee received the requested assessments from the churches and paid each of the three churches employing a student during the summer of 2008 the amount of \$7,500.00 for the 10 week training period. Mr. E. John Post and Mr. Kor Reinink were appointed by the Church of Guelph as auditors of the financial records of the Pastoral Training Program Funding Committee and reported by letter dated October 25, 2008 to the Church of Guelph that "the review indicated that everything in the records was in good order". A report regarding amounts received and disbursed is attached (See Appendix 3).

In the fall of 2008, the Committee received a request for information about the Pastoral Training Program Funding from Mr. Murray Plug, one of the Deputies for Training for the Ministry of the Free Reformed Churches in Australia. The Committee provided him with details of the Pastoral Training Program Funding Committee, how it operates and sent him the guidelines it developed regarding compensation of students in the Pastoral Training Program and the assessment of the Churches. The Committee noted that Synod Legana (2009) of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia decided to "Adopt the Australian adaptation of the guidelines for the Pastoral Training Program" prepared by Deputies for the Training for the Ministry (Article 17, II. 13.4 of the Acts) and to charge the new deputies with the task to "monitor the practical implications of including the Australian Churches in the Pastoral Training Program of the Hamilton College and collect and disburse funds for this purpose in accordance with the Australian adaptation of the guidelines for the Pastoral Training Program" (Article 17, II. 13.5.9).

The Committee anticipated an enrolment of six students in the Pastoral Training Program during the summer of 2009. However, two students (Australian citizens) went to Australia and received the Pastoral Training

provided by the Free Reformed Churches of Australia and one student did not receive permission to speak an edifying word. Thus, three students were enrolled in the Pastoral Training Program during the summer of 2009: Ryan Kampen (employed by the Redeemer Church at Winnipeg; mentor Rev. Poppe), Tony Roukema (employed by the Church at Flamborough; mentor Rev. DeGelder), and Tim Sikkema (employed by the Providence Church at Edmonton; mentor Rev. Aasman). Dr. A.J. De Visser composed an outline for the churches employing students regarding the funding of summer internships. It emphasized that a summer internship ideally has a length of 12 weeks. The PTP Funding Committee therefore decided to provide funding for the Training Program for a period of 12 weeks.

During the year 2009 the Committee received the requested assessment from the churches and paid each of the three churches employing a student during the summer of 2009 an amount of \$9,000.00 for the 12 week training period. It paid travel costs in the amount of \$500.00 for the student employed in Manitoba and \$750.00 for the student employed in Alberta. Mr. E. John Post and Mr. Kor Reinink were reappointed by the Church of Guelph as auditors of the financial records of the Pastoral Training Program Funding Committee and reported by letter dated September 28, 2009 to the Church of Guelph that the financial records of the PTP Funding Committee were in good order. A report regarding amounts received and disbursed is attached (See Appendix 3).

APPENDIX 1

The Committee for Pastoral Training Program Funding

The Church at Guelph has been charged by Synod Smithers 2007 to appoint a Committee for Pastoral Training Program (PTP) Funding (Art. 159.2 of the Acts).

The **Mandate** of the Committee has been described in the Acts as follows (Art. 78.4.11.1):

- a. To look after all internship-related funding matters
- b. To determine a reasonable compensation for internship, and to develop guidelines for such compensation
- c. To assess the churches each year based on the anticipated funding required for a particular summer
- d. To report about their activities to the next general synod, which report shall be sent to all the churches.

Membership:

The **membership** of the Committee consists of a Chairman, a Vice-chairman, a Treasurer, a Secretary and a liaison between the Theological College and the Committee, the PTP Coordinator (Art 78, 4.11.2). One of the members will liaise with the Consistory with the deacons of the Church at Guelph.

Duties of Members:

The **Chairman** is responsible for directing the activities of the Committee in fulfilling its mandate. He will call a meeting on no less than two occasions per annum, preferably in May and October. These meetings will enable the Committee to discuss funding to Churches to employ students and assessment of Churches to include in budgets, respectively.

The **Vice-Chairman** acts as Chairman in his absence and assists the Committee with carrying out its mandate. The Vice-Chairman and the Treasurer will jointly open a bank account and sign cheques.

The **Treasurer** is responsible for managing the receipts and disbursements of funds. He is to submit an annual statement of receipts and expenditures to the Committee before its meeting in October of each year and to make recommendations regarding the annual assessment to be submitted by the Churches. He is to keep accurate records of receipts and disbursements and have these available for auditing before the Committee meeting in October of each year.

The **Secretary** is to keep minutes of meetings, to submit minutes and letters for review and approval, and to mail letters to request the submission of the annual assessment to the Churches after the October meeting to enable inclusion of the assessment in the budget of each of the churches.

The **Liaison with Council** is to keep Consistory with the deacons informed of the activities of the Committee, to relay requests by the Committee for appointments and other matters, and to inform the Committee of decisions of Consistory with the deacons regarding the PTP Funding Committee.

The **Liaison between the Committee and the Theological College** is the Pastoral Training Program Coordinator. He will inform the Committee of all matters regarding funding of the Pastoral Training Program and may request assistance in the carrying out of his duties as PTP Coordinator. He will inform the Committee of the number of students to be enrolled in the PTP on or before the Committee meeting in October of each year. He will, after having made arrangements for placements of students by Churches and with mentors, inform the Committee of the same in a timely manner.

Appointments:

The Committee members, except the PTP Coordinator, are appointed by the Consistory with the deacons of the Church at Guelph. The PTP coordinator is ex officio the liaison between the Theological College and the Committee. The division of tasks of the Committee members is as agreed upon by the Committee. The appointment of all members, except the PTP Coordinator, is for a three year period and Consistory with the deacons may, at its pleasure, reappoint members for additional three-year terms.

Auditors:

The Church at Guelph will appoint two auditors, members of neighbouring churches, who will examine the books of the Treasurer each year before the October meeting of the Committee.

Report to General Synod:

The Committee will submit triennially a report to the Church at Guelph detailing the activities of the Committee well in advance of General Synod so as to enable Consistory with the deacons to review and submit the report six months before General Synod.

APPENDIX 2

**Guidelines developed by the Pastoral Training Program
Funding Committee****1. Compensation for students in the Pastoral Training Program**

- a. The mandate of the Committee is “To determine a reasonable compensation for internship, and to develop guidelines for such compensation” (Acts of General Synod Smithers 2007, Art. 78:4.11.1.2). The Committee considered that the Pastoral Training Program is an **educational** program that endeavours to equip students more fully for their future task among God’s people. The Committee obtained information from past participants in the Program, both students and churches where students were placed during their internship, from students who hope to be enrolled in the PTP, and examined co-op programs in graduate studies at Canadian universities. The Committee considered that the PTP is not unlike co-op programs at Canadian universities that aim to provide practical training and expertise to students. The students that enrol in the PTP are in a Master of Divinity Program of Studies. The Pastoral Training Program is mandatory for all students aspiring to the ministry of the Word among the Canadian Reformed Churches in accordance with the document entitled “Guidelines for the pastoral Proficiency Program” (Art. 78:4.10). The Federal Government established rates of pay to students in a Master’s program during 2008 to range from \$16.39 to \$20.62 per hour when employed in a co-op program at Federal departments, laboratories and agencies. The highest amount was only to be paid to students who are re-employed or to students who have relevant previous work experience. The website is: www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pubs_pol/hrpubs/compensation/tces1_e.asp. New rates of pay are published annually. After considering these matters, the Committee decided to pay \$20.00 per hour or \$750.00 per week for students employed during the summer of 2008 and 2009. Since the requirements of PTP program are considered to be fulfilled during a minimum of 12 weeks of training, the Committee decided to pay the employer, the Church where the student is placed by mutual agreement between the PTP Coordinator and the mentor, a total amount of \$9,000.00 for the 12 weeks of training. The Committee will pay each of the Churches employing a student the above stated amount in a manner ensuring that the student can be paid on time.
- b. To encourage participation of the Churches in Western Canada in the Pastoral Training Program, the Committee decided to provide an additional amount of funding to students travelling outside of Ontario; \$500.00 for travel to Manitoba; \$750.00 for travel to Alberta, and \$1000.00 for travel to British Columbia. This amount would also be sent to the local hosting church.

- c. The Committee decided not to pay for additional travel costs, mileage, the student being married and having a family to look after, housing expenses, tuition fees or other considerations. The Committee considered that it has as mandate to fund an educational program. The Committee is not a Committee for Needy Students. Also, employers that hire students enrolled in a cooperative program of studies at Canadian universities pay students for the period of the training program, but not for travel expenses, family needs, housing expenses or other expenses. However, a local hosting church could, at its discretion, add to the approved amount based on the individual student's circumstances.
- d. The Committee decided to fund only the 12 week Pastoral Training Program period. Students should be able to complete the requirements of the mandatory 12-week Pastoral Training Program during that period of time. The Church employing the student may, at its discretion, enter into an agreement with the student to employ him for a period longer than 12 weeks but would then itself face payment of the additional costs.

2. Assessment

- a. The Committee will consider at its October meeting the number of students to be employed by the Churches in the ensuing year and send a letter to the Churches regarding the annual assessment for the PTP requesting the churches to pay the assessment before March 31 of the following year.

3. Foreign Students

- a. The student should apply early for a work permit, i.e. before January of the year in which he will be enrolled in the Pastoral Training Program.
- b. The granting of a work permit may be expedited when the student writes in his application to Citizenship and Immigration Canada that he is enrolled in a Master of Divinity Program of Studies at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton, Ontario, that the Theological College is a Province of Ontario recognized degree-granting institution, that the program is mandatory to complete the requirements for the M.Div. degree, and that he is required to complete the Pastoral Training Program immediately following the 3rd year of studies of the 4-year M.Div. program.
- c. The Committee will provide advice to foreign students requesting help in applying to Citizenship and Immigration Canada for a social insurance number and a work permit.

Employment and taxes

The Committee will advise churches regarding employment of students and payroll deductions for taxes, unemployment insurance, etc.

APPENDIX 3
Pastoral Training Program Funding Committee
Statement of Receipts & Disbursements for 2008 and 2009

	2008	2009
Receipts		
Annual assessments	33,446.00	34,072.50
Interest & Exchange	0.00	72.12
Total Receipts	<u>33,446.00</u>	<u>34,144.62</u>
Disbursements		
Student Support	22,500.00	28,250.00
Bank Service Charges	30.56	35.47
Total Disbursements	<u>22,530.56</u>	<u>28,285.47</u>
Surplus	10,915.44	5,859.15
Student Support Detail:	2008	2009
Fergus Maranatha - K. Bergsma	7,500.00	
Guelph - R. deJonge	7,500.00	
Toronto - R. Vermeulen	7,500.00	
Winnipeg Redeemer - R. Kampen		9,500.00
Flamborough - T. Roukema		9,000.00
Edmonton Providence - T. Sikkema		9,750.00
	<u>22,500.00</u>	<u>28,250.00</u>

Pastoral Training Program Funding Committee
Statement of Financial Position as at December 31

	2008	2009
ASSETS		
Cash & GIC's	11,033.82	16,744.45
Accounts Receivable	0.00	30.14
TOTAL ASSETS	<u>11,033.82</u>	<u>16,774.59</u>
LIABILITIES & SURPLUS		
Accounts Payable	118.38	0.00
Accumulated Surplus	10,915.44	16,774.59
TOTAL LIABILITIES & SURPLUS	<u>11,033.82</u>	<u>16,774.59</u>

**Reports to
General Synod Burlington-Ebenezer
2010**

Committee for the Official Website

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Report to GENERAL SYNOD Burlington 2010 from the COMMITTEE FOR THE OFFICIAL WEBSITE

Esteemed brothers in the Lord,

With fraternal greetings in the name of our Saviour, we hereby submit our report to General Synod Burlington 2010, as mandated by General Synod Smithers 2007.

1. COMMITTEE MANDATE

Synod Smithers 2007 gave the committee the following mandate:

1. To maintain existing website and associated technical functions.
2. To revise the content of the website whenever necessary, in particular ensuring that the text of the *Book of Praise* is the same as that most recently adopted and revised by general synod.
3. To include on the website:
 - 3.1 Contact material about each local church, either via links or directly on the website, subject to concurrence of the local church.
 - 3.2 Contact information for committees and churches appointed by general synod for specific mandates.
 - 3.3 Publication of the official reports of the synodical committees in a standardized format (e.g., pdf) with security measures restricting access only to consistories.
These restrictions should be lifted after synod has dealt with them.
4. To provide web and email services to the churches, and be available upon request to serve the churches with advice with regard to the possibilities of setting up their own websites.
5. To serve Synod 2010 with a report to be sent to the churches at least six months prior to the beginning of this synod, including a financial statement and a proposed budget, and any recommendations regarding new content to be added to the website.

2. COMMITTEE FUNCTIONING

2.1 Communication

2.1.1 Meetings

Three meetings were held. The first one (2007) in Hamilton, with the three committee members from Ontario present, the other two members from Western Canada participated in these meetings by means of a telephone conference call. The second and third meeting, in 2008 and 2009, were held using skype.

2.1.2 E-mail

Between these meetings, the communication took place mainly by e-mail. This, together with the annual meetings mentioned under 2.1.1., appeared to be sufficient for the committee to function effectively.

2.2 Members and distribution of tasks

Synod Smithers 2007 appointed two new members, Cheryl Harke and Harold Sikkema. They were appointed in the place of the brothers T.J. Flach and J.M. Hoogerdijk. These two new members together with A. VandenHoven focused on the technical aspects of the work and sr. M. VanderVelde, who also served as convenor and Rev. A. Souman, who served as secretary of the committee, focused on the administrative aspects and the content.

3. COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

3.1 Hardware and technical set up

3.1.1. Internet Service Provider and Hardware

In 2007, the committee changed from having its own server to hosting the website by Dreamhost.com. The result of this is that the committee does not have to maintain the hardware anymore and does not need to make use of a separate Internet Service Provider (ISP).

3.1.3 Domain name

The domain name for the website is www.canrc.org and continues to be actively registered for the web-site and e-mail services.

3.2 Existing content

The existing content continues to be maintained on the website and updated regularly, where necessary. This concerns the introduction to the Canadian and American Reformed Churches, the Online Resources, the Church Directory and Church News. The Theological College now has its own website and is not part of the official website of the federation anymore.

For the information on the News-page as well as for the press releases of the ecclesiastical assemblies, the committee completely depends on the cooperation of the ministers and churches and organizations for these items to be posted on this page. The committee encourages the churches, ministers and organizations to provide the information in a timely manner.

Over the past years, the committee has been working on a redesign of the entire site, which will also make it easier to keep the site up to date. At the time of writing of this report the redesign is as good as finished and will be launched in the fall of 2009.

At the same time, the committee has been working on an update of the information on the website. Also the text of the three confessions has

been updated. The committee had to change the format of the text it received to html format, which took quite some work. Due to this, the text of the confessions was for some time only available in pdf format. The expectation is that with the launch of the new website in the fall of 2009 this will be solved.

3.3. New Content

As mandated by Synod Smithers 2007, the committee added the following new content to the website.

3.3.1 More information regarding each local church

The committee will contact the local churches again in the fall of 2009, after the launch of the redesigned website, to inform them of the possibilities for the local churches to present themselves on the internet via the federational website and how the website committee can help them with advice, as mandated by General Synod Smithers 2007.

3.3.2. Links to other websites

There is a page with links to other websites. Some websites were added to these links. The links on this page are websites from organizations and churches which have a clear and official relationship with our churches as well as a link to Bible Gateway, which provides the text of the Bible in many translations.

3.3.3. Posting of sermons

The committee has been discussing the posting of sermons on the website. It has been in contact with 'theseed' about this as well. However, the committee is of the opinion, now that so many churches have sermons posted on the internet, either in audio format or in text, that there is no need to put sermons on the federational website anymore. Instead of this, the committee posted links to pages of websites of local churches where sermons can be found. These links are only to websites of Canadian Reformed churches.

3.3.4. Posting of Press Releases of broader assemblies

Press Releases of broader assemblies as well as of some of the committees of Synod are posted on the Resources page.

3.3.5 Posting of the reports and the Acts of General Synods

In addition to the Acts which were already present on the website, the Acts of General Synod Smithers 2007 have been posted on the website, as well as the reports.

According to the decision of General Synod Smithers 2007, the committee will in the fall of 2009, in cooperation with the convening church and Premier Printing, post the reports of the committees on the website, password protected, and inform the consistories about the possibility to download these reports from the website.

3.4 Web services and email services

3.4.1. Web Services

The committee has the possibility to provide a domain name for a local church website of the churches (e.g. : <http://chilliwack.canrc.org>). This domain name can also be used as a redirect to an existing website. It is possible to provide those domain-names to local churches as long as the service provider of the local church allows it.

3.4.2. Email services

a) ministers email

The committee continues to provide the ministers in our federation with permanent email addresses as well as a mailing list for discussion and correspondence between the ministers.

b) Consistory Clerks email

The committee offered email addresses to the churches for their clerks. However, not many churches signed up for a clerk email address.

3.5 Cost and expenses

The only costs over the past three years was for the hosting plan at Dreamhost.com, which is paid for two years in advance. For the coming three years the committee does not expect much change. The renewal dates for the hosting plan at Dreamhost.com are in 2010 and in 2012.

3.6 Feedback

From time to time the website committee receives comments from visitors of the website, which are in general positive. Sometimes the committee is made aware of minor mistakes or omissions on the website, what is also appreciated by the committee. In several e-mails which the committee received, people ask for more information, for instance about the churches, about Reformed doctrine, or about aspects of our church life. These e-mails are answered, as much as possible, by the convener, sr. M. VanderVelde, or the secretary, Rev. A. Souman. Questions about copyright for the Book of Praise are forwarded to the Standing Committee for the Book of Praise.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Site content

At this moment, the committee is of the opinion that no new content should be added.

The committee should mainly focus on maintaining and fine tuning the redesigned website and promoting the services which are offered to the churches.

4.2 Future direction

The website has proven to be a valuable tool for many to find information about the Canadian Reformed Churches and also to present the federation to others. It is important to maintain the website and keep it up to date. The committee asks Synod to continue to recommend to the local churches to make use of this valuable tool to present the churches and the message of salvation on the internet. The committee was mandated by General Synod Smithers 2007 to provide web and email services to the churches, and be available upon request to serve the churches with advice with regard to the possibilities of setting up their own websites. The committee recommends that Synod Burlington 2010 make this again part of the mandate of the committee.

4.3 Email as official communication

It appears that more and more churches start to use email as an accepted means of official communication. However, churches, assemblies and organizations should be aware of the dangers of this. It is possible that organizations or others represent themselves in emails or websites as representatives of the Canadian Reformed Churches or part of it, which are not officially appointed by Synod or by the churches as such. This can cause confusion or even worse. In order to keep communication by email reliable, the committee is of opinion that Synod should make a decision, for instance by deciding to strongly encourage ministers, synodical committees and local churches to use '@canrc.org' email addresses and to strongly encourage local congregations to use *congregation.canrc.org* as their primary domain name. Other domains they choose can redirect to their canrc.org domain name. Because the website committee is the only organization that can create email addresses in the canrc.org domain, create sub domains of canrc.org and publish content to the canrc.org website, the origin of anything within the canrc.org domain possesses a high level of trustworthiness as to their authenticity.

4.4 Committee composition

The current composition of the committee worked well. The committee consists of three members with advanced technical abilities, as well as the librarian of the Theological College and one minister. Now that the Theological College has its own website, there is no need anymore to have someone from the college in the committee. The non-technical work in the committee can be done by one person. For the technical work, three persons are sufficient.

Synod Smithers decided that a member is usually reappointed only once and serves six years.

Three members of the committee are slated to retire. If the Synod agrees with the committee that there is no need anymore to appoint someone from the College and that the non-technical work can be done by one member, then Synod only needs to appoint two new members: one for the non-technical aspects of the work and one for the

technical aspects. The committee will be sending a list of nominees for potential consideration by Synod under separate cover to be held in confidence and presented to the committee appointed by Synod to deal with the matter.

4.5 Mandate

The committee recommends that General Synod Burlington 2010 give the committee the following mandate:

- 1. To maintain the existing website and associated technical functions.
- 2. To revise the content of the website whenever necessary, in particular ensuring that the text of the Book of Praise is the same as that most recently adopted and revised by General Synod.
- 3. To provide web services and email services to the churches and serve the churches with advice with regard to the possibilities of setting up their own web sites.
- 4. To serve Synod 2010 with a report to be sent to the churches at least six months prior to the beginning of Synod, including a financial statement and a proposed budget, and any recommendations regarding new content to be added to the website.

The committee also recommends that General Synod Burlington 2010 decide:

- 1. To approve the annual budget of \$ 750.00.
- 2. To appoint two new members to the committee.
- 3. To strongly encourage ministers, synodical committees and local churches to use a '@canrc.org' email address and local congregations to use *congregation.canrc.org* as their primary domain name.

Respectfully submitted by your committee:

- C. Lane (nee Harke) (Calgary, AB)
- H. Sikkema (Hamilton, ON)
- A. Souman (Langley, BC), secretary
- A. VandenHoven (Cloverdale, BC)
- M. VanderVelde (Hamilton, ON), convener

Appendix: Financial statement and budget

The only expense in the years 2007 – 2009 was the cost for the renewal of the hosting plan, which was \$ 382.80 for two years (September, 2008 – September, 2010).

The first renewal date is September 28, 2010 and the one thereafter September 28, 2012.

Three year periods	CDN \$
Total 1998 - 2000 Expenses	\$1,120.50
Total 2001 - 2003 Expenses	\$2,940.11
Total 2004 - 2006 Expenses	\$1,934.00
Total 2007-2009 Expenses	\$ 382.80
Budgeted expenses 2010-2012	\$1,000.00

Projected budget:

Hosting plan renewal in 2010 (2 years)	\$ 450.00
Hosting plan renewal in 2012 (2 years)	\$ 450.00
Miscellaneous costs	\$ 100.00
	<hr/>
Total 2010-2012 Expenses	\$ 1,000.00

