

Comments on the changes from PJCO 2010 to PJCO 2012

Prefacing Comments

We composed this document to assist the reader in evaluating PJCO 2012.

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

Synod Burlington 2010 of the Canadian Reformed Churches, when dealing with the report from the Church Order sub-committee, reviewed 45 letters from the churches regarding PJCO 2010. In considering all this input Synod Burlington decided to highlight a number of items for specific direct input and direction, and then to mandate the committee to “adopt the[se] recommendations...in consultation with the committee of the URCNA” (Article 151, 4.4.3). It also decided to mandate the committee to “give a final evaluation of the letters from the churches” and “to finalize those matters deemed to be yet unfinished” (Article 151, 4.4.1).

To carry out these mandates the CanRC committee first reviewed the letters from the churches. On the basis of this review it proposed a number of changes to PJCO 2010 for consideration with the URCNA brothers. It also presented all the directives from Synod 2010 to the URCNA brothers.

The URCNA brothers were able to engage in these negotiations since Synod London 2010, though mandating the churches to send suggested changes to PJCO 2010 to synod instead of to the committee, also reappointed the committee to “continue working closely with the church order sub-committee of the Canadian Reformed Churches ...to address matters yet unfinished (such as PJCO Article 4) (Acts of Synod London, Article 40).

At a joint meeting in June 2010 all the recommendations from Synod Burlington 2010 as well as the above mentioned proposals were duly deliberated and decided upon. These specific deliberations and decisions form the basis for the comments made in this document.

This document, therefore, is not at all exhaustive. Rather, this document is meant to highlight some of the rationale for the changes made to PJCO 2010.

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

Formatting of the PJCO

We made a few very minor formatting changes in the PJCO in order to correct some inconsistencies that were brought to our attention.

Introduction

In the “Historical Background” section of the introduction, PJCO 2010 originally stated that “...*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).*” We followed a suggestion from one of the churches to amend that line to “*the Reformed churches set down the foundation of the Church Order at various ecclesiastical assemblies beginning in 1563, at various ecclesiastical assemblies, with the first official assembly held in Emden, Germany in 1571*” for the sake of historical accuracy and clarity.

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

We considered removing the words “relations and” from the phrase “*Therefore we order our ecclesiastical relations and activities under the following divisions*” since that could suggest that the matter of “relations with other churches” is more important than other matters. In context, however, the phrase “ecclesiastical relations” is primarily about the churches in the federation working together – and it is important to highlight that the Church Order is a document by which the churches relate together.

PJCO Article 3, The Duties of the Minister

Several churches expressed concern that the phraseology of “watching over his fellow office-bearers” had a latent hierarchy in it. Looking at this article again we reworded it noting the following:

- While the suggested terminology of “assisting them in their work” fits with the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship, the terminology of “watching over” fits with the office.
- That the phrase “together with...” is found in PJCO 17 but not PJCO 3 is not an inadvertent inconsistency. Rather, the reason for the inconsistency is that while the minister is a fellow elder, the elder is not a fellow minister.
- The concern could be addressed and PJCO 3 could be improved by separating the “preaching and teaching” duties from the “elder duties.”

PJCO Article 4A, Preparation for the Ministry, Theological Education

Both Synod London 2010 and Synod Burlington 2010 had mandated the combined committee to finalize this article. Synod Burlington gave the following directive: “Seeing as this article is incomplete, the following wording is proposed to the Joint Order Church Committee for its consideration and adoption: *“The churches shall maintain an institution for the training for the ministry and shall support theological education that is properly accountable to the churches.”*”

We considered such matters as the following in finalizing this article:

- Concerns have been expressed about synodical boards over which the churches actually have no control whatsoever.
- In the past, institutions for theological training controlled by the churches have become corrupted and unfaithful to biblical teaching. The responsibility for this, however, actually lies particularly with the churches that were to oversee and control these institutions. Reflected in this is the faithfulness or lack thereof of the churches.
- It is important that the churches take full control of theological education specific to the confessions and creeds of the churches.

PJCO Article 4B, Preparation for the Ministry, Licensure

Synod Burlington gave the following directive:

- *A number of our churches raise questions about a student being able to exhort after only completing one year of theological education. This objection is related to the fact that students from Hamilton need three years of theological education*

before they can exhort in our churches. It should be noted that there is an obvious discrepancy here between our respective churches that no doubt should be discussed and resolved.

- *At the same time it should be noted that students coming from Mid-America take at least three courses in Homiletics in their first year of study and that more attention is given to the preparation of sermons.*
 - *With regard to (Westminster) California, the catalogue appears to indicate that only one course in Homiletics is required.*
 - *In light of these different approaches the... committee should give serious consideration to raising the minimum requirement to two years before granting licensure to exhort.*
- Following are some considerations that contributed to us leaving the article as is
- While a student may only have had one year of theological instruction, he at the same time still has to pass the licensure examination;
 - It should be kept in mind that a student is under a supervisor, and thus his sermons also are under supervision before being preached;
 - Delaying a student access to the pulpit also delays and curtails practical training;
 - The current practice of “after the first year” in the URCNA has not been disappointing;
 - Practically speaking, how much improvement will one more year of theological education have on the quality of the “sermons” presented?
 - Could one ask the seminary to give more homiletics courses earlier on?
 - The current CanRC Church Order does not specify 3 years but instead has “in accordance with general ecclesiastical regulations.”

PJCO Article 5, Calling a Candidate

Extensive editing of articles, especially over time, can result in awkward and superfluous wording that needs to be addressed. The input from several churches made this quite clear with respect to the first two paragraphs of this article. In re-crafting these paragraphs the following matters came up for discussion:

- While some churches questioned the specification that the laying on of hands should be done only by the ministers we decided to keep this stipulation since at stake here is the matter of office.
- PJCO 2010 speaks about both the advice of the congregation and the counsellor: there should be a distinction made which gives more weight to the voice of the congregation.

PJCO Article 6, Calling a Minister Within the Federation

This article also needed some streamlining and could be shortened by the removal of stipulations already covered elsewhere in the PJCO. In connection with the discussion regarding advice and approbation under PJCO 5 it was deemed prudent to change “advice of classis” for a second call to “approval of classis.”

PJCO Article 7, Calling a Minister from Outside the Federation

This article, with its repeated usage of “only” and other awkward phraseology, needed some streamlining and clarification.

PJCO Article 8, Bound to a Particular Church

One church recognized that while the wording “such as” with examples can be intended to limit what can be called an “other ministerial task,” yet in actual fact such wording has the opposite effect. Another church recommended the inclusion of missionaries as the primary example of an “other ministerial task.”

We considered removing all the examples, but felt that this would leave the matter wide open. This would not be good in our day in which many tasks are quickly labeled as “ministerial tasks.” Examples do function to give direction as to what can properly be considered an “other ministerial task.” We also added the word “specific” to clarify that “other ministerial task” should not be taken too broadly.

PJCO Article 10, Support and Emeritation of Ministers

A number of churches pointed out that the words “...shall contribute toward the retirement” could wrongly be taken in a very limited way. We therefore changed “...shall contribute toward...” to “...shall provide for...”

PJCO Article 21D, Ecclesiastical Assemblies, Jurisdiction

Several churches pointed out that the directive “all matters” in PJCO 21D confuses the intent of this article. While the jurisdiction of synod applies to overtures and appeals, the way overtures and appeal come to synod are not necessarily the same. Overtures need to go the ecclesiastical route by way of consistory, classis, and regional synod to general synod. An appeal against a decision of a broader assembly is submitted to the broader assembly next in line; an appeal against a decision of general synod is submitted directly to the next general synod. To clear up any possible confusion we settled on the following formulation that distinguishes appeals from other matters that assemblies have to deal with: *“All these matters, with the exception of appeals, must originate with a consistory and must receive the support of the narrower assembly before being considered by the broader assembly.”*

PJCO Article 25D, Classis, Mutual Oversight

Given the inconsistency of language between PJCO 17 and PJCO 25D about the task of promoting Reformed Schooling we changed the wording of PJCO 25D to *“...and schooling that is in harmony with the Word of God as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity is promoted.”*

Synod Burlington 2010 gave the following directive regarding this matter: *“It can be questioned whether a classis needs to inquire of the churches whether or not “Confessionally Reformed Schooling is promoted.” The committee is advised to leave the matter of schooling to the local churches and not make it a matter of classical concern.”* Over the years this matter has already been negotiated extensively. We in the end decided to keep the wording as is. Following are some of the points, pro and con, that surfaced in our deliberations:

- A key question here is: is this really the task of classis?
- Would it not be best that classis asks questions around the three marks of the Church?
- Why would PJCO 25 D ask about “schooling at all levels” while not asking about catechizing? Is not the matter of “catechizing” more germane to the task of the elder?
- Would it not be important to also ask if the decisions of the broader assemblies are upheld and the Church Order is followed?
- Would not this question be much more pertinent at a church visitation?
- The well-being of the local church is very much impacted by Reformed education.
- Dort 1914 does make reference to the matter of schooling in connection with classis. Hence historically it is not out of synch to have this question at classis. In the CanRCs the stress on education as a parental matter, which in itself is good,

has skewed things in taking it away from classis. This question has a long history in the Reformed Churches: “Are the poor and the Christian schools cared for?”

PJCO Article 28, Regional Synod

We completely rewrote PJCO 28 in order to incorporate the suggestion for a provision regulating the cancellation of an unnecessary regional synod, to get rid of some unnecessary stipulations which are covered in other articles already, and to fix up some terminology that could be taken to suggest that a regional synod is a continuing body. In so doing we also made a small change to PJCO 25B for the sake of consistency in terminology.

PJCO Article 30, General Synod

When considering PJCO 28 regarding regional synods we noticed that while it is important that PJCO 28 has the phrase “consisting of three or more classes” in order to highlight that a Regional Synod has to be made up of at least three classes, the parallel stipulation in PJCO 30 to the effect that a general synod consists of those delegated by the classis is not needed since this is covered elsewhere. We noted that here too terminology could be improved to take away any idea that a general synod is a continuing body.

PJCO Article 36, Psalms and Hymns

Synod Burlington 2010 gave the following directive regarding this article: *“From the letters received, it becomes obvious that all the churches which wrote support the Majority Report and thus would like to see the renditions of the Psalms and Hymns “approved by general synod.” The [committee] is urged to decide accordingly. At the same time, the [committee] realizes that exceptional situations can arise as is the case of a church plant being done among different ethnic groups that do not worship in English. In such cases the advice of classis should be sought before proceeding to use alternative Psalms and Hymns.”* Following are some of the points of deliberation that we again had:

- The URCNA Synod Schererville 2007 expressed its strong preference for the minority report, while the CanRC Synod Smithers 2007 expressed its strong preference for the majority report.

- It is interesting that while the URCNA has a committee to prepare a new hymnal that has to be approved by general synod, it does not indicate that when this hymnal is completed that the singing in the worship services be from that book.
- Most URCNA churches would not want the restriction of singing from only one book. It should be noted, however, that PJCO 36 does not mandate singing from only one book.
- Synod Burlington 2010 agrees with the current wording of PJCO 36, and therefore may have hoped that with this directive the minority report would be taken off the table. The committee as a whole, however, cannot do that. Could the chasm not be bridged by adding a provision that other songs may be sung in a certain area but only if approved by synod? Should a procedure like that, however, be specifically stipulated particularly since the current wording already allows for that?
- Neither the URCNA nor the CanRC church orders specify that a synod has to decide on a Bible translation: it is left to the churches.
- The stipulation of “synod approval” is important: the singing of the church is the confession of the church and thus the churches should work on this together.

We decided to leave PJCO 36 as is.

PJCO Article 40, Public Profession of Faith

A number of churches properly expressed weaknesses with the PJCO 2010 version of this article that needed addressing:

- It does not have the character of a Church Order article but rather the nuance of an explanatory paragraph;
- The terminology of “appropriate liturgical form” should be replaced with “synodically adopted form” for the sake of consistency;
- “Those who wish to profess their faith” is not the best terminology;
- Specifying the Three Forms of Unity here would fit with other PJCO articles;

While considering these matters we also questioned the terminology of “*those who wish to profess their faith shall be examined by the consistory...*” Especially in the context of the Church Order, the word reminds of ecclesiastical examinations for entering the ministry.

This all contributed to the new wording of PJCO 40.

PJCO Article 43, Admission to the Lord’s Supper

Synod Burlington 2010 gave the following directive regarding this article:

- *A considerable number of churches wrote to Synod Burlington-Ebenezer commenting on the current wording of this Article. Many of these comments highlight dissatisfaction with the expression “biblical church membership” and wonder what it means and how it will be applied.*
- *The churches in our federation are reminded that the elders of the local church are directly responsible for the doctrine and life of their members. Visitors, on the other hand, constitute “exceptions” and it needs to be understood that “exceptions” are always hard to regulate.*
- *Notwithstanding this, the [committee] is asked to consider the following:*
 - *a) The printing of this article in three paragraphs would clarify the fact that the first part deals with the responsibility of the consistory, the second part with the participation of members, and the third part with the admission of visitors.*
 - *b) The admission of visitors from churches with which we maintain ecclesiastical fellowship is best served by a letter of testimony, but it should be understood that very few churches in North America are familiar with such a practice.*
 - *c) The admission of visitors from other churches has historically been viewed as an exception to the rule and needs to be regulated locally by the elders.*
 - *d) A number of churches cite those biblical passages that refer to the testimony of two or three witnesses (Dt 19:15; Jn 5: 31, 8:13, etc.) and thus conclude that a verbal testimony is insufficient. It should be noted, however, that these passages all deal with legal or judicial proceedings. There is disagreement as to whether these passages can be applied to the celebration of the sacrament.*
- *The [committee] is urged to adopt the following re-wording of the Article:*
 - *The consistory shall supervise participation at the Lord’s Supper.*
 - *Only those members who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life shall be admitted by the consistory.*
 - *Visitors who profess the Reformed faith may be admitted to the Lord’s Supper provided that the consistory secures from them a satisfactory testimony about their doctrine and life, in either written or verbal form.*

In our discussions we noted the following which contributed to the rewording:

- Synod Burlington 2010 correctly says that the elders of the local church are directly responsible for the doctrine and life of their members, and that visitor constitute exceptions that are always difficult to regulate. This article has been extensively debated over the years.
- The main concern of Synod Burlington 2010 was the nebulous “Biblical Church Membership,” and thus specifies “the Reformed faith.”

- While the suggested wording of “*only those members who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life*” is somewhat more restrictive than the terminology used in PJCO 2010, Synod Burlington 2010 has made a concession here: it allows for self-testimony but it has to be genuine.
- The last sentence of Synod Burlington’s proposal does leave out the matter of church membership, unless it is covered under “doctrine and life.” Experience has shown, however, that church membership should be spelled out as necessary here.

PJCO Article 45, The Church’s Evangelism Calling

Also PJCO 45 was completely rewritten. Synod Burlington 2010 gave the following directive regarding this article: “*The committee should take another look at the style and content of this Article. The present wording is awkward. The [committee] is asked to give due consideration to the following wording: Each church shall fulfill its evangelistic calling in faithfulness to the Word of God and by relying on the Holy Spirit. It shall make known the good news of Jesus Christ to those in its area who do not know God or are estranged from him and his service with the aim of having them join the church through profession of faith.*”

- We came to our revised wording after considering some of the following:
 - The only concern of Synod Burlington seems to be that the style is awkward;
 - Synod Burlington’s rendition does not have the matter of “following Christ” and is a bit stronger on the necessity of joining the church.
 - Synod Burlington’s rendition separates the matters of “relying on the Holy Spirit” and “in faithfulness to the Word of God.”
 - The word “necessarily” in PJCO 2010 is not really necessary.

PJCO Article 52, The Discipline of a Member

A number of churches weighed in on the formulation of this article citing the following concerns:

- If section B begins with the words “A non-communicant member” then for the sake of consistency section A should begin with the words “A communicant member.”
- The terminology “the member” should be consistently used throughout the article to refer to the person under discipline.
- It was asked if the step of obtaining prior concurring advice from classis should be skipped in cases of public sin. Also in such cases, however, the safeguard of

receiving the concurring advice of classis before proceeding with discipline is in place. The point is not only “revealing the name” but “proceeding on with discipline.”

Revisions were made to address these concerns.

PJCO Article 57B, The Reception and Departure of Members, The Departure of Members

Synod Burlington 2010 gave the following directive regarding this article:

- *Numerous churches disagree with the fact that a departing member needs to submit a “written request” in order to receive a letter of testimony.*
- *Several churches also disagree with the requirement that the consistory send a letter of testimony to a local church.*
- *The wording should be changed by the PJCO to:*
 - *Upon request, a letter of testimony shall be given to those members who are departing to a church with which the federation has ecclesiastical fellowship. The consistory may send a copy of this letter to such a church, requesting it to accept them under its spiritual care.*
 - *The departure of members shall be properly announced.*
- Following are some of our considerations that contributed to our new formulation of PJCO 57B:
 - The stipulation in the PJCO 2010 rendition that a request be in writing was due to the potential of legal problems. If people, however, do not have to write a letter indicating that they would like to join the church, why must they do so when the reverse applies?
 - The onus and responsibility of the individual is a fundamental principle here. The individual should take up his responsibility to seek membership in the “new” church.
 - An underlying point is how we perceive membership. In a legal and corporate environment people have to apply for and resign from membership in a written mode. Church membership, however, is different.
 - The concept of “transfer of membership” is very foreign to the Canadian Reformed Churches. It also tends to foster the idea that membership is not in a particular church, but in the federation.
 - Membership in the church means that the person comes under the spiritual care of the body of elders. One then never has the right to take themselves out of such care and membership – unless they withdraw from Christ’s Church. Unless the spiritual care of an individual is transferred from one church to another, things fall between the cracks. Then spiritual care is not transferred – and that means the elders are not fulfilling their task. The point really is not “transfer of

membership” but “transfer of spiritual care” from one body of elders to another. You never put this spiritual care in the hands of an individual.

- True, the role of the person is important: they are responsible to make the decision to come under the care of other elders of another church. The elders, however, also have a responsibility. There should be no gap or time when a sheep is not under oversight. The important part here is “continuing care.”
- When someone moves away, you cannot really supervise them. He has removed himself. Electronically you can trace them somewhat – and that is good – but often you cannot really have supervision.

Ecclesiastical Examinations

One of the churches pointed out that the term “eligible” is not correct in connection with the ordination examination since the term implies “possibility.” When a man sustains a candidacy examination then there is a possibility that he gets a call; when he, however, sustains an ordination examination then an ordination is not only a possibility, but he proceeds right to his ordination. The term “eligible,” therefore, should be used only when there is a possibility of being called to office. The following emendations were therefore adopted:

PJCO 2010	Recommendation
<p>Ordination Examination 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>Ordination Examination A candidate who has accepted a call within the federation must undergo the ordination examination.</p>
<p>Ordination Examination 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>	<p>Ordination Examination 8. Classis shall declare that the candidate has sustained his ordination examination upon:</p>
<p>Ecclesiastical Examination for a Minister from a Church with Whom the Federation Maintains Ecclesiastical Fellowship 8. Classis shall declare that the applicant has sustained his ordination examination and is therefore eligible to be ordained as a minister of the Word and sacraments upon:</p>	<p>Ecclesiastical Examination for a Minister from a Church with Whom the Federation Maintains Ecclesiastical Fellowship 8. Classis shall declare that the applicant has sustained his ordination examination upon:</p>
<p>Ecclesiastical Examination for a Minister from a Church with Whom the Federation does not Maintain Ecclesiastical Fellowship 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:</p>	<p>Ecclesiastical Examination for a Minister from a Church with Whom the Federation does not Maintain Ecclesiastical Fellowship 8. Classis shall declare that the applicant has sustained the examination for upon:</p>

The Ordination Examination

Upon reviewing internal minutes of a previous meeting in 2009 we decided to make the following editorial adjustment to Ordination Examination Regulation: *“If the candidacy exam is sustained and the candidate accepts a call within one year in the classis that examined him, the ordination exam may be waived. The classis that examined him may make such a decision.”*

The Examinations for those who already are Ministers

One of the churches pointed correctly pointed out that a minister coming from another federation within ecclesiastical fellowship should be required to submit the same documentation as those within the federation as required in PJCO 6, and that these documents therefore need to be listed under Ecclesiastical Examinations for a minister from a church with whom the federation maintains ecclesiastical fellowship.

This change was made realizing that different federations have different procedures: would the OPC, for example, have a classical release form? The Church Order, however, has to be responsibly applied in different situations – and not slavishly or legalistically upheld. It is important that the calling church knows that the minister left on good terms.

Credential Forms for Broader Assemblies

For the sake of clarity the number of boxes in the Regional Synod Credential Form was changed from 4 to 3 to coincide with the stipulation in PJCO 25E.