

INTRODUCTION

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.

CHURCH ORDER

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

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.

Article 6

Calling a Minister Within the Federation

- 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.

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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, at various ecclesiastical assemblies, with the first official assembly held in Emden, Germany in 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.

CHURCH ORDER

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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, and finally, together with the elders, watching over his fellow office-bearers, 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

To train for the ministry of the Word, the churches shall maintain and support a theological seminary that is properly accountable to the churches.

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.

Article 5

Calling a Candidate

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

First, the election of a candidate by the consistory with the deacons with the approbation of the congregation after preceding prayers, and the advice of the counsellor appointed by classis;

Article 6

Calling a Minister Within the Federation

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

The church shall then install him with the use of the synodically approved liturgical form.

The approval 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 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.

Article 21

Ecclesiastical Assemblies

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.

Article 25

Classis

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.

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

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 only after sustaining the examination as prescribed in the relevant section of the Ecclesiastical Examination for ministers from outside the federation.

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

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 that congregation or as one charged by that church with some other specific ministerial task such as a missionary, a professor of theology, or a chaplain. Each minister shall remain bound to the Church Order.

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 provide for 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.

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Article 25

Classis

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 submitted by the churches that would warrant the convening of a classis. Cancellation of a classis shall not be permitted to occur twice in succession.

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 schooling that is in harmony with the Word of God as summarized the Three Forms of Unity is promoted. The classis shall also inquire whether the consistory needs the advice or

the church, and whether the decisions of the broader assemblies are being honored.

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.

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.~~

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 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 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 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

the assistance of classis for the proper government of the church, and whether the decisions of the broader assemblies are being honored.

Article 28

Regional Synod

A regional synod, consisting of three or more classes, shall convene once per year unless the convening church, in consultation with its classis, concludes that no matters have been submitted by the classes that would warrant the convening of a regional synod. Cancellation of a regional synod shall not be permitted to occur twice in succession. 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.

Article 30

General Synod

A general synod shall be convened once every three years. If a general synod is necessary before the appointed time, the convening church shall determine the time and place with the advice of its regional synod.

Article 40

Public Profession of Faith

Those who desire to profess their faith and thereby be admitted to the Lord's Supper shall be evaluated by the consistory regarding their motives, their knowledge of the Three Forms of Unity, and their walk of life. This profession of faith shall occur after proper announcements to the congregation and with the use of the adopted liturgical form.

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. The consistory may also admit visitors who profess the Reformed faith provided that it secures from them a satisfactory testimony in either written or verbal form about their doctrine, life, and church membership.

Article 45

The Church's Evangelism Calling

Each church shall fulfill its evangelistic calling in faithfulness to the Word of God. 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. It shall seek to persuade them to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, which includes joining His church through profession of faith.

Article 52

The Discipline of a Member

A. A communicant member

A communicant 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

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| <p>Word of God, be subject to church discipline according to the following stages:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Silent Discipline: 2. Public Discipline: <li style="padding-left: 20px;">a. In the first step, the name of the sinner shall ordinarily not be mentioned so that <u>he</u> may be somewhat spared. <li style="padding-left: 20px;">b. In the second step, <li style="padding-left: 20px;">c. In the third step, 3. Excommunication: <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 <u>he</u> 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 excommunication shall take place, thereby excluding <u>him</u> from the church of Jesus Christ. The intervals between the two announcements and the excommunication shall be left to the discretion of the consistory.</p> <p>The public discipline shall be done with the use of the synodically approved liturgical form.</p> <p>Article 57 The Reception and Departure of Members</p> <p>A. <u>The Reception of Members</u></p> <p>B. <u>The Departure of Members</u> <u>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.</u> The departure of members shall be appropriately announced.</p> | <p>with the Word of God, be subject to church discipline according to the following stages:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Silent Discipline</i>: 2. <i>Public Discipline</i>: <li style="padding-left: 20px;">a. In the first step, the name of the sinner shall ordinarily not be mentioned so that the member may be somewhat spared. <li style="padding-left: 20px;">b. In the second step, <li style="padding-left: 20px;">c. In the third step, 3. <i>Excommunication</i>: <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 the member 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 excommunication shall take place, thereby excluding the member from the church of Jesus Christ. The intervals between the two announcements and the excommunication shall be left to the discretion of the consistory.</p> <p>The public discipline shall be done with the use of the synodically approved liturgical form.</p> <p>Article 57 The Reception and Departure of Members</p> <p>A. <u>The Reception of Members</u></p> <p>B. <u>The Departure of Members</u> Upon their 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 shall send a copy of this letter to that church, requesting it to accept them under its spiritual care. Departing members remain under the supervision and care of the consistory until they are received as members into that church. The departure of members shall be properly announced.</p> |
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**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.~~

B. Procedure and Content:

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,

**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
3. Letter of 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
4. Letter from the classis within which he last served concerning his honorable release from that classis
5. Letter the consistory of the church which he is joining concerning proper announcements made to the congregation for its approbation of the call.

B. Procedure and Content:

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,

**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)**

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,

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 |