

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, 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, 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.

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:

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| 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, 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.

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 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;

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

Third, the public ordination before the congregation 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 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 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 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 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.

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 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.

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 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.

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 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 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 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.

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 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.

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**

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 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. 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 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**

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 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 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 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 the member 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 the member 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 the member 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 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.

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

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.

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.

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

1. The Licensure Examination — cf. Article 4
2. The Candidacy Examination — cf. Articles 4 and 5
3. The Ordination Examination — cf. Article 5
4. Ecclesiastical Examination for a Minister from a Church with Whom the Federation Maintains Ecclesiastical Fellowship — cf. Article 7 part 1
5. 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
6. 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

**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.

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.
- 9. If the candidacy exam is sustained and the candidate accepts a call within one year in the classis that 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.

**The Ordination Examination
(cf. Article 5)**

A candidate who has accepted a call within the federation must undergo the ordination examination.

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 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.

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
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:

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 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 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.

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: _____

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

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: _____

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: _____