

Attachment 1: Response to the “Directives” from General Synod Carman 2013

1 Re. Article 7 et al of PJCO 2012: Place of Deacons

General Synod Carman 2013 (Article 149) stated the following: *“Surveying the PJCO 2012 as a whole, it can be observed that the place of deacons seems to have been marginalized, without any rationale provided for this change. This is at odds with what we confess in Belgic Confession Article 30, where the elders, deacons and pastors together “form the council of the church.” As Aldergrove states, “The inclusion of the deacons in all aspects of Reformed Church government accords much better with our historical practices and roots dating as far back as Synod Emden 1571.” Articles in the PJCO where the deacons have been removed from the corresponding articles in our present Church Order include 7, 11, 15 and 56. The joint committee should work toward reinstating the role of the deacons within these articles.”*

After pondering this matter the committee decided to point out to General Synod 2016 that although General Synod 2013 clearly was sympathetic to what Aldergrove suggests, the committee is not convinced by Aldergrove since Aldergrove’s suggestion:

1. does not go back to Dort as we were mandated to;
2. does not interact with the report sent to General Synod 2010 which provisionally adopted PJCO 2010 without giving special directives about this matter;
3. goes beyond even what we currently have in our current CanRC CO, as the following examples show:
 - 3.1. Re. PJCO 21, Ecclesiastical Assemblies. Aldergrove wishes to include reference to the deacons because “Deacons are involved in many of the governing aspects of the church especially the Ministry of Mercy and therefore should be recognized as part of the "Ecclesiastical assemblies".” This, however, does not reflect our current CanRC CO 29.
 - 3.2. Re. PJCO 22, The Consistory. Aldergrove wishes to include reference to the deacons because “Maintaining a strong diaconal presence in the consistory serves the congregation in a better way. There must be close cooperation between deacons, elders and minister. Otherwise, we end up promoting the notion that the minister and the elders take care of "spiritual" needs and the deacons of the "practical." Including the deacons in this Article would be in line with Article 30 of the Belgic Confession.” This, however, does not reflect our current CanRC CO 38 or 39.

3.3. Re. PJCO 24, Instituting a New Church. Aldergrove wishes to include reference to the deacons because, “Churches should not be instituted without deacons. This proposal reflects current practice as seen in the history of most CanRC churches.” Such a stipulation, however, goes beyond our current CanRC CO 40 and 41.

The committee also decided to further serve Synod 2016 with the following interaction with Aldergrove’s submission to Synod 2013:

1.1 Interaction with Aldergrove’s Submission to Synod 2013

The church of Aldergrove is of the opinion that the inclusion of the deacons in all aspects of Reformed Church Government accords much better with our historical practices and roots dating as far back Synod Emden 1571. It argues that this inclusive approach is displayed in our current Church Order and in the Belgic Confession (Article 30).

With regards to Art. 30 of the Belgic Confession your committee reiterates its position as stated in our report to Synod 2013.

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

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

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

- Though the terminology “consistory with the deacons” is perhaps more cumbersome than the term “council,” it is less confusing;

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

In addition to this, the committee wishes to stress how the Form for Ordination differentiates between the offices. The mandate of the elders in supervising and governing the church is quite distinct from the task of the deacons in the ministry of mercy. Consequently the charge given to the elders is very distinct from the charge given to the deacons. This difference is carefully maintained by Dort and in the PJCO.

As to the request by Aldergrove to bring the PJCO into harmony with the current CanRC church order, we remind the churches that the PJCO is a combined product based on the mandate that the Joint Committee draft a Church Order along the principles of Dort.

Dort makes a clear distinction between the Consistory and the Consistory with the Deacons. It never refers to consistory with the deacons as Council, which only makes the distinction more pronounced. According to Dort:

1. The consistory is an ecclesiastical assembly (Art. 29).
Consistory is made up of ministers and elders (Art. 37).
Deacons are not mentioned. Deacons may be added to the consistory if consistory is very small (Art. 38).
2. Ministers and elders are to carry out supervision of fellow office-bearers and exercise discipline where necessary (Art. 16 and 23). The role of the deacons is the ministry of mercy and they are to give account to consistory (Art. 25).
3. Ministers who refuse to subscribe to the Three forms of Unity are *de facto* suspended by the consistory (Art. 53)
4. When suspension of office-bearers is necessary, this is done by the preceding sentence of the consistory (Art. 79)
5. The only instances where the consent of the Consistory with the Deacons “as a team” is required is when a minister accepts a call elsewhere (Art. 10) or at the election of elders and deacons (Art. 4, 5).

As a result of our investigation of the specific articles that Synod 2013 instructed the committee to review (Art. 149, 3.3) we make the following observations based on the grounds given by Aldergrove in its correspondence to Synod 2013:

Article 7 PJCO 2012

Calling a Minister from Outside the Federation

A minister from a church with whom the federation maintains ecclesiastical fellowship

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.

Aldergrove proposal: *"after an adequate period of supervision determined by his consistory with the deacons..."*

Ground: *Calling of minister(s) has always involved the deacons and they can give their unique practical perspective which elders do not always have. See current Art 5.b. I and PJCO 2012 Art 6. If we needlessly eliminate deacons from Article 7, it will be easy to argue in the future that they should also be removed from the provision Article 6 (PJCO) any longer. (sic)*

CO Committee Comment: Aldergrove has not taken note of the 2 step approach of the PJCO. The consistory is to supervise the member with a view to being ready for the calling process to begin. Once the process begins, the deacons become involved in the calling of that man.

Article 11 PJCO 2012

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.

Aldergrove proposal: *"If the duration of the release is greater than one year, the consistory with the deacons shall obtain the concurring advice of classis."*

Ground: *Because the first part of this same Article (PJCO) has the consistory*

with the deacons already dealing with it.

CO Committee Comment: This request for concurring advice of classis does not require the involvement of the deacons. Their involvement was to grant the temporary release in the first place and their involvement may be required again depending on the advice received.

Article 15 PJCO 2012

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.

Aldergrove proposal: *"Anyone in office refusing to subscribe shall because of that very fact be immediately suspended from office by the consistory with the deacons ..."*

Ground: *This change would bring Article 15 into harmony with Article 26 of our current Church Order (Article 26). Deacons should be involved in such acts of discipline an office-bearer since they are also office-bearers.*

CO Committee Comment: It is true that CanRC CO 26 includes the deacons in this act. However, Dort does not, and we share the view of our URCNA counterparts that this is not really the task of the deacons. Also, our mandate is not to bring PJCO in harmony with our current CanRC CO, but to draft a Church Order along the principles of Dort.

Article 18 PJCO 2012

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.

Aldergrove proposal: *"to protect the congregation from false teachings and errors which endanger the purity of its doctrine and conduct,*

ministers, elders and deacons..."

Ground: *As office-bearers in the church, deacons have a duty to guard the truth of the gospel.*

CO Committee Comment: Aldergrove fails to differentiate between the offices. Ministers and elders as the overseers are charged to protect the congregation by means of instruction etc.

Article 19 PJCO 2012

The Duties of Deacons

The duties belonging to the office of deacon consist of ...

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.

Aldergrove proposal: *and they (the deacons) shall render a regular financial account of their work to the consistory with the deacons"*

Ground: *This change reflects historic practice and avoids giving the impression that deacons operate 'under' the consistory when in reality they are "with" the consistory.*

CO Committee Comment: Aldergrove's suggested change does not reflect historic practice. Our current CanRC CO 42 and the PJCO reflect the historic Dort.

Article 21 PJCO 2012

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.

Aldergrove proposal: *"four assemblies shall be recognized: the consistory with the deacons ..."*

Ground: *Deacons are involved in many of the governing aspects of the church especially the Ministry of Mercy and therefore should be recognized as part of the "Ecclesiastical assemblies"*

CO Committee Comment: This does not reflect Dort 29 nor even our current CanRC CO 29.

Article 22 PJCO 2012

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.

Aldergrove proposal: *"In each church there shall be consistory composed of the minister(s), elders and deacons ..." And further: "The consistory with the deacons is the only assembly which exercises authority ..."*

Ground: *Maintaining a strong diaconal presence in the consistory serves the congregation in a better way. There must be close cooperation between deacons, elders and minister. Otherwise, we end up promoting the notion that the minister and the elders take care of "spiritual" needs and the deacons of the "practical." Including the deacons in this Article would be in line with Article 30 of the Belgic Confession.*

CO Committee Comment: This view does not reflect Dort 37 nor even our current CanRC CO 38 or 39.

Article 24 PJCO 2012

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.

Aldergrove proposal: *"A new church shall be instituted with its first consistory with the deacons ..."*

Ground: *Churches should not be instituted without deacons. This proposal reflects current practice as seen in the history of most CanRC churches.*

CO Committee Comment: If Aldergrove’s suggestion is that the deacons are part of an ecclesiastical assembly as the governing body, we refer to our comments regarding PJCO Articles 21 and 22 and our earlier comment about the distinct charges given to elders and deacons in the Form for Ordination. What the PJCO proposes is completely in line with Dort and is a combination of articles 40 and 41 our current Church Order.

Article 56 PJCO 2012

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.

Aldergrove proposal: *"he shall be suspended from the duties of his office by his own consistory with the deacons."*

Ground: *Inclusion of the deacons in discipline of fellow office-bearers (whether deacons or elders) is stipulated by our current Church Order (Art 71). No reason has been given to exclude them from this responsibility. There is no reason to exclude them from this process. They should work with the elders when there is need to suspend or depose someone from office.*

CO Committee Comment: It is true that CanRC CO 71 includes the deacons in this act. However, Dort does not, and we share the view of our URCNA counterparts that this is not really the task of the deacons.

2 Re. Article 7, “Examination of Ministers from Churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship”

General Synod Carman 2013 (Article 149) stated the following: *“Several churches point out that, according to the PJCO 2012, ministers coming to our federation from a sister church need to undergo a complete examination at classis, whereas presently a colloquium is held. If we take seriously our ecclesiastical relationships and the ordinations that take place in sister churches, there is no need for this provision in our Church Order and a colloquium would be sufficient.*

In reviewing this matter the committee considered the following:

1. The churches bring forward specific cases that indeed show that a modified candidacy exam simply does not fit here;
2. The examination was crafted to serve as a safety in cases of federations in ecclesiastical fellowship with uncertain orthodoxy. The real place to address this concern, however, is in the rules of ecclesiastical fellowship;
3. The term “colloquium” is not even in the PJCO anymore.

The committee therefore decided:

1. To bring this matter to the URC brothers, suggesting that we craft an examination that is not just a modified candidacy examination, and is more specific to the situation at hand;
2. To craft a Colloquium Doctum proposal for consideration by the joint committee: see appendix 1 attached

3 Re. Article 26, “Church Visitors”

General Synod Carman 2013 (Article 149) stated the following: *“The practice of making church visitations on an annual basis (instead of every two years, as in the PJCO 2012), should be upheld. When things are going well, the visits appear routine. However, it is beneficial to be held accountable on an annual basis, to be encouraged and challenged and to receive guidance for complex local situations.”*

While considering this the committee also considered the following input from the churches. Aldergrove noted that being accountable to each other as sister churches is an important part of what it means to be a federation. Flamborough cited that the need for annual visitation has only increased as our world has become more fast paced and complex.

The committee came to the following considerations:

1. It needs to be kept in mind that the PJCO has not been crafted to change the current Canadian Reformed Church Order, but to serve in a new federation of churches which will be composed of churches that have had different practices when it comes to frequency of church visitation.
2. The matter of “best frequency” is a judgment call, and it needs to be kept in mind that in the new federation there will likely be classes in which the churches will be separated by considerable distances.

The committee therefore decided not to approach the URC brothers with a proposal for a revision on this article.

4 Re. Article 43, “Admission to the Lord’s Supper”

General Synod Carman 2013 (Article 149) stated the following: *“A number of churches wrote about the current wording of this article, which refers to the consistory admitting ‘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.’ There continues to be concern that an individual guest may give a verbal testimony about his own doctrine, life and church membership, while the greater responsibility to provide such a testimony should rest with the visitor’s consistory. However, as Synod Burlington 2010 noted, ‘The elders of the local church are directly responsible for the doctrine and life of their members. Visitors, on the other hand, constitute ‘exceptions’ and it needs to be understood that ‘exceptions’ are always hard to regulate... The admission of visitors from churches with which we maintain ecclesiastical fellowship is best served by a letter of testimony, but it should be understood that very few churches in North America are familiar with such a practice” (Acts, Article 151). Nevertheless, because of the biblical principle of establishing truth on the basis of two witnesses, the joint committee ought to consider making an addition to the wording of the proposed article to reflect a preference for a written testimony about the member from his consistory.*

In further reflecting on this matter the committee came to the following considerations:

1. While the CanRC committee members could easily adopt what General Synod 2013 suggests, we are hesitant to bring this up again since we have gone around the mulberry bush so often with this matter. We feel that we’ve gotten the best we could get;
2. The word “preferably” is weak, especially in a Church Order;
3. The word “written” is before “verbal:” this already states the preference.

The committee therefore decided to not approach the URC brothers for further revision on this article.

5 Re. Article 57, “The Reception and Departure of Members”

General Synod Carman 2013 (Article 149) stated the following: *“There is concern with the provision in this article that, ‘Departing members remain under the supervision and care of the consistory until they are received as members into [the receiving] church.’ The committee notes the role of the individual ‘to come under the care of other elders of another church,’ but stresses that the elders also have a responsibility and that there should be no time when a member is not under supervision. The joint committee needs to consider the point that this makes it difficult for the sending church to maintain interim oversight of a member who moves a great distance from their current church.”*

In reviewing this matter the committee came to the following considerations:

1. It is true that we cannot have supervision at a distance, but that is not the intent. The point of this article is to prevent people from asking for an attestation in order to disappear from the scene;
2. The point really is not “transfer of membership” but “transfer of spiritual care” from one body of elders to another. You never put this spiritual care in the hands of an individual.
3. True, the role of the person is important: he/she is responsible to make the decision to come under the care of other elders of another church. The elders, however, also have a responsibility. There should be no gap or time when a sheep is not under oversight. The important part here is “continuing care.”

The committee therefore decided to not approach the URC brothers for further revision on this article.

Appendix 1

Reason for seeking revision of exam requirement re PJCO 2012, Art 7 part 1

Synod 2013 received several letters from churches objecting to the requirement in Art 7, part 1 that a minister from a church with whom the federation maintains ecclesiastical fellowship (EF) needs to undergo an examination at the candidacy level. Some of the reasons for the objection are:

1. The calling church has called a minister in good standing. The requirement for the call include two documents that require the following:
 - a. 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;
 - b. Letter from the classis within which he last served concerning his honorable release from that classis. (See below: Section A. Documents 3 and 4)
2. If a minister from a church in EF is permitted to preach in the churches of the federation, then he does not need to be examined by the churches to become a minister. He is one.
3. As churches in a federation we need to honour the fact that we have EF with others and not disregard the EF by subjecting the minister who has been called to an examination at the level of a candidacy exam. He is not seeking entrance into the ministry; he is in the ministry and is called by a church who seeks his services. Therefore the onus on making sure the man is fit for the task lies with the calling church.
4. If the calling church has done due diligence with regard to the minister’s ability to preach, to prepare biblical sermons based on sound exegesis, his ability to teach the

youth and his faithfulness in his pastoral work and his own personal life with the Lord, then his competency of these things are known to the calling church and the brother does not need to be examined on these points. He is called as a minister in good standing in one of the churches in EF.

5. Historically the “examination” consisted of a colloquium doctum for ministers coming from another federation. This covered the two key areas: doctrine and church polity. During a discussion about doctrine the churches can find out what the man believes (including his knowledge of confessions and creeds), and a discussion on church polity will highlight differences in practice and the minister’s comprehension of the CO of the federation he is joining. A colloquium at this level should be sufficient.

With these points in mind we suggest that the ecclesiastical examination be known as a Colloquium Doctum and suggest the following changes to Art 7 and the Colloquium Doctum requirements:

Article 7 (part 1)

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 a colloquium doctum as prescribed in the relevant section of the Ecclesiastical Examination for ministers from outside the federation.

**Colloquium Doctum 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 from 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 from 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 its request that the colloquium 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. In this colloquium Classis shall focus on:

- a. Reformed doctrine: his 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).
- b. Church Polity: his 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 to ask questions after each area of the colloquium. 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 minister has sustained his colloquium upon:
 - a. the affirmative vote of classis, and
 - b. his promise to sign the form of subscription upon installation.
9. A minister who does not sustain his colloquium may undergo the above colloquium again by a subsequent classis upon the request of the calling church.