

Synod.
1983
198

Surrey, Langley, Fergus, August 1983

To the General Synod of
Cloverdale, 1983

Esteemed Brothers.

Herewith the Committee on the Revision of the Church Order, appointed by the General Synod of Smithville 1980, presents to you the result of its work. Synod 1980 gave the Committee the following mandate.

to send a complete definite draft of the Revised Church Order to the Churches before January 1, 1982, soliciting remarks from the Churches to be sent to the Committee before January 1, 1983, and to present the result of its work to General Synod 1983. (Acts, Art.19D3)

In compliance with this mandate, the Committee did send a complete draft of the Revised Church Order to the Churches with the request that the Churches, on their part, would act in accordance with the synodical decision quoted above and send their criticism and remarks before January 1, 1983.

We are happy to report that several Churches did send their remarks which were very helpful in reaching the conclusions which are now presented to your assembly. In every comment the Churches made the desire came to the fore which one Church expressed as follows: "We offer our comments with the hope that they may help to formulate our Church Order as near 'foolproof' as possible and to the upbuilding of our Church-life."

For your information we enclose a copy of the draft which was sent to the Churches in December 1981.

It is our sincere wish that the definitive draft as it is herewith presented to you may indeed be acceptable and may serve as our Church Order for many years to come, although we realize that "these articles . . . may and ought to be changed, augmented, or diminished" if the interest of the Churches demands it. Yet we express the hope that the now presented draft, reached with the assistance of those Churches which took the time and went into the effort of weighing every article, will not have to be changed in the foreseeable future.

As suggested by more than one Church, this definitive draft was submitted to and examined by language experts so as to ensure that proper grammar, wording, and punctuation are used.

We are most happy to report that at no time any difference regarding the principles of our Church Order became evident. The submissions by the Churches concerned only wording, omissions and additions but not the basic contents. We saw therein proof that we did not put to shame the great trust and responsibility which the Churches gave us when giving us our mandate.

One can never prevent misuse and abuse of adopted rules and of accepted provisions, however careful one may be in one's formulation. Both interpretation and observance of the Church Order are dominated by one's acceptance or rejection of the principles of Reformed Church Polity, as history proves most clearly. As much as possible, however, we have taken care that also in the formulation of the various provisions the Reformed character of our Church Order is preserved and wrong concepts are prevented from using these provisions for their support.

With the wish that we have served the true interest of the Church of our Lord, we now present to your assembly the following definitive draft.

CHURCH ORDER OF THE CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCHES

I. INTRODUCTION

ARTICLE 1. (1) Purpose and Division

For the maintenance of good order in the Church of Christ it is necessary that there be: offices and supervision of doctrine; assemblies; worship, sacraments, and ceremonies; and discipline.

These matters will be dealt with in the above mentioned order.

It was pointed out that "necessary" and "should" as found in the complete draft are making each other redundant. For this reason we changed the wording.

It was also pointed out that the second sentence was unnecessarily long. It has been changed in accordance with a suggestion received.

II. OFFICES AND SUPERVISION OF DOCTRINE

ARTICLE 2. (2) The Offices

The offices are those of the Minister of the Word, of the Elder, and of the Deacon.

The semi-colon has been removed.

ARTICLE 3. (3,4,22,24) The Calling to Office

No one shall take any office upon himself without having been lawfully called thereto.

Only those male members shall be eligible for officewho have made profession of faith and may be considered to meet the conditions as set forth in Holy Scripture, e.g. in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

The election to any office shall take place with the cooperation of the congregation and according to the regulations adopted for that purpose by the consistory.

The consistory shall be free to give the congregation the opportunity beforehand to draw the attention of the consistory to brothers deemed fit for the respective offices.

The consistory shall present to the congregation either as many candidates as there are vacancies to be filled, or at the most twice as many, from which number the congregation shall choose as many as are needed.

Those elected shall be appointed by the consistory in accordance with the adopted regulations.

Prior to the ordination or installation the names of the appointed brothers shall be publicly announced to the congregation for its approbation on at least two consecutive Sundays.

The ordination or installation shall take place with the use of the relevant forms.

In this definitive draft we speak only of "the consistory." This is the fruit of the change of (new) article 38: the consistory is composed of the ministers of the Word, the elders, and the deacons. Throughout our Church Order this body is meant when the term "consistory" is used.

In one of the submissions received it was stated that the Committee should justify its proposal that the consistory shall present to the congregation "at the most twice as many" candidates as there are vacancies to be filled. Why, thus it was asked, did the Committee not propose "a double number" or just "twice as many" ?

The answer to this question is that we should not compel a consistory to come with twice as many names as there are vacancies to be filled. We all know by experience that it is sometimes very difficult to reach twice the number of elders or deacons needed. We should prevent that a consistory is compelled to put twice the number of names on the list of candidates for the simple reason that our Church Order provides this, even though the consistory cannot, with a good conscience, reach this number. We acknowledge that the condition in the Church should be such that every male communicant member can be put on the list of candidates, but are also aware of the hard reality that this is not so. A consistory must have the right to come with five or six names when four brothers have to be elected.

As for the expression "double number" which was also suggested, we remark that this might cause misunderstanding. In some congregations it is customary to present to the congregation "double numbers" and this is then to be understood as two names for every vacancy; the congregation does not choose from a complete list of six candidates when three office-bearers are needed, but from each "double number" it chooses one brother, to a total of three. Certainly no one wishes to lay this upon the churches as a binding provision. This expression should, therefore, be avoided.

The words "elder, deacon, minister, consistory, congregation," which were capitalized in the draft sent to the Churches are now written with lower case letter. One Church informed us that "several brothers with an M.A. Degree in English" stated that these words should not be capitalized when they are not used as proper nouns. Complying with this expert advice, we have changed the text accordingly.

Other changes in the text are also the result of suggestions received from the Churches.

ARTICLE 4. (4,5) Eligibility for the Ministry

A. Eligibility

Only those shall be called to the office of minister of the Word who

1. Have been declared eligible for call by the Churches;
2. Are already serving in that capacity in one of the Churches; or
3. Are serving in one of the Churches with which the Canadian Reformed Churches maintain a sister-church relationship.

B. Declared Eligible

Only those shall be declared eligible for call within the Churches who

1. Have passed a preparatory examination by the Classis in which they live. This examination shall not take place unless those presenting themselves for it submit the documents necessary to prove that they are a member in good standing of one of the Churches and have successfully completed a course of study as required by the Churches;
2. Served in Churches with which the Canadian Reformed Churches do not maintain a sister-church relationship, and have been examined by the classis in which they live, with due observance of the general ecclesiastical regulations adopted for that purpose;
3. Have been examined according to the rule described in Article 8.

C. Calling Twice

For a second call to the same minister in the same vacancy the approval of classis shall be required.

D. Counsellor

When a vacant Church extends a call, the advice of the counsellor shall be asked.

A few minor changes in the text are the result of suggestions received.

It was also suggested to insert in B.2. "or intend to live." We do not consider this proper. When someone expresses the wish to be declared eligible for call within the Canadian Reformed Churches, it may be expected that he first has taken the step of becoming a member of one of these Churches. Thereby he does live within a certain classical area and thus there is no problem with respect to the question where he shall be examined.

The suggestion to "set a time limit of one year" in point C. could be acceptable if the reason for declining a call is that a minister is too short in the present congregation. If there are other reasons for the declining of a call, these reasons might be removed within a year or even within a few months, or they are of such a nature that even a period of twenty years would not be sufficient. In each and every case it appears not correct to set a time limit.

ARTICLE 5. (4,5.10) Ordination and Installation of Ministers of the Word

- A. Regarding those who have not served in the ministry before, the following shall be observed.
 - 1. They shall be ordained only after classis has approved the call.
Classis shall approve the call
 - a. Upon satisfactory testimony concerning the soundness of doctrine and conduct of the candidate, signed by the consistory of the Church to which he belongs;
 - b. Upon a peremptory examination of the candidate by classis with satisfactory results. This examination shall take place with the cooperation of deputies of the regional synod.
 - 2. For the ordination they shall show also to the consistory good testimonials concerning their doctrine and conduct from the Church(s) to which they have belonged since their preparatory examination.
- B. Regarding those who are serving in the ministry the following shall be observed.
They shall be installed after classis has approved the call.
For this approbation as well as for the installation the minister shall show good testimonials concerning his doctrine and conduct, together with a declaration from the consistory and from classis that he has been honourably discharged from his service in that church and classis.
- C. For the classical approbation of a call of those who are serving in one of the Churches with which the Canadian Reformed Churches maintain a sister-church relationship a colloquium shall be required which will deal especially with the doctrine and polity of the Canadian Reformed Churches.
- D. For the classical approbation of a call shall further be required a declaration by the calling Church that the proper announcements have been made and that the congregation has given its approval to the call.

It was pointed out by one Church that the definite article should not be used each and every time when we speak of "classis." Use of the definite article -- it was stated -- might lead the thoughts into the direction of a permanent body. Complying with the suggestion, we have omitted the definite article where this appeared warranted.

The question was asked what the logical background is of the change made from "in the presence of" to "with the cooperation of." We thought that this was clear from the remark we made in our draft report to the Churches: "One cannot examine 'with the concurrent advice of' but only 'with the cooperation of. . . .' " Mutatis mutandis the same applies to the point of "in the presence of." This expression might be understood as if an examination simply had to be done while the deputies are present but without their participation or agreement. Such is not the intention of this provision: they are not only to be present but also to judge the examination and, if they deem such necessary, to participate in it. Thus "with the cooperation of" appears to be more appropriate.

The Dutch expression "ten overstaan van" was quoted. As we understand this expression, it comprises more than just presence. When a couple gets married "ten overstaan van de ambtenaar van de burgerlijke stand," this means that the man is a very active participant in the proceedings.

ARTICLE 6. (6,7) Bound to a Church

No one shall service in the ministry unless he is bound to a certain Church, to be stationed in a certain place, or to be sent out for the gathering of the Church from among the heathen or from among those who have become estranged from the Gospel; or is to be charged with some other special ministerial task.

One Church suggested to replace "Church" with "Congregation" in order to be consistent with the proposed Article 9. Although the words "Church" and "Congregation" can be used alternately and refer to the very same entity, it appears to be more proper -- if a change has to be made -- to change Article 9 accordingly.

Another Church asked whether "other ministerial task" has ever been defined. This has not been done to our knowledge. We would not advocate any such definition either, but leave it up to each Church (and classis) to come to a conclusion regarding this point in each and every case which might come up.

ARTICLE 7. (9) Recent Converts

No one who has recently come to the confession of the Reformed Religion shall be declared eligible for call within the Churches unless he has been well tested for a reasonable period of time and has been carefully examined by classis with the cooperation of the deputies of the regional synod.

One Church suggested to read, "until his sincerity has been proven . . . for a reasonable period of time. . ." However, more will have to be tested than only his sincerity and therefore this restriction does not appear acceptable.

Another Church stated that "well tested" is sufficient and that it is not necessary to provide that this shall be done "for a reasonable period of time."

As we are to be extremely careful in admitting such, it is necessary to stress that the testing shall be done during a reasonable period of time.

ARTICLE 8. (8) Exceptional Gifts

Persons who have not pursued the regular course of study shall not be admitted to the ministry unless there is assurance of their exceptional gifts of godliness, humility, modesty, good intellect, and discretion, as well as the gift of public speech.

When such persons present themselves for the ministry, classis, after the approval of regional synod, shall examine them in a preparatory examination and allow them to speak an edifying word in the Churches of the classis; and further deal with them as it shall deem edifying, with observance of the general ecclesiastical regulations adopted for this purpose.

As may appear from the text, we took over the suggestion to read "as well as the gift of"

One Church asked, "Who gives assurance?" and it suggested to read, "unless classis has assured itself" We could not take this over, since it is not classis which is to assure itself of the presence of these exceptional gifts but regional synod. Classis enters the picture only after someone has been examined regarding the presence or absence of the exceptional gifts, and this examination takes place at regional synod.

It did not appear necessary to replace "persons" with "members of the Church." It is self-evident that those presenting themselves for the examination are members of the Church, since only communicant members in good standing are eligible for office, see Article 3.

Use of the term "shall be admitted" is to be preferred above the suggested reading "shall be eligible." The Dutch text also speaks of "toegelaten worden."

ARTICLE 9. (10) *From One Church to Another*

A minister, once lawfully called, shall not leave the Church to which he is bound to take up the ministry elsewhere without the consent of the consistory and the /^e of classis. /^e approval
On the other hand, no Church shall receive him unless he has presented a proper certificate of release from the Church and the classis where he served.

"No argument has been presented to prove that classis has to approve," one Church wrote. We ask, "Is this not 'common law' among us that a minister has to have a certificate of release from Church as well as from classis?"

In the second part of the Article, the definite article before classis has to be retained, since it refers to "the classis where he served."

ARTICLE 10. (11) *Proper Support*

The consistory, as representing the congregation, shall be bound to provide for the proper support of its minister(s).

No remarks were received regarding this article.

ARTICLE 11. (11) *Dismissal*

If a minister of the Word is judged unfit and incapable of serving the congregation fruitfully and to its edification, without there being any reason for Church discipline, the consistory shall not dismiss him from his ministry without the approbation of classis and the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod, and not without proper arrangements regarding the support of the minister and his family for a reasonable period of time.

If no call is forthcoming in two years, he shall be declared released from his ministerial status by the classis in which he served last. He shall, however, remain eligible for call except in the case of having entered upon another vocation.

The suggestion to read, "without reason for Church discipline" does not seem to be an improvement.

One Church urged us to add a provision covering the ministerial status of such a "dismissed minister." It was felt that within the framework of our Reformed church polity there is no place for men who continue to retain the title and honour and privileges of a minister of the Gospel but who have no Church to serve, who, in fact, have no bond with any Church except the membership in the Church where they live. Article 6 of the Revised Church Order was quoted in this context.

It was also stressed that this provision should not be seen as a way of "solving" a present case; it was said that this was proposed for the future, with the hope and wish that it will never be necessary to apply it.

By way of example we quote the provision which the Christian Reformed Church inserted in their Church Order: "Eventually, if no call is forthcoming, he may at the discretion of classis and the synod be completely released from his ministerial office."

ARTICLE 12. (12) *Bound for Life*

Inasmuch as a minister of the Word, once lawfully called, is bound to the service of the Church for life, he is not allowed to enter upon another vocation unless it be for exceptional and substantial reasons, of which the consistory shall judge, and which shall receive the approval of classis with the concurring advice of deputies of regional synod.

The term "weighty" was considered antiquated by one Church; it suggested "substantial" or "serious." We considered "substantial" to be the more appropriate word to be used here.

ARTICLE 13. (13) Retirement of Ministers

If a minister of the Word, upon reaching retirement age, does retire, or if he is rendered incapable of performing the duties of his office according to the judgment of the consistory, with the concurring advice of classis and of deputies of regional synod, he shall retain the honour and title of the minister of the Word. He shall also retain his official bond with the Church which he served last, and this Church shall provide honourably for his support. The same obligation exists towards a minister's widow and/or other dependents.

Until now no provision could be found in our Church Order which gives ministers of the Gospel the right to retire as long as they are physically and mentally able to fulfil the duties of their office. "Some people are convinced," one Church wrote, "that there is no retirement age for ministers." Another Church asked whether retirement age has ever been defined; another what retirement age is. "Would it be appropriate," a Church asked, "to recommend a definition to synod?"

As for the question whether ministers are allowed to retire at a certain age, we are convinced that such is indeed the case. In the Old Testament dispensation, the Levites were to serve from their 25th to their 50th year; after that they were allowed to help their brothers, but were no longer permitted to perform the specific duties in the sanctuary. We can see no reason why ministers in the new dispensation have to serve till they are totally unable to do their work. When every one has the right to retire at a certain age, this should apply to ministers of the Word as well. In Israel, one had to serve in the army till his fiftieth year; after that he was free.

We were reminded of the Constitution of our College. There professors and lecturers are free to retire at 65, but have to retire at 70 or 71. However, we do not wish to provide that ministers of the Gospel have to retire at the age at which every one else retires, but certainly are convinced that they should have the right to do so.

If they wish to serve longer, and if the congregation does not object, there is no reason why they should be forced to retire. However, experience teaches that the disadvantages of staying on outweigh the advantages in by far the most cases.

To the question whether synodically a certain age should be fixed we reply that such is not advisable. On purpose we spoke only of "retirement age," without mentioning what this is or is to be. This will depend on the general rules which apply in all of life.

When we are asked, "what is retirement age?" we answer, "The usual age at which people in today's society are permitted to retire." This should be sufficient.

One Church wrote that "if he is rendered incapable . . ." is too vague. It suggests to insert "by reason of illness." However, there are sufficient safeguards to prevent abuse of this option and, besides, one can be rendered incapable also by other things than illness.

The suggestion to read, "If a minister of the Word, due to age retires or is rendered incapable. . ." is not acceptable, since thereby retirement at the "retirement age" would be prohibited. We could ask, "what is 'due to age'?"

All in all, the above mentioned suggestions appear to be no improvements.

ARTICLE 14. (14) Temporary Release

If a minister, because of illness or for other substantial reasons, requests a temporary release from his service to the congregation, he can receive the same only with the approval of the consistory and shall at all times be and remain subject to the call of the congregation.

In this article, too, "weighty" was replaced by "substantial."

ARTICLE 15. (15) *Preaching in Other Places*

No one shall be permitted to preach the Word or to administer the Sacraments in another Church without the consent of the consistory of that Church.

ARTICLE 16. (16) *The Office of the Ministers of the Word*

The specific duties of the office of minister of the Word are : thoroughly and sincerely to proclaim to the congregation the Word of the Lord; to administer the sacraments; publicly to call upon the Name of God in behalf of the whole congregation; also to instruct the children of the Church in the doctrine of salvation, to visit the members of the congregation in their homes, and to comfort the sick with the Word of God; and further, with the elders, to keep the Church of God in good order, to exercise discipline, and to govern it in such a manner as the Lord has ordained.

The expression "to keep the Church in good order" has been changed as suggested by one Church.

ARTICLE 17. (17) *Equality among the Ministers of the Word*

Among the ministers of the Word equality shall be maintained with respect to the duties of their office and in other matters as far as possible according to the judgment of the consistory and, if necessary, of classis.

ARTICLE 18. (New) *Missionaries*

When ministers of the Word are sent out as missionaries, they shall be and remain subject to the Church Order. They shall report and give account of their labours to the Church which sent them and shall at all times remain subject to its calling.

It shall be their task, in the specific region assigned to them or chosen by them in consultation with the Church that sent them, to proclaim the Word of God, to administer the sacraments to those who have come to the profession of their faith, teaching them to observe all that Christ has commanded His Church, and to ordain elders and deacons when this appears feasible according to the rules given in the Word of God.

Upon the suggestion by one Church, the word "out" was deleted in the first part:

" . . . the Church which sent them out . . . "

As one Church stated that "Holy Writ" was too archaic, we replaced it by "the Word of God."

ARTICLE 19. (18) *Training for the Ministry*

The Churches shall maintain an institution for the training for the ministry. The task of the professors of theology is to instruct the students of the . . . in those disciplines which have been entrusted to them, so that the Churches may be provided with ministers of the Word who are able to fulfil the duties of their office as these have been described before.

The words "in order that . . ." were replaced by "so that . . ." as suggested by one Church.

Although the words "as these have been described before" may be considered redundant as one Church stated, yet it appears good to refer back to these duties where the training for the ministry is dealt with in our Church Order.

ARTICLE 20. (19) *Students of Theology*

The Churches shall endeavour that there be students of theology, extending financial aid to those who are in need of it.

ARTICLE 21. (20) *An Edifying Word*

Besides those who have been permitted, according to Article 8, to speak an edifying word, also others may be given such consent in accordance with general ecclesiastical regulations, for their own training and in order that they may become known to the congregations.

One Church calls this article still "confusing." It is of the opinion that a further defining of persons should be found here. It also asks who gives this consent and on what authority they give this consent. Another Church states that "others" should be specified, e.g. "students of theology."

We cannot find anything confusing here. We first speak here of persons who have received this right according to Article 8; then we speak about others who may receive the right to speak an edifying word according to general ecclesiastical regulations.

It would not be good to specify here, e.g. by mentioning "students of theology." In the first place, then we would make it a permanent feature that students of theology appear on the pulpit as a "right" given to them by the Church Order. In times when the Churches have few ministers it may be advisable that students who have completed a certain part of their training receive the authorization to speak an edifying word, but we certainly should not fix this in our Church Order as something "normal."

And in the second place, we do mention general ecclesiastical regulations, which can be made only by a general synod. A synod may decide to grant this right to students on certain conditions; it may also decide to terminate the practice. We should leave this up to the Churches.

As for the question on what authority consent is given, this is, of course, on the authority of the generally adopted rules. And regarding the question who gives this consent, we reply that this is common knowledge among us: is not consent to speak an edifying word and the declaration that someone is eligible for call given by a classis? We see no need to make further provisions here.

ARTICLE 22. (23) *The Office of Elder*

The specific duties of the office of elder are: together with the ministers of the Word, to have supervision over Christ's Church, that every member may conduct himself properly in doctrine and life according to the Gospel; faithfully to visit the members of the congregation in their homes to comfort, instruct, and admonish them with the Word of God, reproofing those who behave improperly. They shall exercise Christian discipline according to the command of Christ against those who show themselves unbelieving and ungodly and refuse to repent; they shall watch that the sacraments are not profaned. They further are to take care, being stewards of the house of God, that in the congregation all things are done decently and in good order, to tend the flock of Christ which is in their charge. Finally it is their duty to assist the ministers of the Word with good counsel and advice and to supervise their doctrine and conduct.

ARTICLE 23. (25) *The Office of Deacon*

The specific duties of the office of deacon are: to see to the good progress of the service of charity in the congregation; to acquaint themselves with existing needs and difficulties, and to exhort the members of Christ's body to show mercy; further to gather and manage the offerings and to distribute

them in Christ's Name according to need. They shall encourage and comfort with the Word of God those who receive the gifts of Christ's love, and promote with word and deed the unity and fellowship in the Holy Spirit which the congregation enjoys at the table of the Lord.

According to the opinion of one Church, too much of the Form for the Ordination is repeated in the article as proposed. This Church considers the old version of the present Article 23 much better. It also states that the order of priorities is wrong.

As was done with the article concerning the specific duties of the office of elder, so with this article concerning the specific duties of the office of deacon we changed the article to bring it into conformity with the newly adopted Form. If the priorities are wrong in this article, they are also in the Form. However, we have found no arguments which should compel us to return to the 1979 version.

Another Church suggests to re-insert "not only to those who belong to the congregation, but also to strangers, as their need may require."

Historically it can be proved that by "strangers" our forefathers were thinking of Churchmembers from other places who were compelled to flee through persecution and betrayal and now were in need of support. If we wished to provide for such a situation, we would have to express this differently; however, there appears to be no need for it.

ARTICLE 24. (27) *Term of Office*

The elders and deacons shall serve two or more years according to local regulations, and a proportionate number shall retire each year. The place of the retiring office-bearers shall be taken by others, unless the consistory judges that the circumstances and the benefit of the Church render it advisable to have them serve another term, or to extend their term, or to declare them immediately eligible for re-election.

The word "profit" has been replaced by "benefit," as suggested by one Church.

ARTICLE 25. (17) *Equality to Be Maintained*

Among the elders as well as among the deacons equality shall be maintained with respect to the duties of their office, and also, as far as possible, in other matters, of which the consistory shall judge.

The old redaction was considered too vague by one Church ; we have tried to make it somewhat clearer.

ARTICLE 26. (53,54) *Subscription to the Confession*

All ministers of the Word, elders, deacons, and professors of theology shall subscribe to the Confessions of the Canadian Reformed Churches by signing the form(s) adopted for that purpose. Anyone refusing to subscribe in that manner shall not be ordained or installed in office. Anyone who, being in office, refuses to do so shall, because of that very fact, be immediately suspended from office by the consistory, and classis shall not receive him; and if he obstinately persists in his refusal, he shall be deposed from office.

It was suggested by one Church to delete the words "in that manner," as it was felt that it was redundant because of the provision that office-bearers shall "subscribe by signing," which leaves no doubt.

With a view to what the Canadian Reformed Churches experienced with respect to the refusal to sign, we cannot be too explicit, and for this reason we feel that the proposed reading should stand.

ARTICLE 27. (55) *False Doctrine*

To ward off false doctrines and errors which could enter the congregation and constitute a danger to the purity of its doctrine or conduct, the ministers and elders shall use the means of instruction, of refutation, of warning, and of admonition, as well in the ministry of the Word as in Christian teaching and family-visiting.

Once again we are advised to delete "via literature and other means of communication." If it is felt that this is redundant, and that the article is clear without those words, we should indeed delete them.

The suggestion to leave out "as well in the ministry. . .etc." was not acceptable. Ministers as well as elders should be reminded of their obligation in this respect and thus it appears advisable to mention the main aspects of their office.

ARTICLE 28. (28) *Civil Authorities*

As it is the office of the Civil Authorities to promote in every way the holy ministry, so all office-bearers are in duty bound to impress diligently and sincerely upon the whole congregation the obedience, love, and respect which are due to the Civil Authorities; they shall set a good example to the whole congregation in this matter, and endeavour by due respect and communication to secure and retain the favour of the authorities towards the Church, so that the Church of Christ may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way.

A few redactional changes have been made as suggested by one Church.

III. THE ASSEMBLIES

ARTICLE 29. (29) *The Ecclesiastical Assemblies*

Four kinds of ecclesiastical assemblies shall be maintained: The Consistory, the Classis, the Regional Synod, and the General Synod.

ARTICLE 30. (30) *Ecclesiastical Matters*

These assemblies shall deal with no other than ecclesiastical matters and that in an ecclesiastical manner.

A major assembly shall deal with those matters only which could not be finished in the minor assembly or which belong to its Churches in common. A new matter which has not previously been presented to that major assembly may be put on the agenda only when the minor assembly has dealt with it.

The term "major" assembly has been object of discussion. One Church suggested to abandon this term because of possible connotations with an hierarchical concept and, instead, to use the term "broader assemblies." There would be no objection to using the term "broader assemblies" throughout our Church Order, but there is one drawback: What is one then going to call the "minor assemblies" ? What term will be used? "Narrower," or "smaller," or "restricted" ? We see no other possibility than retaining the term "major" overagainst "minor." Every one who knows what truly Reformed Church polity is all about will not misunderstand this term; whereas, on the other hand, if the truly Reformed character of our Church Order is denied, even the use of the term "broader" will not prevent misinterpretation and misuse.

One Church proposed to read "resolved" instead of "finished" in the second paragraph. Matters are usually finished in the sense that an end is brought to the deliberations, thus the argument ran.

However, the point is not that there is an end to deliberations but that the question could not be brought to an end, to the finish. This term is still to be preferred as "resolved" appears to cover only part of the matters which could be brought to the major assembly.

The suggestion of one Church to read "which belong in common to its Churches" does not appear to be any improvement over the reading which the committee proposes.

Another Church asked, "We wonder if the word 'that' before 'major' is necessary? Will 'a' not suffice? We think that this is a different situation than you suggest with your footnotes as to the question 'a/the minor assembly.' The word 'that' makes one think of specific major assemblies (e.g. Regional Synod Smithers- June 1,2,1982 or Synod Coal- dale 1977) whereas you are referring to that level of assemblies. Taken as we suggest it might be taken, the word 'previously' would then of course not have a place in connection with 'that.' "

We think that the word "previously" precludes thinking of a specific assembly in the past. The word "that" refers to the previous paragraph where it is provided that a major assembly shall deal. . . . When a new matter is presented to that particular assembly, it shall not . . . etc. When it concerns a general synod, it shall not deal with it unless a regional synod has dealt with it; the same applies to regional synods and classes, respectively.

ARTICLE 31. (31) Appeals

If anyone complains that he has been wronged by the decision of a minor assembly, he shall have the right to appeal to the major ecclesiastical assembly; and whatever may be agreed upon by a majority vote shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proved to be in conflict with the Word of God or with the Church Order.

In one submission it was stated that "proved" should read "proven." We do not agree with this, for "proven" is used as an adjective -- it is a proven fact -- whereas "proved" is the past participle and this is how it is used here.

ARTICLE 32. (33) Credentials

Delegates to the major assemblies shall bring with them their credentials, signed by those sending them; they shall have a vote in all matters except those in which either they themselves or their Churches are particularly involved.

One Church expressed the wish that "instructions" should be included in this article. Without going too deeply into history we remark that by "instructions" originally the points for the agenda were meant. In order to prevent that brothers brought matters to the assembly which did not come from the Church itself, it was provided that the instructions, i.e. the points for the agenda should be signed by the delegating assembly. We see no reason for inserting the word "instructions" in this article since the practice of composing the agenda of the ecclesiastical assemblies in our days is such that it is clear whether a proposal comes from the Church or not. As for what we call "instructions," each and every Church remains free to give its delegates a letter along with the special charge to bring a certain matter to the fore during the assembly.

ARTICLE 33. (46) Proposals

Matters once decided upon may not be proposed again unless they are substantiated by new grounds.

Five Churches were of the opinion that the redaction of this article as proposed in the provisional report was not clear and even making little sense, since one who would propose to change a decision obviously was of the opinion that it should be changed.

The meaning of the provision becomes clear when we take over the suggestion from the Churches that proposals to reconsider a matter can be received and dealt with only when they are substantiated by new grounds.

One Church proposed to provide that the proposals should be substantiated by "new and valid" grounds. However, whether the new grounds are valid is something which the assembly will have to judge, since every one who gives arguments for his proposal is, of course, of the opinion that they are valid grounds.

ARTICLE 34. (32) Proceedings

The proceedings of all assemblies shall begin and end with calling upon the Name of the Lord.

This article has been simplified as suggested by one Church.

ARTICLE 35. (34, 35) President

In all assemblies there shall be a president whose task it is

- a. To present and explain clearly the matters to be dealt with;*
- b. To ensure that every one observe due order in speaking;*
- c. To deny the floor to those who argue about minor things or who let themselves be carried away and cannot control their strong emotions;*
- d. To discipline those who refuse to listen.*

According to one Church, "to see to it" is more British than Canadian; according to another Church "to see to it" is colloquial. For safety's sake, however, we have replaced it with "to ensure" as was already suggested more than once.

"In major assemblies the office of the president shall cease when the assembly has ended," one Church suggested to add to this article. We do not consider this necessary, although there would be no objection to it if Synod desires to do so. We just mention this suggestion.

Point c. has been reworded, in accordance with a suggestion received.

ARTICLE 36. (34) Clerk

Also a clerk shall be appointed whose task it shall be to keep an accurate record of all things worthy to be recorded.

"Why does the 'president' have to be mentioned again?" one Church asked. Agreeing with this, we deleted this part from the article, so that now it speaks of the clerk only.

ARTICLE 37. (36) Jurisdiction

The classis has the same jurisdiction over the consistory as the regional synod has over the classis, and the general synod over the regional synod.

From one Church the opinion was received that a better word-choice is required here. The committee, however, cannot find a better word. The word "authority" is definitely out. In the word "jurisdiction" we hear the "right" to have a "say" in things, which matters are defined by our Church Order. Although one would be able, with the help of voluminous dictionaries to promote a different interpretation of the word "jurisdiction," we wish to repeat the statement that there is no danger in using this term as long as one adheres to the truly Reformed Church polity; whereas no term or expression will prevent deviation from this polity if the heart is turned away from the Reformed principles.

ARTICLE 38. (37) Consistory

In all Churches there shall be a consistory composed of the ministers of the Word, the elders, and the deacons who, as a rule, shall meet at least once a month. As a rule, the ministers of the Word shall preside. If a Church is served by more than one minister, they shall preside in turn.

From one Church the very concrete proposal was received to read this article as follows: "In all Churches . . . the ministers of the Word, the elders, and the deacons who . . ." and then to delete Article 39. In this manner, it was argued, we bring our Church Order into full harmony with the Belgic Confession.

This Church was not the only one. Your Committee, too, is convinced that we are to formulate Article 38 as we have done it above. In this manner we are in complete harmony with the Belgic Confession and also with the first two general synods which were held in the Netherlands after the Reformation.

In accordance with this concept, we deleted "with the deacons" wherever our Church Order speaks of the Consistory.

This is better than the confusion of terms which is prevailing at the moment, as the one speaks of "consistory," the other of "council," a third one of "presbytery," a fourth one of "general" and "restricted" consistory, a fifth one of "consistory" and "consistory with the deacons."

This redaction does not necessitate meetings of all the office-bearers to deal with all matters brought before them. As the specific duties of each office are described in our Church Order, there is still the possibility to meet separately for the conduct of particular meetings dealing with the specific tasks, as we provide in Article 39.

ARTICLE 39. (new) Separate Meetings

The ministers of the Word and the elders on the one hand, and the deacons on the other hand, may also conduct separate meetings to deal with the matters specifically pertaining to their respective special offices.

As mentioned with Article 38, here we retain the possibility of having separate meetings of the Overseers as well as of the Deacons. When the right is there to conduct separate meetings, it is a matter of course that at these meetings decisions can be taken such as barring someone from the holy sacraments, admitting someone into the communion of the Church, etc.

ARTICLE 40. (38) Constitution Consistory

In places where the consistory is to be constituted for the first time or anew, this shall be done only with the advice of classis.

ARTICLE 41. (39) Places without Consistory

Places where as yet no consistory can be constituted shall be placed by classis under the care of a neighbouring consistory.

ARTICLE 42. (40) Meetings of Deacons

When the deacons meet separately to deal with the matters pertaining to their office, they shall do so with calling upon the Name of God. They shall give account of their labours in the consistory.

The ministers shall acquaint themselves with the work of the ministry of mercy and, if need be, also may visit these meetings.

As may be seen from the above redaction, we complied with the wish of some Churches to re-introduce the participation of the ministers here. Given the special position which the minister of the Word has in the congregation, it does appear advisable that he also acquaints himself with this part of the work of the office-bearers.

ARTICLE 43. (new) Archives

The consistories and the major assemblies shall ensure that proper care is taken of the archives.

ARTICLE 44. (41,42,43) Classical Meetings

The classical meetings shall consist of neighbouring Churches that respectively delegate, with proper credentials, a minister and an elder, or, if a Church has no minister, two elders, at such a time and place as were determined by the previous classis. Such meetings shall be held at least once in three months, unless the great distances render this inadvisable, or the convening Church, in consultation with the neighbouring Church, concludes that no matters have been sent in by the Churches which would warrant the convening of a classis. Cancellation of a classis shall, however, not be permitted to occur twice in succession.

In these meetings the ministers shall preside in rotation, or one shall be chosen to preside; however, the same minister shall not be chosen twice in succession.

The president shall ask whether there is any matter in which the consistories need the judgment and help of classis for the proper government of their Church.

At the close of the classical and other major assemblies, censure shall be exercised over those who in the meeting have done something worthy of reproof, or who have scorned the admonition of the minor assemblies.

At the last classis before regional synod delegates shall be chosen to that synod.

If two or more ministers are serving a Church, those who have not been delegated shall have the right to attend the classical meetings in an advisory capacity.

ARTICLE 45. (new) Counsellors

Each vacant Church shall request classis to appoint as counsellor the minister it desires as such, to the end that he may assist the consistory in maintaining good order and especially may lend his aid in the matter of the calling of a minister; he shall also sign the letter of call.

To one Church it was not clear to whom the word "it" in the second line refers. Is this the consistory or the classis? It seems to us that the context answer the question. If classis were meant, it could have read simply: "to appoint a counsellor."

ARTICLE 46. (44) Church Visitors

Each year classis shall authorize at least two of the more experienced and able ministers to visit the Churches in that year, unless the great distances render this inadvisable.

It shall be the task of these visitors to inquire whether all things are regulated and done in full harmony with the Word of God, whether the office-bearers fulfil the duties of their office faithfully as they have promised, and whether the adopted order is being observed and maintained in every respect; in order that they may in good time fraternally admon-

ish those who are found negligent in any thing, and that by their good counsel and advice all things may be directed towards the edification and preservation of Christ's Church.

They shall submit a written report of their visits to classis.

It did not appear necessary to follow the suggestion of one Church and to provide that classis shall "authorize and instruct" two ministers. These ministers' instruction is found in this article.

We did change "most experienced" to "more experienced," as suggested by one Church.

It would indeed be realistic to provide that the Churches shall be visited at least every two years, for this is common practice among us. Yet we are of the opinion that the provision of "each year" is to be retained.

The word "betimes" was considered archaic. We replaced it by the words "in good time," which means "as early as possible, before it is too late."

Again it was suggested to insert a provision that a copy of their report is to be sent to the Church which it concerns, but we abide by our original ^{te} statement that we do not think it to be necessary to provide this in our Church Order.

ARTICLE 47. (47) Regional Synod

Each year some neighbouring classes shall send delegates to meet in a regional synod. To this regional synod each classis shall delegate four ministers and four elders. If there are three classes, the number shall be three ministers and three elders; if there are four or more classes, the number shall be two ministers and two elders.

At the close of the regional as well as of the general synod the time and place of the next synod shall be determined and the convening Church for that meeting be appointed.

In case it appears necessary to convene a regional or general synod before the appointed time, the convening Church shall determine the time and place with the advice of the classis, respectively regional synod. At the last regional synod before the general synod delegates shall be chosen to that general synod.

As may be seen from the proposed article, we did add "ministers and two elder" at the end of the first paragraph.

We do not consider the word "neighbouring" redundant, as one Church put it.

One Church proposed to delete the word "place" in the second paragraph. It wishes to leave the choice of place up to the convening Church, since the convening Church is in a position to determine whether there are sufficient facilities in the place itself. This suggestion is certainly worth considering.

ARTICLE 48. (49) Deputies Regional Synod

Each regional synod shall appoint deputies who are to assist the classes in all cases provided for in the Church Order, and -- upon the request of the classes -- in cases of special difficulties.

These deputies shall keep proper record of their actions and submit a written report on them to synod, and, if so required, they shall give account of their actions.

They shall not be discharged from their task before and until synod itself discharges them.

In the second line a change in wording may be noted.

ARTICLE 49. (50) General Synod

The general synod shall be held once every three years. Each regional synod shall delegate to this synod four ministers and four elders. A general synod shall be convened before the appointed time if, according to the judgment of a regional synod, such appears necessary.

One Church proposed again to change this article in this manner, that each classis shall delegate two ministers and two elders. It adduced arguments derived from practical difficulties encountered when it appeared necessary to delegate brothers some one-and-a-half years in advance for fear that a regional synod would have to be convened for the sole purpose of electing delegates. Cost and time did not seem warranted. Besides, a more "proportionate representation" would result in change of practice.

We repeat our conviction that we should not go into this direction. It would result -- for all practical purposes -- in the elimination of regional synods and this is to be considered a great loss. We let it suffice to mention the repeated suggestion.

ARTICLE 50. (86) Churches Abroad

The relation with Churches abroad shall be regulated by general synod. With foreign Churches of Reformed confession a sister-church relationship shall be maintained as much as possible. On minor points of Church Order and ecclesiastical practice Churches abroad shall not be rejected.

ARTICLE 51. (new) Mission

The Churches shall endeavour to fulfil their missionary task. When Church cooperate in this matter, they shall, as much as possible, observe the division into classes and regional synods.

From the text of this article it will become evident that all that has been changed is "in this end" which has become "in this matter."

We did not take over the suggestion of one Church to delete the first line and to provide only "When Churches cooperate in the endeavour to fulfil their missionary task, they shall . . . etc." However, the main thrust of Article 51 is not that the Churches shall cooperate along the lines of division into classes and regional synods, but that they shall fulfil their missionary task. If we leave this out, we do not need this article at all.

IV. WORSHIP, SACRAMENTS, AND CEREMONIES

ARTICLE 52. (new, 67, 68) Worship Services

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

The consistory shall ensure that, as a rule, once every Sunday the doctrine of God's Word as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism is proclaimed.

No changes were made.

One Church asked, "How does one ensure as a rule?" However, the article reads that the consistory shall ensure that -- as a rule -- once every Sunday. . . etc. We cannot see any difficulty here.

ARTICLE 53. (67) Days of Commemoration

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 His outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

We changed the order of the words somewhat in accordance with the advice of one Church.

ARTICLE 54. (66) Days of Prayer

In time of war, general calamities, and other great afflictions, the presence of which is felt throughout the Churches, a day of prayer may be proclaimed by the Churches appointed for that purpose by general synod.

One Church suggested to provide in this article that 'general synod shall appoint two Churches who, after consultation with each other, shall proclaim such a day of prayer.' However, when we provide that two Churches may do so which have been appointed by general synod, it is obvious that general synod appoints two Churches for this purpose. It is equally obvious that when there are two Churches that have been appointed, they shall consult with one another and come with a combined call for a day of prayer.

ARTICLE 55. (69) Psalms and Hymns

In the worship services the Psalms will be sung in the rhyming adopted by general synod and the Hymns that have been approved by general synod.

This formulation is to be preferred over one suggested by a Church: "In the worship services the Psalms and Hymns shall be sung in the rhyming adopted by general synod." We not only sing the Hymns in the rhyming adopted by general synod, we sing the Hymns adopted by general synod, and we should differentiate between the Psalms and the Hymns.

ARTICLE 56. (56,58,62,64) Administration of Sacraments

The sacraments shall be administered only under the authority of the consistory, in a public worship service, by a minister of the Word, with the use of the adopted Forms.

Only one Church repeated the suggestion to read "using the adopted Forms." We see no need to follow it this time either.

ARTICLE 57. (56,57) Baptism

The consistory shall ensure that the covenant of God is sealed by baptism to the children of believers as soon as feasible.

One Church expressed its opinion that the last part should read "as soon as it is feasible to do so." It does not appear necessary to add these words.

ARTICLE 58. (21) Schools

The consistory shall ensure that the parents, to the best of their ability, have their children attend a school where the instruction given is in harmony with the Word of God as the Church has summarized it in her confessions.

One Church suggested deletion of this article. It could not see any valid reason for singling out the schools and keeping silent, e.g. about labour unions.

Another Church proposed to change "to the best of their ability" to "where this is possible." Such a change would shift the emphasis from the obligation of the parents to the circumstances and this is not the intention of the article.

The formulation "That the consistory promote in their work that the parents have their children attend. . ." appears no improvement.

As for the suggestion to read, "The consistory shall ensure that the members of the Church, to the best of their ability have the children of the congregation . . ." and the reason given for it, namely "this rendering conveys that the responsibility rests also with those not having children," we must come to the conclusion that this is unacceptable.

The obligation we speak of here in this article is an obligation of the parents; they have to make sure that that which is taught at home and in the Church is not broken down at school. And it is the task of the consistories to ensure that the parents see and fulfil this obligation. The matter of mutual support within the congregation does not come into focus here and certainly should not be laid down in the Church Order. That one without children has the duty to help his brothers and sisters with the fulfilment of their task does not mean that he himself has a task towards the children or is responsible for their Reformed schooling.

ARTICLE 59. (59) *Baptism of Adults*

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

No reason was given for the suggestion to read -- in our opinion somewhat stiltedly -- "Upon their public profession of faith, adults who . . . by holy baptism."

ARTICLE 60. (63) *Lord's Supper*

The Lord's Supper shall be celebrated at least once every three months.

ARTICLE 61. (61) *Admission to the Lord's Supper*

The consistory shall admit to the Lord's Supper only those who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life. Members of sister Churches shall be admitted on the ground of a good attestation concerning their doctrine and conduct.

ARTICLE 62. (82) *Attestations*

Communicant members who move to a sister Church shall be given an attestation regarding their doctrine and conduct, signed on behalf of the consistory by two of its members.

In the case of non-communicant members such an attestation shall be sent directly to the consistory of the Church concerned.

Three Churches suggested to add that an attestation is to be signed on behalf of the consistory. We have made this change accordingly.

ARTICLE 63. (70) *Marriage*

The consistory shall ensure that the members of the congregation marry only in the Lord, and that the ministers -- as authorized by the consistory -- solemnize only such marriages as are in accordance with the Word of God.

The solemnization of a marriage may take place either in a private ceremony or in a public worship service. The adopted Form for the Solemnization shall be used.

A few changes have been made in the wording. E.g. the words "to solemnize marriages" in the provision that ministers are authorized by the consistory have been deleted, as the word "solemnize" occurs right after that (again). Further, the last part of the article has been made into a separate sentence.

To the question, "Where do we find that ministers are authorized by the consistory?" we could answer: here in this article; but this would not satisfy. We gave account of the reason why this was inserted in the provisional report. Ministers have received their position and mandate from Christ via the Church, and the Church is seen in and represented by the consistory. It is by virtue of their position that ministers have the right to solemnize marriages; if there comes a change in their position and status, they are no longer qualified to do this.

And to the question whether the Church has a say in a private ceremony, we reply that the question here is the supervision over the conduct of the members and over the activities of the minister. The consistory certainly has the right to tell a minister that he is not allowed to solemnize this specific marriage if the consistory is convinced that it is in conflict with God's Word.

One Church expressed the wish that general synod would receive the wisdom either to delete this article altogether or to speak in no uncertain terms about this non-eclesiastical matter.

ARTICLE 64. (60) Church Records

The consistory shall maintain Church records in which the names of the members, the dates of their birth, baptism, public profession of faith, marriage, and departure or death are properly recorded.

V. CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINE

ARTICLE 65. (71, 72) Mature and Purpose

Since Church discipline is of a spiritual nature and, as one of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, has been given to the Church to shut and to open that kingdom, the consistory shall ensure that it be used to punish sins against both the purity of doctrine and the piety of conduct, in order to reconcile the sinner with the Church and with his neighbour, and to remove all offense out of the Church of Christ -- which can be done only when the rule given by our Lord in Matthew 18:15-17 is followed in obedience.

It did appear desirable to insert again that the purpose of Church discipline is also to reconcile the sinner with the Church and with his neighbour and to remove the offense out of the Church of Christ, as was suggested by one Church.

ARTICLE 66. (72, 73, 74) Consistory Involvement

The consistory shall not deal with any matter pertaining to the purity of doctrine or piety of conduct reported to it unless it has first ascertained that both private admonitions and admonitions in the presence of one or two witnesses have remained fruitless, or that the sin committed is of a public character.

One Church pointed out that, since this is a new article, "any such matter" hangs somewhat in the air. We, therefore, were more specific in the now proposed article.

ARTICLE 67. (76,77) Excommunication

Anyone who obstinately rejects the admonition by the consistory or who has committed a public sin shall be suspended from the Lord's Supper. If he continues to harden himself in sin, the consistory shall inform the congregation of this by means of public announcements, that the congregation be engaged in prayer and admonition, and the excommunication not take place without its cooperation.

In the first public announcement the name of the sinner shall not be mentioned.

In the second public announcement -- which shall be made only after the advice of classis has been obtained -- the name and address of the sinner shall be mentioned.

In the third public announcement a date shall be set at which the excommunication of the sinner shall take place.

In case a non-communicant member hardens himself in sin, the consistory shall in the same manner inform the congregation by means of public announcements.

In the first public announcement the name of the sinner shall not be mentioned.

In the second public announcement -- which shall be made only after the advice of classis has been obtained -- the name and address of the sinner shall be mentioned and a date shall be set at which the excommunication of the sinner shall take place.

The time between the various announcements shall be determined by the consistory.

ARTICLE 68. (75) Repentance

When someone repents of a public sin or of a sin which had to be reported to the consistory, the latter shall not accept his confession of sin unless he has shown real amendment.

The consistory shall determine whether the benefit of the congregation requires that this confession of sin shall be made publicly and -- in case it is made before the consistory or before two or three office-bearers -- whether the congregation shall be informed afterwards.

ARTICLE 69. (78) Readmission

When someone who has been excommunicated repents and desires to be again received into the communion of the Church, the congregation shall be informed of his desire in order to see whether there are any lawful objections.

The time between the public announcement and the readmission of the sinner shall be not less than one month.

If no lawful objection is raised, the readmission shall take place with the use of the Form adopted for that purpose.

ARTICLE 70. (79) Suspension and Deposition of Office-bearers

When ministers, elders, or deacons have committed a public or otherwise gross sin, or refuse to heed the admonitions by the consistory, they shall be suspended from office by the judgment of their own consistory and of the consistory of the neighbouring Church. When they harden themselves in their sin or when the sin committed is of such a nature that they cannot continue in office, the elders and deacons

shall be deposed by the judgment of the above mentioned consistories. Classis, with the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod, shall judge whether the ministers are to be deposed.

ARTICLE 71. (80) *Serious and Gross Sins with Office-bearers*

As serious and gross sins which are grounds for the suspension or deposition of office-bearers the following are to be mentioned particularly: false doctrine or heresy, public schisms, blasphemy, simony, faithless desertion of office or intrusion upon that of another, perjury, adultery, fornication, theft, acts of violence, habitual drunkenness, brawling, unjustly enriching oneself; and further all such sins and serious misdemeanours that rate as ground for excommunication with respect to other members of the Church.

A change has been made in the last part of this article, in accordance with a suggestion received.

In the provisional report we inserted "brawling." Now a Church asked why this was inserted. Simply because we overlooked it in the first draft and we were asked the previous time why it was left out. It is also found in the Dutch original.

That "unjustly enriching oneself" is the same as "theft," as one Church asserted is something we cannot agree with. One can make use of his position to enrich oneself unjustly without rendering oneself guilty of what might be called theft.

ARTICLE 72. (81) *Christian Censure*

The ministers, elders, and deacons shall mutually exercise Christian censure and shall exhort and kindly admonish one another with regard to the execution of their office.

ARTICLE 73. (81) *No Lording It Over*

No Church shall in any way lord it over other Churches, no office-bearer over other office-bearers.

ARTICLE 74. (84) *Property of the Churches*

All property, both real and personal, which belongs to the Churches comprised respectively in classes, regional synods and general synods in common, shall be held in trust for such Churches in equal shares by deputies or trustees appointed for that purpose from time to time by the appropriate classis, regional synod, or general synod, and such deputies or trustees shall be bound by the terms of their appointment and instruction and are subject to being discharged by a subsequent classis, regional synod, or general synod.

One Church told us that they find this article very unclear. Another Church suggested that we ask legal advice.

The present article was drawn up by one of our brothers who is a legal expert, and this was done several years ago already. We are confident that the present text safeguards the common possessions of the Churches sufficiently and that no change is needed.

ARTICLE 75. (87) Observance and Revision of the Church Order

These articles, which regard the lawful order of the Church, have been adopted with common accord. If the interest of the Churches demand such, they may and ought to be changed, augmented, or diminished. However, no consistory, classis, or regional synod shall be permitted to do so, but they shall endeavour diligently to observe the articles of this Church Order as long as they have not been changed by a general synod.

Following the suggestion by one of the Churches, we have inserted "and ought" (to be changed. . .).

We do not agree with the statement of another Church that "endeavour diligently to observe . . ." is a tautology, since "diligently" belongs to the verb "to observe" which follows.

Again two Churches suggested that the article on funerals be reinstated. One Church wrote that it is not sure that the dangers which this article endeavours to eliminate are not present.

We are still not convinced that it indeed is necessary to have such an article.

If, however, general synod should decide to have the old Article 65 reinstated, we would suggest to take over the text of the Christian Reformed Church and to have this article read as follows.

ARTICLE (65) Funerals

Funerals are not ecclesiastical but family affairs, and should be conducted accordingly.

If this article were reinstated, the numbering would have to be changed accordingly. It could become Article 64 or Article 65 (retaining its old number) and then our Church Order would contain a total of 76 articles.

Herewith we submit the result of our labours to your assembly.

A copy of this final report has been sent to the consistories for their information.

Respectfully submitted

Yours in the Lord

w.s. J. Geertsema
W. Pouwelse
W.W.J. VanDene

