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PROVISIONAL REPORT
ON THE
REVISION OF THE CHURCH ORDER
OF
THE CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCHES

In compliance with the decision
of the Synod of Smithville, 1980
of the Canadian Reformed Churches,
Acts of Synod, Article 19.

DECEMBER 1981

Burlington/Fergus/Surrey
December 4, 1981

To the Consistories.
Esteemed Brethren.

Complying with the order of the General Synod of Smithville 1980, we herewith submit to you the draft report on the revision of the Church Order. The first part of this report was already submitted to the above mentioned Synod but due to its provisional character, none of the articles was discussed or adopted at this Synod. We solicit remarks from the Churches before January 1, 1983, in order that we may be able to send a definite report to the Synod of Cloverdale 1983.

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 should be : offices and supervision of doctrine; assemblies; worship, sacraments, and ceremonies; and discipline.

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

Apart from a few changes in language, we enlarged the heading of this article, making it "Purpose and Division," which expresses the contents more accurately.

A suggestion to read "Ministry of the Word" instead of "worship" did not appear an improvement or even to be correct: "worship" includes more than only the proclamation of the Gospel. Thus we retained "worship."

It appears more correct to us to read "that there should be" than -- as one suggestion read -- "that there are." No fact is stated but a rule, what should be.

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 heading of this section of the Church Order has been enlarged, and now reads, "Offices and Supervision of Doctrine."

It has been suggested to move the point of "supervision of doctrine" again to the second half of the Church Order; but we have not been convinced by the few remarks which were made in this connection. Supervision of doctrine is no matter of discipline but is better in place in a section where we speak of the offices and the tasks of the office-bearers.

As for Article 2 itself, we have shortened it considerably, as also was suggested by one Church. We have become convinced that we do not have to provide that a Minister may be "set apart" for the work of a Missionary or a Professor of Theology. In our original proposal we wished, in this manner, to provide a provision which could be used to regulate the position of the Professors of Theology, but we agree : we do not really need that.

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 office who have made profession of faith and may be considered to meet the conditions as set forth in Holy Scripture, e.g. in I 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 and the Deacons.

The Consistory and the Deacons shall be free to give the Congregation the opportunity beforehand to draw the attention to brothers deemed fit for the respective offices.

The Consistory and the Deacons 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 and the Deacons in accordance with the adopted regulations. The names of the appointed brothers shall be publicly announced to the Congregation before the ordination or installation, on at least two consecutive Sundays for the latter's approbation. The ordination or installation shall take place agreeably to the relevant forms.

The heading of this article has been changed and now reads, "The Calling to Office."

We maintained the first sentence, an expression which we took literally from Hebrews 5:4, and which expresses better what is meant than the suggestion of one Church: "No one shall be permitted to enter any of the aforementioned offices." Besides, we did not think that that was the proper way of putting it.

The further changes which we made are self-evident and do not need an explanation.

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 who 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

If a Church is vacant, the advice of the Counsellor shall be asked when that Church extends a call.

The only point which demands our attention here is the question of persons who have been declared eligible for call by Churches with which we maintain correspondence. A few suggestions were received to insert: "Have been declared eligible for call by, or are serving in one of the Churches with . . ."

We most urgently advise the Churches not to accede to those suggestions. It is one of the conditions of Church-correspondence that we recognize each other's office-bearers, but it has been correctly pointed out that a candidate has no office as yet. The Churches are to see to it that they, and they alone retain the right to declare one eligible for call who is no office-bearer as yet.

When our Rev. Drs. J.DeJong -- who had been declared eligible for call by a Classis Ontario South -- went to the Netherlands to study, he had to submit to a Classical examination before he could even receive the right to speak an edifying word in our Netherlands sister-Churches. We consider such practice to be completely correct and are convinced that we should decide and act in the same vein. Although the bonds exist, we are a separate, independent federation. Also for the future we are to see to it that we remain "boss in our own house," so to speak. Besides, correspondence may be expanded in the future and include more federations than the ones we now recognize as our sister-Churches. It is not unthinkable that there will be a federation somewhere which we have to recognize as a true Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, but about whose requirements for admission into the Ministry or about whose doctrinal position we have grave doubts. Rules have to be drawn up when everything is good and in good order. Then we have the best safeguards for the future.

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 the Classis has approved the call.
The Classis shall approve the call
 - a. Upon satisfactory testimony concerning the soundness of doctrine and conduct of the Candidate;
 - b. Upon a peremptory examination of the Candidate by the 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(es) 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 the 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 the Deacons and from the 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 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.

In point A we inserted the provision that the Candidate shall show good testimonials concerning doctrine and conduct.

After point B we inserted a provision concerning the colloquium required for the admission of Ministers who come from corresponding sister-Churches.

In point D we inserted a provision (suggested by one of the Churches) concerning the proper announcements and approval by the Congregation.

We could not take over a suggestion to replace "with the cooperation of" in A 1 b, by "with the concurring advice of." One cannot examine "with the concurring advice of" but only "with the cooperation of. . ."

ARTICLE 6 (6,7) Bound to a Church

No one shall serve in the Ministry unless he be 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 those who have become estranged from the Gospel; or is to be charged with some other special ministerial task.

No remarks

ARTICLE 7. (9) Recent Converts

No one who recently has 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 the Classis with the cooperation of the deputies of the Regional Synod.

We changed the order in this article to some extent and added the words "reasonable period of time," such upon the suggestion from one of the Churches.

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 also the gift of public speech.

When such persons present themselves for the Ministry, the Classis, after the approval of the 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.

Two changes have been made.

In the first place we inserted the word "of" after "of their exceptional gifts," and in the second place we replaced "word of edification" by "edifying word."

Replacement of "Persons" by "Male members" appeared unnecessary, since Article 3 already precludes the admission of female members to this examination.

Changes resulting in a clear distinction between the one group of gifts and the other group of gifts did not appear advisable, since in that case a certain "exegesis" of this article would become "binding." We therefore left the wording as it has stood for centuries.

ARTICLE 9 (10) From One Church to Another

A Minister, once lawfully called, shall not leave the Congregation to which he is bound to take up the Ministry elsewhere without the consent of the Consistory and the Deacons, and the approval of the Classis.

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 remarks

ARTICLE 10 (11) Proper Support

The Consistory and the Deacons, as representing the Congregation, shall be bound to provide for the proper support of its Minister(s).

We added "and the Deacons."

ARTICLE 11 (11) Dismissal

If a Minister of the Word is judged to be unfit and incapable of serving the Congregation fruitfully and to its edification, without there being any reason for Church discipline, the Consistory and the Deacons shall not dismiss him from his Ministry without the approbation of the Classis and the concurring advice of the deputies of the Regional Synod, and not without proper arrangements regarding the support of the Minister and his family for a reasonable period of time.

In general, the remarks received contained the conviction that the wording as proposed in the "provisional revision" was too "rigoristic." It was felt that that wording might give the impression as if such a Minister was no good for anything. That certainly was not our intention. Thus we came to the conclusion that this article should be changed, and we did so.

Further, we added "and the Deacons."

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 weighty reasons, of which the Consistory and the Deacons shall judge, and which shall receive the approval of Classis with the concurring advice of deputies of the Regional Synod.

No remarks.

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 and the Deacons, with the concurring advice of the Classis and of deputies of the 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.

No remarks.

ARTICLE 14. (14) Temporary Release

If any Minister, because of illness or for other weighty reasons, requests a temporary release from his service to the Congregation, he can receive the same only with the approval of the Consistory and the Deacons and shall at all times be and remain subject to the call of the Congregation.

"Requests" takes the place of "desires."

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.

No remarks

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 discipline and order, and to govern it in such a manner as the Lord has ordained.

We have changed a few expressions. It did not appear necessary to go any further, since the new form as adopted by the General Synod Smithville 1980 shows no basic difference with the old form and with the text of Article 16 as we have had it for many years.

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 the Classis.

No remarks.

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 out 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 Holy Writ.

A few changes were proposed, and we adopted one: delete the words "the provision of" the Church Order. A question was put before us: Would it not be wise to say something about the position of a Missionary in the Consistory of the sending Church?

In answer to that question we would submit that we should not try to regulate all sorts of matters in our Church Order. The proper way seems to be that, if there is any uncertainty in this respect, the judgment of a broader assembly be asked and not that we insert all sorts of provisions in our Church Order.

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 theology in those disciplines which have been entrusted to them, in order that the Churches may be provided with Ministers of the Word who are able to fulfil the duties of their office as they have been described before.

We changed the heading of this article to "Training for the Ministry." Further, we changed "that so" into "in order that."

A proposal to insert "The Churches may appoint Ministers as Professors of Theology at this College" appears to be superfluous. Besides, the Churches may also appoint non-Ministers as Professors of Theology.

It was also suggested to insert that the task assigned to the Professors of Theology is above all to expound the Holy Scriptures and to vindicate sound doctrine against heresies and errors that so . . . etc.

We beg to disagree with that suggestion. The task of the Professors is specifically to teach the students, and to instruct them so that the latter, as Ministers of the Gospel, are able to do those things.

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.

The wording of this article has been changed; the basic contents have remained the same.

We see no need to change "financial aid" into "support" as also including the spiritual aspect of help. This spiritual help is to be given by the Church of which the student is a member which not necessarily is the same Church that extends financial aid.

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.

The wording of this article has been changed, since the previous text was difficult to read and understand.

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, reproving 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.

The wording of this Article has been changed so that it now reflects the newly adopted form.

As for the rest, it was suggested to delete the word "specific" here as well as in Article 16. We did not take over this suggestion, since there may be other duties which are entrusted to a Minister by the Consistory which do not belong to his "specific" duties; the same applies to the Elders.

A suggestion to provide that the Elders are to have to supervise the doctrine of the Ministers of the Word "as well as the Deacons" did not appear advisable to us. In the first place it is not clear what exactly the meaning of that addition is; and in the second place, the point here is that the Elders are "specifically" to protect the flock against errors and heresies; to that end they have to supervise the doctrine of the Ministers of the Word.

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.

The wording has been changed to bring this article into harmony with what the newly adopted form says about the task of the Deacons.

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 and the Deacons judge that the circumstances and the profit 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.

Two Churches suggested that the proposed article be changed so that it provide that Elders and Deacons shall serve three or more years, since two years was considered too short a term of office for the office-bearers to become fully acquainted with their task.

From the history of this provision it is evident that a period of two years has been part of it from the very first years after the Reformation on. Whoever wishes to do so can trace this history himself. We confine ourselves to the following : For many years it was the rule that office-bearers should serve no more than two years, and we should not declare it wrong if a Church holds to that; besides, the provision as proposed by us leaves the possibility that office-bearers serve three or even more years.

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 in other matters as far as possible, according to the judgment of the Consistory and the Deacons.

The only remark received regarding this article was that a few comma's should be added. That's what we did.

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 the Deacons, and the Classis shall not receive him; and if he obstinately persists in his refusal, he shall be deposed from office.

We changed this article in a few points.

1. It now reads, "by signing the form(s) adopted for that purpose," in accordance with a suggestion made. Within our Churches we experienced that it is good to provide expressly that the required subscribing shall be done by signing an adopted form.

2. We also added "and the Deacons" to "the Consistory," thus bringing this provision into harmony with e.g. artt.3,13,14: the suspension of an office-bearer should be done by the same body that appoints and ordains or installs him.

3. We followed the example of our Netherlands sister Churches and changed the provision that a Minister who refuses to sign shall be suspended by the Consistory "or the Classis" to "that the Classis shall not receive him." Apart from the fact that it is not clear how the suspension is to be done in such a case, we considered that it was advisable to remove even the appearance of hierarchy. If a Classis meets with refusal to sign, it cannot receive such an office-bearer as a legitimate member of that Classis. The suspension is something which belongs to the authority of the Consistory.

For consideration by the Churches we enclose the Form of Subscription for Docents at the Theological College as it was adopted by the General Synod of Edmonton 1965, and a similar form which may be used by the Churches and/or Classes.

It has been suggested to move this article back to its "original" place, namely in the part "of the Doctrine, Sacraments, and other Ceremonies."

We decided against that and kept this provision in its present place, as it is more fitting to have it in the section where we are dealing with admission into and requirements for office.

Strictly speaking, the signing of a Subscription Form does not belong to the part on Doctrine but to that which provides what has to be done before one enters upon his office.

As we changed the part of a Classis in the procedure, we do not have to go into the suggestion to insert that the advice and cooperation of deputies of the Regional Synod is required. We only mention that suggestion.

ARTICLE 27. (55) False Doctrine

To ward off false doctrines and errors which via literature and other means of communication 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.

It was pointed out that the previous draft used the word "teaching" twice; we replaced it once by "instruction."

One Church asked whether it was "really necessary" to include the words "via literature and other means of communication," and another Church suggested to delete these words because it is "immaterial how it enters."

We agree that it is "immaterial" how false doctrine enters, but such does not make it superfluous to point out the various methods used by the evil one. By the same token it could be said that it is immaterial which commandment is transgressed, since in each and every case one transgresses the one Law of God; yet in our Catechism we point out various aspects of obedience as well as of disobedience against this specific commandment.

Furthermore, seeing the danger posed by the printed as well as the spoken word, oftentimes accompanied by visual presentations, it appears to be advisable that the attention is drawn to that danger in more explicit terms.

Another suggestion made is to replace "Christian teaching" by "Catechism teaching." We do not agree with this suggestion, for the teaching to which the proposed article refers is not restricted to the Catechism room, neither is it to be done only by the Ministers of the Word: it is the duty of the Elders as well, especially when they visit the families and enquire about their life with and before the Lord.

For the same reason we cannot agree with the suggestion by one Church to leave out "as well in the . . . and family visits."

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 diligently and sincerely to impress 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, that the Church of Christ may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way.

One change has been made: in the second part we changed "their favour" to "the favour of the Authorities."

It was not considered advisable to pluralize "Church": the Church of Christ as such should enjoy the Authorities' favour; besides, "Churches of Christ" might be a confusing terminology, as there are groups which call themselves by that name.

OF 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.

No change.

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.

In the first sentence we added the word "that" as suggested by one Church.

Another Church asked whether it would not be better to say "in a minor assembly" instead of "in the minor assembly." Our answer is: "No, that would not be better." Now it is clear that the assembly immediately minor to that particular major assembly is meant. If we used the indefinite article, one could argue that as long as a(ny) minor assembly -- e.g. a Consistory -- has dealt with a matter, a General Synod would be permitted to put it on its agenda. Such would indeed be an abuse of this article, but there is no article that cannot be abused if faithfulness is absent.

One Church suggested to delete the last sentence since there is "too much danger that sentence will be abused."

Whether there is more danger that abuse will occur with respect to this article than to any other

other article is only a matter of speculation.

Following our Netherlands sister Churches, we consider it a very wise and edifying provision. It may be new in wording, whoever studies the Acts of the General Synods of the Canadian Reformed Churches will discover that more than once a matter was deleted from the provisional agenda because the minor assemblies had no opportunity to discuss or study the matter.

If we may use an example: Synod Coaldale 1977 received, at the very last moment, a proposal to instruct the Committee for Contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church "to seek contact with the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, with a view to determining whether church correspondence can be established with this church federation."

No Consistory ever had an opportunity to discuss this matter, much less did the broader assemblies. It was just dumped onto Synod's table, and Synod should have refused to deal with it on that ground. However, Synod dealt with it in spite of the fact that no minor assembly could have considered the matter. That Synod did not accede to the proposal was not on this ground but on the ground of insufficient information.

We consider the proposed provision an important guideline which will serve to prevent that broader assemblies take to hand matters which have not been sufficiently prepared in the Churches.

Of the Churches only one suggested to delete this provision.

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.

Two changes have been made.

In the first part the indefinite article has been replaced by the definite article to make clear that an appeal should be made to the major assembly, viz. major with respect to that particular minor assembly and not just to any major assembly, e.g. an appeal from a Consistory decision to a Regional or General Synod.

Further, we changed "this Church Order" to "the Church Order."

One Church suggested to replace "complains" by "maintains." However, that would not express the meaning of this article correctly. One could maintain that he has been wronged without lodging a complaint about that with the broader assembly. It is the latter action to which Article 31 refers.

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.

The only change is that "such" has been replaced by "in those."

ARTICLE 33. (46) Proposals

Matters once decided upon may not be proposed again, unless it is considered necessary that they be changed.

The new wording is one suggested by one of the Churches.

ARTICLE 34. (32) Proceedings

The proceedings of all assemblies shall begin with calling upon the Name of the Lord and be closed with thanksgiving.

No change.

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 see to it 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 by vehement emotions;
d. To discipline those who refuse to listen.

The word-order in point a. has been changed as suggested by one Church.

It was also suggested to delete point d. on the ground that "if action must be taken, the assembly should decide collectively." We are convinced, however, that this is first and foremost the task of the president.

ARTICLE 36. (34) Clerk

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

The wording has been changed as a result of suggestions received.

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.

One Church remarked that "the whole article is not very clear to the general reader (neither was the old edition)." It asked whether it could not be worded more clearly, "defining what is meant by jurisdiction."

One Church suggested to "replace the word 'jurisdiction' with the word 'authority.' "

As for the latter suggestion, it is unacceptable. According to Reformed Church Polity, major assemblies may have the right to have a say in certain well-defined areas and matters, they certainly have no authority over the minor assemblies. Especially in connection with the struggles before and during the Liberation of 1944, the late Prof. P. Deddens, in his inaugural oration, elaborated on the question why in Article 36 of our Church Order the word "zeggen" is used and not the term "zeggenschap." The latter term represents authority, but our forefathers avoided it. The Consistory alone has authority in the Church; major assemblies have none.

By choosing the word "jurisdiction" we make clear that major assemblies have received the right to have their say in certain well-defined areas and matters; this should, however, not be confused with authority (which rests only with the Consistory).

ARTICLE 38 (37) Consistory

In all Churches there shall be a Consistory composed of the Ministers of the Word and the Elders who, as a rule, shall meet at least once a month. The Ministers of the Word shall preside. If there is more than one Minister in a Church, they shall preside in turn.

One Church suggested to provide that the Consistory "shall meet at least twice a month," but we are convinced that we should not, via a provision in our Church Order, compel Consistories to meet twice a month if they themselves are convinced that once a month is sufficient.

Another Church remarked that no provision was made for a vacant Church. Do we have to insert such a provision? Each Consistory will have elected a vice-president when they have one Minister, and in each vacant Church the Consistory will have elected a president. We see no need to make a special provision for that.

As for the suggestion "to insert 'as a rule' before: Ministers of the Word shall preside . . . etc., to allow a little freedom as to who shall preside the meetings," we do not consider this advisable. If there are compelling reasons why someone else is to preside over a meeting, a Consistory can always make a decision to that effect.

Concerning the term "Council" for Consistory and the Deacons and "Consistory" for the Minister plus Elders, we did receive some statements from a few Churches where these terms are being used in the above meaning, expressing their satisfaction with that use. We are convinced, however, that the wisest course is retention of the terminology which has served the Churches so well for so many years.

ARTICLE 39. (38) Consistory and the Deacons

Where the number of Elders is small, the Deacons may be added to the Consistory by local arrangement; this shall invariably be done where the number of Elders or the number of Deacons is less than three.

No change.

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 the Classis.

No change.

ARTICLE 41. (39) Places without Consistory

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

No change.

ARTICLE 42. (40) Meetings of Deacons

The Deacons shall meet regularly, calling upon the Name of God, to deal with the matters pertaining to their office. They shall give account of their labours to the Consistory.

We changed the beginning of this article, as suggested.

One Church suggested to change "regularly" to "once a month." No reason was given for this suggestion, and we are not convinced of the necessity to make this change.

We are not convinced either of the need to insert the provision that Ministers shall or may attend the meetings of the Deacons. One Church suggested to do so, but did not give any arguments nor tried to refute the arguments which we gave for deletion of that passage.

It was suggested to read "They shall be accountable of their labours to the Consistory" instead of "They shall give account of their labours to the Consistory." However: "to be accountable to" does not necessarily include that one does give account; perhaps one does so only when required to do so. In the case of the Deacons it is so that a report should be given at regular times. Such a report does not have to include names and amounts, but should give a general overview of the activities of the Deacons during the period covered.

ARTICLE 43. (new) Archives

The Consistories and the major assemblies shall see to it that proper care is taken of the Archives.

One Church suggested to change "shall see to it" to "shall ensure." We do not consider this to be an improvement and left the article as proposed.

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, however, shall take place no more than once.

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 the 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 punishment, or who have scorned the admonition of the minor assemblies.

And finally, at the last Classis before the Regional Synod delegates shall be chosen to that Synod.

If two or more Ministers are connected with a Church, those who have not been delegated shall have the right to attend the Classical meetings in an advisory capacity.

The only change is the insertion of "old 43" as the third-last paragraph. From the submissions received it appeared that it might be wise to retain this provision.

Only one Church suggested to delete the last paragraph without, however, adducing any grounds for its suggestion or trying to refute the arguments we gave for retaining it.

ARTICLE 45. (new) Counsellors

Each vacant Church shall request the 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.

One Church suggested to provide that the Classis shall appoint "the neighbouring Minister, unless Classis, with good reasons, decides otherwise."

Although it will not happen very often that not the Minister of the neighbouring Church is requested and appointed, yet we are convinced that it would not be wise to make it obligatory. There can be various reasons why a Church desires another Minister than the neighbouring one and it is more in the line of our Reformed Church polity to have the Church decide about the necessity of requesting another one than to have a Classis do it.

ARTICLE 46. (44) Church Visitors

Each year the Classis shall authorize at least two of the most experienced and able Ministers to visit the Churches in that year, unless the great distances render this inadvisable. It shall be the task of those 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 betimes fraternally admonish 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.

Following the order of the article, we mention the following suggestions received.

"Delete 'most experienced and able.' We may trust the delegates at Classis to appoint those deemed best suitable."

We may certainly trust that, but this does not make it superfluous to provide so. It has become more or less customary to engage all Ministers in the Classis due to the relatively small number of Ministers and the heavy workload carried by some of them. It is good when the Churches are reminded of the desirability of entrusting this task to those most experienced and considered most able.

"To visit the Churches at least once every two years." This is considered more realistic in view of the practice in the Churches. We are well aware of this practice of having Church Visitation once every two years, but do consider it advisable that we return to the good practice of having it every year. If we adapt the Church Order to our present practice, we foresee that it will be hard, if not altogether impossible, to return to the yearly visits.

"The old article is more specific in listing the duties of the visitors." It was indeed, but strictly speaking, we could describe the duties of Church Visitors as inquiring "whether the adopted order is being observed and maintained in every respect." When Visitors follow our adopted Church Order, they will be more specific in their questions than we could ever spell out in an article. Thus we see no need for further elaboration in the proposed article.

"We suggest : change 'betimes' to 'when necessary'."

Our reply: No, for the meaning is not that they shall fraternally admonish when that is or appears necessary, but that this shall be done betimes, to bring about improvement before things get worse.

". . . a written report of their visits to the Classis and a copy to the respective Church."

Although we realize that it is customary to send such a copy, we do not consider it advisable to insert a provision to that effect. The brethren from that particular Church hear the reading of the report at Classis and that should be sufficient. If, besides, a Church receives a copy of the report, that may be considered an added courtesy but we do not think it to be a necessity.

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. At the close of the Regional Synod 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 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 its Classis, respectively Regional Synod.

It was suggested to add to the word "two" at the end of the first paragraph "Ministers and two Elders." We consider this to be an unnecessary repetition.

ARTICLE 48. (49) Deputies Regional Synod

Each Regional Synod shall appoint deputies who are to assist the Classes in all cases in which this is provided 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.

One Church suggested to regulate delegation as follows: "Each Classis shall delegate to this Synod two Ministers and two Elders."

As reason was adduced: "As it is the practice now, it is very difficult to appoint capable Elders since most are unknown to those who have to appoint. This problem is considerably lessened by classical appointment. Furthermore, the good practice of having delegates from all classical regions is promoted by this proposed change."

We know from experience that the difficulties referred to here are real ones, although apparently not insurmountable. We also know that the good custom of choosing an equal number from each classical area is followed in by far the most instances and we would not wish to discourage that practice in any way.

Yet we must say that the suggested change would constitute such a deviation from the practice followed in our Reformed Church polity that it may suffice just to mention the above suggestion.

ARTICLE 50. (86) Churches Abroad

The relation with Churches Abroad shall be regulated by the 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.

In two instances we changed "foreign Churches" to "Churches abroad" in accordance with the official name of our Synodically appointed committee. It did not sound proper to do it also in the beginning of the second sentence.

One Church saw "no reason to drop the old expression 'non-essentials,' which is clear enough."

We beg to disagree with the statement that the term "non-essentials" is clear enough, and are convinced that the words "minor points of. . ." cause fewer difficulties.

ARTICLE 51. (new) Mission

The Churches shall endeavour to fulfil their missionary task. When Churches cooperate in this end, they shall, as much as possible, observe the division into Classes and Regional Synods.

The only remark we received was "whether this article is indeed in the right place." It was only a question, and upon pondering it we saw no reason to change that place.

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.

The change in wording is the fruit of remarks received from several Churches.

We could not agree with the suggestion to replace "summarized" with "confessed" as the emphasis is not on the character of the Catechism as a confession of the Church but as a summary of God's Word, as may also appear from the Dutch original: "de somma der Christelijke leer."

As for the suggestion to provide that the Churches shall keep the order of service as adopted or approved by the General Synod, we do not wish to follow it up. A General Synod should respect the freedom of the Churches by not doing any more than suggest an order of worship, and we should have no provision in our Church Order which would obligate the Churches to abide by a suggested order.

ARTICLE 53. (67) Days of Commemoration

Each year the Churches shall commemorate the birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as His outpouring of the Holy Spirit, in the manner decided upon by the Consistory.

Generally speaking, our proposal has been received well by the Churches. From remarks received it became clear that the term "commemoration" is to be preferred, and we have changed the article accordingly.

Two Churches proposed to read "the outpouring of" instead of "His outpouring of."

However, when we wish to continue the line mentioned -- all facts are facts in the course of Christ's redeeming work -- we should retain "His," and with that we are fully in accordance with Acts 2:33, where Peter says very distinctly that "He has poured out."

A few suggestions were received to re-introduce the mention of specific days. One Church even suggested to add "during the week in which these remembrance days are indicated by the calendar."

We strongly disagree with this suggestion. We all know that there is a Church in our midst that decided not to have any weekday services (excepting December 25). Only a few Churches have a service on the so-called Ascension Day. If we inserted the suggested line, we would put a yoke upon the Churches which we are not allowed to impose.

The provision that these deputies, if so required, shall give account of their action was considered redundant by one Church. We do not think so. Deputies are servants of the Churches who, in case a further account is needed, cannot let a written report suffice, but will have to comply with any demand for further explanation and/or elaboration.

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 intimated something by which we were both shocked and hurt. It wrote, "The new art.53 to all intent and purposes (emphasis ours) leaves the observance of Christmas, Easter and Pentecost in the freedom of the Churches. We object to this procedure because the deputies have not just 'freed themselves from such terms as Christmas and Easter' but they leave the observance of these days to the decision of each and every Church."

We may state emphatically that an underhand abolition of the special days of commemoration was farthest from our mind and we take exception to any suggestion in that direction.

From the careful and benevolent reading of our proposal it can be clear that we wish to leave the manner in which in the freedom of the Churches, not the observance as such. No doubt, the use of the term "commemoration" will have made this even clearer.

ARTICLE 54. (66) Day 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 the General Synod.

From one Church the suggestion was received to read -- with omission of the word "of" -- "the presence which is felt," but we cannot see that such would be grammatically correct or even would make sense.

ARTICLE 55. (69) Psalms and Hymns

In the worship services the Psalms shall be sung in the rhyming adopted by the General Synod and the Hymns approved by the General Synod.

It was suggested to read, "only the Psalms and Hymns shall be sung which are approved for use by General Synod."

We repeat: we do not "approve" Psalms, only Hymns, and this term "approve" is inappropriate when used of Psalms. Besides, the suggested reading would leave the possibility that a Church or even a Minister uses a different rhyming.

When choosing our terms, we gratefully benefited from the work of the Netherlands sister Churches.

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.

We replaced the definite article with the indefinite article: "a Minister of the Word," as suggested by one Church. The definite article might give the impression that only a Church's "own" Minister would be permitted to administer the sacraments, and that certainly is not the intention.

The suggestion to change "with the use of" to "using" cannot be followed, as "The sacraments" are the subject of the sentence.

One Church suggested not to insert the provision that the administration of the sacraments shall be done by a Minister of the Word. It considered that to be a "binding ourselves beyond what Scripture says about a very important matter."

Overagainst that we remark that we simple fixed in an article what is the common rule: only those who are Ministers of the Word are allowed to preach the Word and to administer the sacraments. If that is binding ourselves beyond Scripture, we should change it; as long as that rule stands we do nothing improper when fixing it in our Church Order.

As for the argument that times may come when the Churches are deprived of their Ministers -- we make provisions for normal times and trust that the Lord will show the way when such times come upon the Churches.

ARTICLE 57. (56,57) Baptism

The Consistory shall see to it that the covenant of God is sealed by baptism to the children of believers as soon as feasible.

We are of the opinion that "shall see to it" is a better term than "shall ensure," as suggested by one Church.

The term "children of believers" is taken from Article 34 of the Belgic Confession and we cannot agree with the Church that expressed fear that "the word 'believers' is unclear as it could mean various things."

ARTICLE 58. (21) Schools

The Consistory shall see to it 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.

It has been suggested to add this article to article 22, which describes the specific duties of the office of Elder, whereas one Church suggested its deletion altogether.

Another Church proposed to change the beginning to "The Consistory shall exhort the parents . . ." This Church expressed the fear that our formulation "would be used to apply censure to those who do not or who cannot send their children to our schools." As far as we can see, the suggested wording would not preclude such action either and would not be an improvement.

One Church suggested to word this article in such a manner that Reformed education is part of the promise which the parents make at the baptismal font.

From the remarks we gave with our proposed text it may be evident that we cannot go along with this suggestion. Besides, if any fear is to be expressed about possible censure, it certainly has to be expressed if the above suggestion would be accepted.

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 change.

ARTICLE 60. (63) Lord's Supper

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

"Holy Supper" has been changed to "Lord's Supper" as suggested. The same applies to article 61.

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.

No change.

ARTICLE 62. (82) Attestations

Communicant members who move to a sister Church shall be given an attestation regarding their doctrine and conduct, signed by two. In the case of non-communicant members such an attestation shall be sent directly to the Consistory of the Church concerned.

No fewer than five Churches wrote about the verb "to remove"; some suggested to use the verb "to move," some "to depart." We took the word from the Christian Reformed Church Order of 1965, and thus assumed that it was neither antiquated nor improper. However, there is no objection to using the term "to move," and we have changed the article accordingly.

One Church suggested to insert that an attestation shall be given "by their Consistory," but we consider that so obvious that an express provision appears superfluous.

ARTICLE 63. (70) Marriage

The Consistory shall see to it that the members of the Congregation marry only in the Lord, and that the Ministers — as authorized by the Consistory to solemnize marriages — 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; with the solemnization the adopted Form shall be used.

In the first paragraph we inserted "as authorized by the Consistory to solemnize marriages." We were asked where we could find that Ministers are authorized to solemnize marriages and whether, if no provision to that effect were found in our Church Order, we should leave Article 63 at all in our Church Order. It was, therefore, suggested to insert it in article 16, where the specific duties of a Minister of the Word are described. We found the solution in inserting such a provision in Article 63.

One Church suggested to delete this article completely. Its reason was: "Observance of this article (old art. 70) is left in the freedom of the Churches (Synod 1954, Acts Art. 74). The new article 63 nullifies this decision which is only possible via an appeal."

The above reasoning is based on a wrong understanding of the relevant synodical decision. The old art. 70 compelled the Churches to have marriages solemnized in a worship service, and Synod 1954 left that in the freedom of the Churches; but so does our proposed Article 63.

One Church has "strong objections against the solemnization of a marriage in a Church service as there is no indication in Scripture that this is an ecclesiastical matter."

The proposed Article 63 does not compel any Church to have such solemnization in a worship service; however, even if all but one of the Churches had strong objections to that and one Church were convinced that a marriage must be solemnized in a worship service, this Church should not be prevented from doing it.

One Church "would like to see the 'private ceremonies' deleted as in our opinion the solemnization of marriage should take place in a public gathering and witnessed by the Consistory." Another Church suggested to read "either in a public civil ceremony . . ."

We object to the word "civil" in the latter suggestion. The opposition is not "civil" or "ecclesiastical," but : "private" or "in the midst of the Congregation."

When a solemnization takes place "in the midst of the Congregation," i.e. in a worship service, it is clear that such is public.

However, when the solemnization takes place in a private ceremony, it is up to the couple to decide whether it shall be a "private" or "public" affair. A marriage being not an ecclesiastical but a family affair, we do not have the right, via our Church Order, to compel any couple who wish a Minister to solemnize their marriage to arrange a public ceremony, i.e. one which may be attended by anyone wishing to do so. There can be circumstances which make the couple or their parents decide to invite just a few persons and not to have a public ceremony.

Two Churches thought it advisable to add after "worship service" : "at the discretion of the Consistory." Thereby misunderstanding would be prevented, it is argued, as if the choice were up to the members.

We do not deem it necessary to insert these words. Even if a couple requested a service, it would still be up to the Consistory to comply or not to comply with such a request.

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.

"Name" has been pluralized.

CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINE

ARTICLE 65. (71,72) Nature 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 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 save the sinner, which can be done only when the rule given by our Lord in Matthew 18:15-17 is followed in obedience.

The wording has been changed in the manner suggested by two Churches.

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

The Consistory shall not deal with any such matter 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 suggested a positive formulation, but we are convinced that the negative form in which we put it is stronger and shows more clearly the restrictions to which a Consistory is subject in dealing with matters reported to it.

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.

We were justly reminded of our failure to include provisions in the case of non-communicant members and have corrected that in the new redaction.

One Church suggested to "eliminate the clause between dashes" but we are convinced that it should be retained as a safeguard to keep a Consistory from hasty and unfounded actions and to protect the brother or sister from such actions.

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 or -- in case it is made before the Consistory or before two or more office-bearers -- that the Congregation shall be informed afterwards.

One Church suggested to change "his" into "his/her," but we do not deem this necessary. The one who has to read the form will read "his" in the case of a male member and "her" in the case of a female member. Personally we always found it rather confusing when we saw every time "his/her."

One Church wondered whether not the provision should be retained that, in case of disagreement within the Consistory, the neighbouring Church or Churches should be consulted.

In the first place it is difficult to determine what measure of disagreement must be present to necessitate such consultation. Would it be necessary if one or two office-bearers disagreed? Or if half of the brethren disagree so that the Consistory cannot come to a decision? Would such a provision require unanimity? That would have to be spelled out as well.

In the second place, if a Consistory is experiencing difficulties, it is always possible to ask the advice of Classis.

Our conclusion: leave it out.

ARTICLE 69. (78) Readmission

When someone who has been excommunicated repents and desires again to be 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 no less than one month.

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

As is evident, we met the criticism on the formulation of the first paragraph. Now it is clear that it is not the intention to solicit objections from the Congregation.

We were reminded of the Form for Readmission which states that readmission shall take place at the next celebration of the Lord's Supper. We were also asked whether "two consecutive Sundays of announcement" are not sufficient.

In reply, we state that we cannot see any difficulty in this respect. The announcements can still be made on two consecutive Sundays and the readmission of the sinner can still take place at the next celebration of the Lord's Supper, provided the first announcement takes place one month before that celebration.

What we wish to prevent is emergency meetings of the Consistory with the pressure of the celebration of the Lord's Supper coming up on the forthcoming Sunday behind it. If there are any objections, there should be ample time to deal with them and it should not be necessary that meetings are held and visits made one or two days before the celebration of the Lord's Supper, with the final decision to be made in the Consistory room before the morning service.

Although the Congregation will be aware of the repentance, yet it should have ample opportunity to assure itself of the genuineness of the repentance.

One more question was raised, namely "whether there should not be a provision for those excommunicated persons who seek (re-)admission at another church in the federation."

We do not think so. It is a matter of course that that other Church, before making a definite decision, will contact the Church which did excommunicate, but we do not think it to be necessary to make a provision to that effect.

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 the Deacons and of the Consistory and the Deacons 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 and the Deacons. The Classis, with the concurring advice of the deputies of the Regional Synod, shall judge whether the Ministers are to be deposed.

In accordance with artt. 3,9,10,11,12,13,14, we have added the Deacons here. It appears proper that the same body that is involved in the appointment of office-bearers be also responsible for their suspension and/or deposition.

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

As serious and gross sins which are a ground 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 which with the other members of the Church count as ground for excommunication.

We inserted "brawling."

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.

No change.

ARTICLE 73. (85) No Lording It Over

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

One Church suggested deletion of "no office-bearer over other office-bearers" as, in its opinion, this is already stated in article 25. However, careful reading of article 25 makes clear that this article deals with a different matter.

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.

No change.

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 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.

No change.

In closing, we would wish to make a few remarks about the articles which were deleted.

Old Article 57

One Church felt "that a provision should be made for witnesses at a Baptism, e.g. on the mission field, also where a child having lost his parents is with a guardian and is not adopted."

We certainly wish to leave open the possibility that a guardian answers the questions at baptism and takes upon himself the obligations connected with baptism of a ward, but if we understand the article well, the witnesses referred to in it are not the same as those meant in the above mentioned suggestion from one of the Churches.

We do not consider it necessary to insert a special article providing that in exceptional cases witnesses may answer the questions at the baptism of an infant.

Old Article 65

Three Churches were of the opinion that this article should be left in.

The following arguments were brought forward.

"In our opinion this article should be retained, considering that all around us funeral services are being held, and the easy use of these terms could soon imply that we also have them when the opposite is not clearly stated in our Church Order."

"This article was needed at the beginning of the reformation and has been changed off and on, but always has been kept in some form. Even if some of us do not see any danger, what about the future? Almost all our funerals are conducted in a public worship building. We do see a possible danger and would like to have this article retained."

The third Church simply stated, "This article should also be left in," without giving any reason or argument.

It is a fact that practically all funerals among us are conducted in our Churchbuildings. It is equally a fact that all around us people speak of "the service will be held. . ." Even among our own people some use that expression.

Yet we are not convinced by the above remarks from two Churches.

If their objections are to be met, it appears necessary to provide that funerals shall not be conducted from out of our Churchbuildings. No one, however, wishes to make such a provision. We still are convinced that there is no danger that Consistories will convene an official worship service under the supervision of the Consistory when a funeral is to be conducted. That is what the old article 65 wishes to prevent. If any such danger exists, let's keep the old 65 by all means; we don't think it to be real.

In one submission an interesting comparison was made between funerals and marriages, which both are basically family matters. Why should a worship service be convened for the solemnization of a marriage and why is it forbidden to do so for a funeral?

We must say that we are basically in agreement with this criticism and we wished that all Churches came to the conclusion that marriages should not be solemnized in an official worship service. However, this inconsistency has existed for many, many years, and we can do nothing else than mention it.

Old article 83

Two Churches recommended that this article be retained in one form or another. One gave its reasons: "There are small congregations that could be overburdened if there are too many needy members moving in." We were also reminded of the possibility that members of the one Congregation go and seek employment in another province.

In the days when our Church Order was formed the situation was different and this article certainly was in place, with the many wandering believers who were being pursued from the one place to the other, many of them having lost all their possessions. It was most appropriate in those days to provide that money should be given to them to enable them to move on, and that the office-bearers were warned not to be too eager to get rid of them, with the result that smaller congregations might be burdened too much. Although the provision has been retained in later years and centuries, we still think that it makes little sense in our days to retain it any further. How could the Consistory and the Deacons "see to it that smaller sister Churches are not over-burdened by the departing needy members"? It is a matter of course that the needy are supported and that, when they move to another place for reasons deemed sufficient, they will receive money to get there and most likely some extra to help them in the first period in the new place of residence; we do not need a provision for that. As for the warning that Consistories and Deacons should not be too eager to urge such brethren and sisters to move to another place, is it really necessary that we have such a provision? We are not convinced at all.

* * * * *

Herewith we have completed the first part of our mandate and submit the result of our labours to the Churches, awaiting the reaction of the Churches before January 1, 1983.

Seeing that the Consistories have one full year to consider our proposals and to make their reaction known, we wish to stress that we shall not take into consideration any submission received after January 1, 1983. We may expect that the Consistories will fulfil their responsibility by doing what Synod 1980 decided: reactions before January 1, 1983.

We solicit those reactions and request that they be sent to P.O. Box 54, Fergus, Ontario, N1M 2W7.

We further request that we may receive three copies of your submissions.

With our work we have taken into consideration not only submissions received from Churches but also from individual members of the Churches. Even where we did not mention this expressly, we have made thankful use of them.

As for the submission by bro. Groenewegen, we took due note of it, but we are convinced that the main thrust of his reasoning is not in accordance with our Reformed Church Polity.

Respectfully submitted
Yours in Christ

J. Geertsema
W. Pouwelse
W.W.J. VanOene

FORM OF SUBSCRIPTION
FOR THE DOCENTS AT THE THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE OF THE CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCHES

We, the undersigned, docents at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches, do hereby, sincerely and in good conscience before the Lord, declare by this our subscription that we heartily believe and are persuaded that all the articles and points of doctrine, contained in the doctrinal standards of the Canadian Reformed Churches: the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort, do fully agree with the Word of God.

We promise therefore diligently to teach and faithfully to defend the aforesaid doctrine, without directly or indirectly contradicting the same by our public teaching or writing. We declare, moreover, that we not only reject all errors that militate against this doctrine, but that we are disposed to refute and contradict these and to exert ourselves in keeping the Church free from such errors. And if hereafter any difficulties or different sentiments respecting the aforesaid doctrine should arise in our minds, we promise that we will neither publicly nor privately propose, teach, or defend the same, either by teaching or writing, until we have first revealed such sentiments to the Governors, that the same may be examined by them, being ready always cheerfully to submit to their judgment under the penalty in case of refusal to be, by that very fact, suspended from our office.

And further, if at any time the Governors, upon sufficient grounds of suspicion and to preserve the uniformity and purity of doctrine, may deem it proper to require of us a further explanation of our sentiments respecting any particular article of the above mentioned doctrinal standards, we do hereby promise to be always willing and ready to comply with such requisition, under the penalty above mentioned, reserving for ourselves, however, the right of appeal in case we should believe ourselves aggrieved by the sentence of the Governors, and until a decision is made upon such an appeal, we will acquiesce in the determination and judgment already passed.

(Acts Synod Edmonton, 1965, Art. 180)

A FORM OF SUBSCRIPTION
WHICH MIGHT BE USED BY THE CHURCHES FOR THEIR OWN LOCAL USE

We, the undersigned, Ministers, Elders, and Deacons of the Canadian Reformed Church at do hereby sincerely and in good conscience before the Lord, declare by this our subscription that we heartily believe and are persuaded that all the articles and points of doctrine, contained in the doctrinal standards of the Canadian Reformed Churches : the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort, do fully agree with the Word of God.

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