

1983
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ADDITION TO THE REPORT ON THE REVISION OF THE CHURCH ORDER

Esteemed Brothers,

The promised submission of the text of the Revised Church Order to language experts resulted in the following changes, none of which is substantial but all of which concern correct wording and/or punctuation.

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.*

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 members 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 3.*

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.

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(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 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.

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

No one shall serve 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.

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 his having entered upon another vocation.

ARTICLE 13. (13) Retirement of Ministers

If a minister of the Word, upon reaching retirement age, does retire, or if, according to the judgment of the consistory, with the concurring advice of classis and of deputies of regional synod, he is rendered incapable of performing the duties of his office, 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.

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.

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.

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, and 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.

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.

ARTICLE 40. (38) Constitution of a 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 a Consistory

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

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 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 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 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 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 to classis.

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 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 or regional synod respectively.

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

ARTICLE 48. (49) Deputies of 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 discharged them.

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.

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 approved by general synod.

ARTICLE 59. (59) Baptism of Adults

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

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 of Marriage shall be used.

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 to open that kingdom, the consistory shall ensure that it is 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 offence 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.

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

The consistory shall not deal with any matter pertaining to purity of doctrine or piety of life that is 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.

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, so that the congregation may be engaged in prayer and admonition, and the excommunication may 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 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 on the Part of 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.

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

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

In some of the above corrected articles the only thing that was changed was a colon or comma; in other articles a word had to be deleted or added.

Twenty copies of these corrected articles are sent to the convening Church for General Synod: one for each of the delegates and four spares.