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DRAFT - REPORT

CHURCH ORDER

JANUARY 1979

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1980

To the Consistories.

Dear Brethren.

Herewith you receive "a complete draft" of our revised Church Order, in accordance with the decision of the General Synod of Coaldale, 1977, Acts, Art. 71, which Synod instructed our Committee

"to forward a complete draft along with brief explanations to the Churches within one year and to invite comments on it."

With this complete draft we also add "brief explanations" wherever required. We understand that it was not Synod's intention that we are to write a commentary, however concise, on our Church Order, but that we are to explain the changes which we propose as well as deletions and/or additions.

Complying with Synod's mandate, we hereby request the Churches to send their comments and/or criticisms before AUGUST 1, 1979, to the address of the last-undersigned, Rev. W.W.J. VanOene, P.O. Box 54, Fergus, Ontario, N1M 2W7.

We request the Churches to do so before August 1, 1979, because we need sufficient time to evaluate remarks received, suggestions made, changes proposed, and there will -- we hope -- be some extra time available in August, when Catechism Classes have not yet started and the number of meetings has not yet multiplied. We need time to prepare our final report to Synod, copies of which are to be with the Churches before January 31, 1980.

We have tried to keep the Church Order as brief as possible, although we have not deleted any elements which should be considered essential, sacrificing them to the desire to be brief.

When you read this draft, you will note that we have tried to follow a certain pattern. Wherever possible, we begin each "section" with an article which, more or less, gives general guidelines which introduce the following articles.

We draw your attention, e.g., to the following articles.

Article 3 speaks of the election to office in general, and thereby prevents unnecessary repetition.

Article 52 speaks of the worship services in general, article 56 about the sacraments in general.

Article 65 speaks of the nature and purpose of Church discipline.

We have also deleted some articles. At the end of our report you will find them mentioned, together with the reason(s) why we deleted them.

Behind each number of the (new) article you will find between brackets the number which this provision has or had in the Church Order.

We wish to express our gratitude to the Rev. P. Lok of Kampen, the Netherlands who, when asked, immediately provided us with the text of the Church Order as adopted by the Synod of Groningen 1978 of our Netherlands sister Churches; thereby we were enabled to consult the decisions of that Synod and receive considerable profit from it for our work.

Now follow the articles as we present them in this draft revision.

Article 1. (1) Purpose

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

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

Remarks:

The wording has been changed as suggested by the Advisory Committee III of General Synod 1977.

We further added "worship" and switched around "assemblies" and "supervision of doctrine" as can be seen from our draft. We deem it more logical to have the supervision of doctrine immediately after the offices.

No further comments are necessary; we believe that the article speaks for itself.

T H E O F F I C E S

Article 2.(2) The Offices

There are three offices in the Church: those of the Minister of the Word, of the Elder, and of the Deacon. A Minister may be set apart for the work of a Missionary or of a Professor of Theology.

Remarks:

From the previous Article 2 we deleted the "Doctors" as being a special office in the Church. It is the general consensus that by "pastors and teachers" in Ephesians 4:11 the Apostle means the same persons and not two different persons or positions. The latter opinion was held, among others, by Calvin and Beza, but has since been abandoned.

The Advisory Committee of General Synod 1977 questioned the validity of the claim that there are three offices. Ministers of the Word, they argue, and Elders are two different "aspects" or "branches" of the one

office of Elder. They advise "to reconsider the THREE-OFFICE view, taking into account the TWO-OFFICE view of the Scriptures which sees the offices also basically as a unit (presbyters and presbytery) in the office of Christ."

It should be borne in mind that in our Church Order we do not lay down or set forth "principles." In our Church Order we have the practical application of the "principles" as found in Holy Writ and repeated in our Confessions.

And for all practical purposes we have three offices in the Church. In our Liturgical Forms we differentiate even more between the office of a Minister of the Word on the one hand and of the Elders and Deacons on the other hand than between Ministers and Elders on the one hand and Deacons on the other hand.

When providing that there are three offices in the Church, our Church Order does not give a definition of what an office is; it simply described the factual situation which, however, is not in conflict with what the Lord teaches us in His Word.

The Advisory Committee also advised to "consider 'Missionary/evangelists' since both terms have been used interchangeably and since they have the same task (cf. Art. 6 -- 'for the gathering of the Church from among the heathen or from among those who have become estranged from the Gospel'). It is a biblical expression."

We do not deem it necessary or even advisable to insert the term "evangelist." It certainly is used in the Holy Scriptures but it is not certain at all that it has the same 'value' there which we ascribe to it nowadays.

The term "Home Mission" is being used with increased frequency and thus no other term than "Missionary" would be needed. This term could be used irrespective of whether he is to go to faraway regions or is to work closer to home.

Article 3. (3,4,22,24) Election to Office

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

Only those male members shall be eligible for office who have made profession of faith and meet the requirements 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 with the Deacons. The Consistory with 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 with the Deacons shall present to the Congregation either as many names as there are vacancies to be filled, or twice as many names from which number the Congregation shall choose one-half. Those elected shall be appointed by the Consistory with 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.

Remarks:

Advisory Committee III of General Synod 1977 suggested a few changes in wording which have been taken over.

It further stated that "the manner of 'appointing' without election by the Congregation is not made clear."

Our Church Order is not a manual in which all sorts of actions and procedures are to be described.

From our proposed redaction it is clear that the Consistory with the Deacons is to draw up regulations for the election of office-bearers. In those regulations the various procedures can be described. We wished to draw the attention to:

- a. The election is to be done at all times with the cooperation of the Congregation. That applies also in case the election consists of either accepting or rejecting a single candidate for an office, e.g. a Minister of the Word;
- b. There should be local regulations, since having written rules by which to go will prevent many difficulties.

Further, the position of the Consistory with the Deacons as the appointing authority has been upheld.

The Church at Barrhead proposed to Synod 1977 to "Delete in art. 3 the words 'male members,' since several sound reformed scholars are convinced that there were deaconesses in the apostolic churches, and that Paul in I Timothy 3:11 refers to female deacons. By inserting 'male members' in article 3 of the Church Order, the door will be closed for what may be Scriptural."

We are certainly convinced that the door is indeed closed to having female office-bearers, and that such is Scriptural. The question is not whether the sisters in the Church may be called upon to fulfil certain positions or to perform certain tasks in the midst of the Congregation, but whether they are allowed to be an office-bearer in Christ's Church.

That's what Article 3 deals with. The proposed article 3 does not render it impossible to make use of the gifts of the sisters. Whether they are called deaconesses is immaterial; they certainly are no office-bearers.

Thus we see no reason to leave out "Male members" but we do see abundant reason to leave it in.

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; or
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

In a Church with no more than one Minister the advice of the Counsellor shall be asked when that Church extends a call.

Remarks:

1. Although we do not deem it necessary to change the negative wording into positive all the time, we did meet the desire of the Synodical Advisory Committee to a large extent. In some cases, however, we deemed it better to retain the negative form of the provision since it expresses

more strongly and clearly what is being provided in that specific instance.

2. The Advisory Committee stated that 4C is a questionable addition and could be omitted. That it could be omitted is something with which we agree. That it is a questionable addition is something we venture to doubt. To our knowledge we do not have a synodical decision regarding a second call in the same vacancy. The practice among us has been the same as in the Netherlands Churches: Go and ask the advice of Classis if you consider a second call to the same Minister. Since article 4 deals with the general provisions regarding calls and eligibility, we deem it advisable to insert the above provision. Generally speaking, a Minister is not eligible for a second call; if the situation has changed so much that a second call is warranted, let Classis judge about that.

Article 5. (4,5,11) Ordination or Installation of Ministers of the Word

- A. Regarding those who have not served in the Ministry before, the following shall be observed:
They shall be ordained only after the Classis has approved the call.
The Classis shall approve the call
1. Upon satisfactory testimony concerning the soundness of doctrine and conduct of the Candidate;
 2. Upon a peremptory examination of the Candidate with satisfactory results. This examination shall take place with the cooperation of deputies of the Regional Synod.
- 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 with the Deacons and from the Classis that he has been honourably discharged from his service in that Church and in the Classis.

Remarks:

1. We have retained the word "peremptory" and decided not to replace it by the suggested "final." The term "peremptory" has become a standing expression in the practice within the Churches and it expresses better than the word "final" what the intention is. It is not just so that the Candidate submits to a "final," his "last" examination; it is so that he submits to a "final and concluding, decisive examination." We therefore

decided to retain the old term.

2. As can be noticed from the revised text above, we did change the wording of the last part of the article, hopefully thereby having made clearer what is meant.

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.

Remarks:

Here is one of the articles where we decided to keep the negative wording. We did change "called" into "serve", since the latter is more accurate.

We also made a change in the last part and added "other" and "ministerial." Fear was expressed that the former wording might open a door to persons accepting all sorts of positions and still retaining the status of a Minister of the Gospel. In order to prevent that, we stressed that it should be a "ministerial" task; we were thinking specifically of chaplaincies in hospitals or in the Armed Forces, just to mention those two.

Article 7. (9) Recent Converts

No one who only recently has come to the confession of the Reformed Religion shall be declared eligible for call within the Churches unless he has been carefully examined by the Classis with the concurring advice of deputies of the Regional Synod, and has been well tested for some time.

Remark:

This article should not be considered redundant with reference to article 4. It was wise when our forefathers inserted this provision and we also shall do wisely when we retain it. If someone has not grown up in a Reformed family and has not received the training "from his youth up" which our children receive, it will already be hard enough on him to grow into the "Reformed pattern," so to speak. How much more will that apply if someone aspires to the ministry and will have to guide others.

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 ex-

exceptional gifts: 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 a word of edification 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.

Remarks:

Upon the advice of the Advisory Committee Synod 1977, we inserted a colon after "gifts."

As for the suggestion to provide that exceptional gifts "should include knowledge of the theological disciplines with the exception of the biblical languages (Hebrew and Greek)," we decided against that. The Advisory Committee speaks here of something which belongs to the Classical examination; however, before the Classical examination can take place, the Regional Synod must have agreed that the exceptional gifts are present. Besides, knowledge as such (even of the "theological disciplines") is not a part of the exceptional gifts; it can only be the fruit reaped by someone who uses his exceptional gifts.

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 with 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.

Remark:

As can be noted, we changed "connected" into "bound."

Article 10 (11) Proper Support

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

Remarks:

Our committee was certainly aware of the danger that the expression "as representing the Congregation" can be misunderstood and misinterpreted. However, we simply followed the Form for the Ordination of Elders and

Deacons, where we read, "And thus the Ministers of the Word, together with the Elders, form a body or assembly, being as a council of the Church, representing the whole Church." Also in the latter case every thought as if the Consistory should be a "Hoise of Representatives" is wholly absent.

Article 11. (11) Dismissal

A Consistory shall not dismiss its Minister without the approbation of the Classis and the concurring advice of deputies of the Regional Synod.

If a Minister of the Word is judged to be totally unfit and incapable to serve any Congregation fruitfully and unto its edification, without there being any reason for Church discipline, the Consistory shall not dismiss him from his ministry without the approbation of the Classis and the concurring advice of 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.

Remarks:

The Advisory Committee Synod 1977 stated that the above provision is "too specific. A general statement is enough, otherwise we receive a church law-book and not a church order."

We have examined the proposed article 11 and have not found it any more specific than, e.g., article 4. We share the Advisory Committee's concern about getting a law-book, but the committee did not prove its assertion quoted above.

We deem it necessary, to safeguard both the Church and the Minister, to give (indeed general) guidelines for a procedure as meant. We would not know which element could be safely deleted from the proposed article.

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

Article 13. (13) Retirement of Ministers

If a Minister of the Word, upon reaching retirement age, does retire,

or if he is rendered incapable of performing the duties of his office according to the judgment of the Consistory with the 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.

Remarks:

1. As advised by the Advisory Committee Synod 1977, we deleted the word "connection" which was found in the former proposed article 13.

We also made a change in the last part of the article; the obligation of the Church towards a Minister's widow and/or other dependents is now expressed in a separate, brief sentence.

2. As for "retirement age," we fail to see why this needs further explanation. Until now no provision was inserted which even gave Ministers the express right to retire at a certain age; we deemed it advisable simply to express in this article what has been a fact in the Churches for many decades. For that reason the old redaction cannot be used.

Further specification of "retirement age" would seem undesirable, since the legal retirement age might change in the course of time. The proposed wording does not require Ministers to retire upon reaching the legal age.

Article 14. (14) Temporary Release

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

Article 15. (15) Preaching in Other Places

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

Article 16. (16) The Office of the Ministers of the Word

The specific duties of the office of the Ministers of the Word are: thoroughly and sincerely to ^{preach} present to their people the Word of the Lord, and to apply the same; 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 at 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.

Remarks:

The description of the task of the Ministers of the Word has been derived from the Form for their ordination or installation. If any false dilemmas are created, that is done by the relevant Form.

We do realize that the Liturgical Committee may come with a considerably different Form in their report to the forthcoming Synod. In that case we would suggest to take that proposed wording. For the time being, however, we are safest when we abide by the accepted Form.

A second general remark is that, when describing the task of the Ministers of the Word, we do not deny that others may have a task which partially overlaps theirs. The task of visiting the members has also been given to the Elders, although that is not the case with the task of instructing the children. We wish to refer to our remark that the Church Order shows the way in which "principles" are to be applied in the daily practice of the Churches and of Churchlife. It would be inadvisable to bring into our Church Order a more or less "technical description" or even definition of what the Office of a Minister, of an Elder, and of a Deacon is. The remark of the Advisory Committee III that visiting belongs to "his office as elder" brings in an element which should be avoided in our Church Order. We simply described what the task of a Minister of the Word is as "pastor and teacher" as this task is described by our adopted Form.

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.

Remark:

We changed the article according to the suggestions of the Advisory Committee Synod 1977. We did deem it more advisable, however, to read "in other matters."

Article 18. (new) Missionaries

When Ministers of the Word are sent out as Missionaries, they shall be and remain subject to the provisions of 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.

Remarks:

The Advisory Committee 1977 suggested to put it in this manner: Missionaries/Evangelists.

We did already make some remarks about "evangelists" in connection with the second article. We wish to add a few words to that at this place.

If the Churches had recognized an office of "Evangelist" as a long neglected office or as a newly-established office, matters would be different. Now insertion of the term "Evangelist" would be smuggling in through the backdoor a term and concept which is by no means generally accepted. We did not feel free to accept the Advisory Committee's suggestion.

Article 19. (18) Professors of Theology

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 that so 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.

Remarks:

We added the first sentence, that the Churches shall maintain an institution for the training for the Ministry. We did that because otherwise the speaking, all of a sudden, of Professors of Theology would somewhat hang up in the air. As with other articles, so here we also consulted what our Netherlands sister Churches have adopted at their latest General Synod.

Article 20. (19) Students of Theology

The Churches shall exert themselves that there be students of theology.

They shall extend financial aid to those who are in need of it.

Article 21. (20) An Edifying Word

In Churches in which persons have been judged competent, according to Article 8, to be prepared for the Ministry of the Word, or where others have received this right in harmony with general ecclesiastical regulations, it may be arranged that, for their own training, and in order that they may become known to the Congregations, they be allowed to speak a word of edification in the public worship services.

Remarks:

1. We did take over the suggestion of the Advisory Committee to change "meetings of public worship" to "worship services," although it may sound too much like translated Dutch ("erediensten").

2. We did not take over the suggestion to change "to be prepared" into "to prepare themselves." The expression "to be prepared" is in accordance with the Dutch text and also with the text of the Christian Reformed Church Order of 1920. Candidates and students not only "prepare themselves" (and specifically not during the period in which they are allowed to speak an edifying word) but, even more so, they are "being prepared" by remarks and criticism from the Churches and the instruction they may receive from the Churches.

Article 22. (23) The Office of Elder

The specific duties of the office of Elder are: To have the oversight of the Church, to rule the same with the Ministers of the Word, and diligently to pay attention to it whether everyone properly deports himself in his confession and conduct; to admonish those who behave themselves disorderly, to prevent, as much as possible, the Sacraments from being profaned, and to exercise the Church discipline; further, to have regard unto the doctrine and conduct of the Ministers of the Word, to the end that all things may be directed to the edification of the Church, and that no strange doctrine be taught.

Remarks:

1. The Advisory Committee suggested to delete "the specific duties of." However, we deem it advisable to retain those words. In Article

16 we did the same.

2. We are to bear in mind that we do not give a definition of the office of Elder, nor do we give an exhaustive list of what they are to do or, perhaps, are expected to do. We only mention the specific duties of their office and even here do not claim completeness.

3. We have taken the terms from the Form for the Ordination. It is possible that the Committee on the Liturgical Forms comes with a different proposal to the next Synod. We can always change this article accordingly. For the time being it appears advisable to abide by those sentences as are found in our present Form.

4. We do not consider it necessary to mention with the separate offices that which is common to them.

5. If anyone comes with Scriptural proof that it is one of the specific duties of an Elder to admonish others to the Christian religion, we shall hastily insert that. For the time being we decided to delete it.

Article 23. (25,16) The Office of Deacon

The specific duties of the office of Deacon are: Diligently to collect moneys and other gifts for the needy, to do their utmost endeavours that many good means may be procured for the relief of the needy; faithfully and diligently to distribute the same to the indigent and to exercise care that the gifts are not misused; to assist and comfort the indigent not only with external gifts but also with comfortable words from the Word of God.

In places where others are devoting themselves to the care of the needy, the Deacons shall seek mutual understanding with them -- if deemed necessary -- to the end that the gifts may all the better be distributed among those who have greatest need.

Remarks:

1. We brought the provisions concerning the office and work of the Deacons into one article.

2. We partly refer to our remarks with Article 22.

3. We do not consider it redundant to provide that the Deacons shall "do their utmost . . .," for those "means" are by no means just financial means. Deacons oftentimes help even better and more by providing assistance which has nothing to do with money.

4. We doubt that it is an "important omission" (as the Advisory Committee had it) that the Deacons shall extend help to "strangers." Those strangers -- we are convinced -- are not "non-members of the Church," but Churchmembers from other places who had to flee because of persecutions. In our given situation those words "not only to those who belong to the

Congregation but also to strangers" are not relevant.

5. The matter of giving account to the Consistory is dealt with in the proposed Article 42.

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 with 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.

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 with the Deacons.

Remark:

We did delete the word "rights" in harmony with the change in Article 16.

Article 26. (53,54) Subscription to the Confessions

All Ministers of the Word, Elders, Deacons, and Professors of Theology shall subscribe to the Confessions of the Canadian Reformed Churches in the manner decided upon by the Churches. Anyone refusing to subscribe in that manner shall not be ordained or installed in office.

Ministers of the Word who refuse to do so shall, because of that very fact, be immediately suspended from office by the Consistory or the Classis; and if they obstinately persist in their refusal, they shall be deposed from office.

Remarks:

1. The Advisory Committee suggested to delete "Professors of Theology" since "all 'Ministers of the Word' includes them." Not necessarily so. It is quite well conceivable that someone be appointed Professor of Theology who is not a Minister of the Word. There is nothing against and much in favour of retaining these words.

2. We deem it necessary (contrary to the suggestion of the Advisory Committee) to retain "Anyone refusing to subscribe in that manner shall

not be ordained or installed in office." The Advisory Committee states that "ordination or installation takes place before subscribing to the Three Forms of Unity." However, what about Candidates who sign at a Classis before their ordination? And what about it when a Church decides that signing shall take place before the ordination or installation?

3. The Advisory Committee suggested to change "Ministers of the Word who refuse . . ." into "Those who refuse. . ." We do not see how this would be possible, since Ministers of the Word can -- in this case -- be suspended either by the Consistory with the Deacons or the Classis, but Elders and Deacons are (if the case be) suspended by the Consistory with the Deacons alone.

Article 27. (55) False Doctrines

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 teaching, of refutation, of warning, and of admonition, as well in the Ministry of the Word as in Christian teaching and family-visiting.

Remark:

We considered the article to be more in place here than where it originally found a place in our Church Order.

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 their favour towards the Church, that the Church of Christ may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way.

Remark:

We did take over the translation of I Tim. 2:2 as found in the Revised Standard Version.

O F T H E A S S E M B L I E S

Article 29. (29) The Ecclesiastical Assemblies

Four kinds of ecclesiastical assemblies shall be maintained: the Con-

sistory, the Classis, the Regional Synod, and the General Synod.

Article 30. (30) Ecclesiastical Matters

These assemblies shall deal with no other than ecclesiastical matters and 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.

If it concerns a new matter which has not previously been presented to that major assembly, it can be put on the agenda only when the minor assembly has dealt with it.

Remarks:

1. As for the first sentence: we followed the Advisory Committee's suggestion.

2. The last sentence has been taken over from our Netherlands sister Churches. We deem it a valuable addition which would prevent that a General Synod suddenly is faced with a proposal from a Church about a matter which has never before been presented to a major assembly, and has to decide about it since it concerns a matter in which all the Churches are involved.

We do not even have to think of a General Synod in the first place; the same applies to a Regional Synod or even a Classis: it prevents that matters are presented and dealt with which have not even been discussed by the Consistories.

The proposed addition does not prevent that a Church addresses itself to a General Synod about a matter already before the broadest assembly; it would prevent that a Church proposes a matter which is completely new, even though it can be said that it concerns the Churches in general and is a matter belonging to all the Churches in common.

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 a 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 this Church Order.

Remark:

We changed the wording of the second part somewhat.

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 such in which either they themselves or their Churches are particularly involved.

Remark:

We changed the beginning of this article.

Article 33. (46) Proposals

What was once decided upon be not again proposed, unless it is deemed necessary that it be changed.

Remark:

We followed the advice of the Advisory Committee and inserted only the general rule.

We see no reason to place this article "after the articles on the assemblies," for it fits just as well before we start dealing with the assemblies separately.

Article 34. (32) Proceedings

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

Remark:

It could be argued that this article is redundant. However, we decided against deleting it. If it were not in our Church Order we might not have introduced it; now that it is in it, we do not feel like deleting it.

Article 35. (34,35) President

- In all assemblies there shall be a president whose task it is
- a. To present clearly and explain 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.

Remark:

We decided to delete "his office shall cease when the assembly has been adjourned" or "ends". In the first place: as for major assemblies, once they have been adjourned, they no longer exist. And secondly: if we should retain those words, we would be compelled to differentiate between the president of the Consistory and the president of major assemblies:

the former position (as that of the clerk) is "permanent" and does not cease to exist once the meeting has been adjourned. Thus it appeared to be better to delete that whole sentence.

Article 36. (34) Clerk

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

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.

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.

Remarks:

Here again the question may be raised whether our Church Order should not "be brought into harmony with our Confession." We have not been able to find a convincing, satisfactory explanation for the difference between our Confession -- which states that the Ministers, Elders, and Deacons together form a "council" of the Church -- and our Church Order which speaks consistently of the Consistory as consisting of the Minister(s) and the Elders.

Some Churches have tried to find a "solution" by using the term "Council" for the body consisting of all office-bearers and the term "Consistory" for the body consisting of the Minister(s) and Elders. Such, however, appears to be confusing and we deem it wise not to advise into that direction. Such terminology seems to bring no "solution" at all.

In some instances the term "restricted" and "general" Consistory are used. These terms, however, are contradictions-in-terms: If the Deacons belong to the Consistory, they are not to be excluded by a "restriction," and if they do not belong to the Consistory, the term "general" is wrong, for a meeting with the Deacons is not a "general Consistory meeting;" it is a meeting of the Consistory with the Deacons.

The only instance when the term "general Consistory" might be applicable would be that mentioned in Article 39; however, when that is the case, there are no "restricted Consistory meeting" at all.

We would, therefore, plead for a continuation of the simple terminology "Consistory" and "Consistory with the Deacons;" these terms are clear to all and every one who know the Reformed manner of Church government.

In the case when the Deacons have been "added to the Consistory" it would not be necessary to use the term "Consistory with the Deacons."

Article 39.(38) Consistory with 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 when the number of Elders or the number of Deacons is less than three.

Remark:

From the Dutch Church Order (1978) we have taken over the provision that also when the number of Deacons is less than three, the Deacons shall be added to the Consistory. The old saying "Three form a college" should be borne in mind in this context, too. If there are only two Deacons, they cannot justly be called "The College of Deacons." It is better in that case too to add them to the Consistory.

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.

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.

Article 42. (40) Meetings of Deacons

Likewise 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.

Remark:

The old article contained the provision that "the Ministers shall take good heed and if necessary they shall be present."

We see no reason why we should have a provision like that. If it is a matter of supervision, the Elders too should be mentioned, for it is their task as well "to have the oversight of the Church, to rule the same with the Ministers of the Word."

In case it is the intention to open the possibility for the Deacons to request the Minister to be present and to serve the brothers with his

advice, we must say that no such provision is necessary: it is a matter of course that the Minister is available for that.

In case they wish to do so, the Deacons can always come for advice to the Consistory.

Article 43. (new) Archives

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

Article 44. (41,42) 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 was 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.

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.

Remarks:

We deleted the provision that the president shall ask whether the Consistory meetings are held, whether the schools are taken care of, etc. Apart from the fact that it is seldom done in that manner or, if the president does ask those questions, he seldom receives a direct answer to the questions, we are to consider that the deleted questions may have been "up to date" and most relevant in the years when our Church Order was drawn up and was being used for the first period of time, but that right now they may have become antiquated and therefore are to be abrogated.

The question has been asked whether not too much honour and too dominant a place is assigned to the Ministers when they are permitted to speak at a Classis to which they have not been delegated, whereas Elders do not have that privilege.

We can well go along with the argumentation which the Dutch deputies followed in their defense of keeping this provision in. Their main argument in favour appears to be that the Churches maintain an institution for the training for the Ministry in order that they may have Ministers of the Word who have received special instruction in doctrine (refutation of errors) and Church Polity; and that the Churches will do well when using this "arsenal," available in their Ministers, to the fullest extent.

Article 45. (new) Counsellors

Each vacant Church shall request the Classis to appoint as counsellor the Minister it desires as such, in order 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.

Remark:

On purpose the wording has been chosen so that a Church shall not be compelled to accept a Minister as counsellor whom she did not wish to have. We deem it necessary that a Church does have a counsellor; we deem it equally necessary that her own wishes in this matter be respected.

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.

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 Minister 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.

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.

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.

Article 50. (86) Foreign Churches

The relation with foreign Churches 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 foreign Churches shall not be rejected.

Remark:

Until now we had no provision covering what is known as "Church cor-

respondence."

The previous article 86 finds a place in the second half of this Article 50, and we have that preceded by a provision concerning sister Church relationship with foreign Churches.

Such relationship appears to be a matter of the Churches in common, since it is not a relationship which, e.g. Church A. in Canada has with Church A. in the Netherlands, but a relationship which the one Church Federation has with the other Church federation.

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.

Remarks:

We adopted the Church Order as it was in force in the Netherlands Churches in 1951/1952. It was a Church Order in which no provision was found dealing with the missionary task of the Church. We inserted such a provision at the appropriate place of a previous similar provision. It seems logical to have that provision here: first we stated that the relation with foreign Churches is in the province of General Synod; now we speak about mission which -- at least when it is undertaken in foreign countries -- may lead to the establishing of a sister Church federation abroad.

It appears advisable to state that -- as much as possible -- the division into Classes and Regional Synods be observed.

W O R S H I P . S A C R A M E N T S , A N D C E R E M O N I E S

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

The Consistory shall call the Congregation together for worship two times on the Day of the Lord.

The Consistory shall see to it that, as a rule, once every Sunday the doctrine of God's Word as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism is explained.

Remark:

This article is a general provision: before we speak about what is to be done, sung, etc. in the worship services, we are to provide that such services shall be called.

We inserted in this article that in one of the two services the Heidelberg Catechism shall be taken as guideline for the preaching. We did

not consider it necessary to provide that this shall be done in the afternoon services.

Article 53. (67) Remembrance

Each year the Churches shall remember 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.

Remark:

The change in wording will be obvious. We have freed ourselves from such terms as "Christmas" and "Easter" and speak now solely and clearly about the decisive moments in the life of our Saviour both before and after His ascension.

We did not wish to mention any specific days, but provided that the Consistory shall decide upon the manner in which the remembering of Christ's birth, death, and so on, shall be done by the Congregation. It may be that a Consistory decides that a service shall be held on the so-called Ascension Day, but a Consistory may also remember the fact of Christ's ascension into heaven when the Congregation comes together on the Day of the Lord.

The only thing we should ascertain is that those facts are remembered by the Churches; let each and every Church decide upon the manner in which.

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.

Remark:

We deleted the word "pestilence." Although it is possible that an epidemic of a known or unknown disease breaks out, it is not very likely. If such a thing should happen, it is already covered by the word "general calamities."

Further we deleted the word "latest" before "General Synod," and changed "shall" into "may." It is up to those Churches whether they will call a day of prayer.

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.

Remarks:

The wording has been chosen carefully, in agreement with the text as the Netherlands Churches have adopted it.

Of the Psalms we cannot say that they are "adopted" or that we "approve" of them. We only adopted a rhyming of the Psalms.

Not of all Hymns can we say that we "adopted a rhyming." That could be done only in the case of rhymings of Scripture passages. There are also Hymns which we took over as they were made by their author. And then, in the case of the Hymn, the term "approved" appears appropriate.

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 the Minister of the Word, with the use of the adopted Forms.

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.

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.

Remarks:

We consider the proposed wording of this article a great improvement.

By placing it immediately after the article on the baptism of the children of believers, we wish to express the close connection there is between baptism and the instruction which our children receive at school.

Although -- we are convinced -- the promise which the parents give to instruct and have their children instructed in the aforesaid doctrine refers to what the parents themselves do at home and to the instruction the children receive in and by the Church, yet we are endeavouring to express -- by placing this article immediately after the one on baptism -- that the Consistories are to see to it that the parents do their utmost endeavour and take care that, if they can prevent such, at school be not broken down that which they build up at home and in the Church.

We speak here of the Consistories: they shall see to it whether the parents are faithful in this respect, too.

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.

Remark:

We do not deem it necessary to retain the provision that adults are "obliged also to partake in the Lord's Supper, which they shall promise to do at their baptism." Such a provision may have been necessary in olden days, we do not see the need of it.

Besides -- and this is a remark which we will make again when we come to the articles on Church discipline -- in our Church Order we should not have provisions stating or describing what Churchmembers are to do, but only what Churches, office-bearers, and ecclesiastical assemblies are to do.

If there should be any provision regarding adults who are baptized setting forth their obligation to partake of the Lord's Supper, it would have to read, "The Consistories shall see to it that adults who have been ingrafted into Christ's Church by holy baptism, also partake in the Lord's Supper." However, such a provision would seem superfluous, since the Consistories do take heed of the doctrine and conduct of the members.

Article 60. (63) Holy Supper

The holy supper shall be celebrated at least once every three months.

Remark:

It appears superfluous to provide that the holy supper shall be celebrated at least "every two or three months." "At least every three months" is sufficient, for that leaves open the possibility of every two months. On the other hand, "at least every two . . . months" appears to exclude the possibility of every three months.

Article 61. (61) Admission to the Holy Supper

The Consistory shall admit to the holy 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.

Remark:

On purpose we propose "of the Reformed faith," for we make profession of what we believe. That someone somewhere, in some form, has "professed his faith" is not sufficient.

We also propose to mention this rule from the rules for correspond-

ence with Churches abroad, that we accept each other's attestations. It is no question or subject to discussion whether we shall accept an attestation from a sister Church. Nor is it subject to discussion whether we shall accept a member who presents a good attestation. The discussion (and possible refusal) comes only when someone presents a bad attestation.

Article 62. (82) Attestations

Communicant members who remove 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.

Remark:

It appears logical to have the article about attestations immediately after the provision of Article 61.

We did not think it to be necessary to insert a provision making the (good) custom of informing the Consistory concerned of the departure of a communicant member obligatory and part of the Church Order.

Article 63. (70) Marriage

The Consistory shall see to it that the members of the Congregation marry only in the Lord, and that the Minister(s) 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.

Remark:

By the proposed redaction we have covered all the elements which have been brought to the fore by which the importance of a truly Christian marriage for the Church was stressed.

Since the Ministers receive their registration as a person authorized to solemnize marriages by virtue of their position as a Minister of one of the Churches, it appears to be a logical consequence that also this part of their work is under the supervision of the Consistory.

Article 64. (60) Church Records

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

Remark:

This is the proper place to provide that the Churches shall keep proper records of the activities and ceremonies mentioned in the previous articles.

THE CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINE

Article 65. (71,72) Nature and Purpose

Since the 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 see to it that it be used to punish the sins, both against the purity of doctrine and the piety of conduct, and to win the sinner, which can be done only when the rule given by our Lord in Matthew 18:15-17 is followed in obedience.

Remark:

In this general article we mention the Lord's command given in Mat. 18:15-17. This command "covers" more than only the "private" admonitions: it covers the whole discipline from private admonitions to excommunication.

The proposed wording reminds us of Lord's Day 31 of our Catechism and of one of the marks of the Church as mentioned in Art. 29 B.C.

The obligation to see to it that the Lord's command is followed faithfully and scupulously is the obligation of the Consistory.

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.

Remark:

Instead of having a provision which states what Churchmembers shall do or shall not do, we concentrate on what the Consistory shall do or shall not do. It is not the "task" of the Church Order to tell Churchmembers what the Churches have agreed upon as the proper conduct, but we remind one another as Churches of what we have agreed upon in the Federation.

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 holy 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.

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

Remark:

The old articles 76 and 77 were very explicit and could be shortened considerably. In our proposed Article 67 we have combined all the elements of the two "old" articles without unnecessary repetitions.

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 three office-bearers -- the Congregation shall be informed afterwards.

Remark:

Not every confession of sin must be made before the Congregation.

Not every confession of sin must necessarily be "reported" to the Consistory.

Not every confession of sin must even of necessity be made before the full Consistory. In the mouth of two or three persons every word shall be established and stand. Thus a confession made in the presence of two office-bearers is valid and that may suffice. Of course, these office-bearers will report such to the Consistory.

The Consistory is the body which is able to judge what would be most conducive to the edification of the Congregation and no rule can or should be given here.

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 to see whether anyone can raise a lawful objection.

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.

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. The Classis, with the concurring advice of the Deputies of the Regional Synod, shall judge whether the Ministers are to be deposed.

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

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

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.

F I N A L P R O V I S I O N S

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.

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 Classes, Regional Synods 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.

Remark:

This article has been adopted by the Synod of Toronto 1974, which adoption was necessary with a view to the safeguarding of the possessions of the Churches in common.

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.

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The following articles of the Old Church Order we have deleted.

Article 43.

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.

Remark:

We did not see any need for this provision in our present situation.

If the Churches should wish to retain this article in some form, we suggest that it be added to Article 44, and be inserted as the third-last paragraph.

Article 45.

It shall be the duty of the Church in which the Classis and likewise the Regional or General Synod meets to furnish the following meeting with the Acts of the preceding one.

Remark:

Since the Acts of our broader assemblies are sent to all Churches of that major assembly, and such in a sufficient number of copies, and each Church therefore is familiar with those Acts, we do not see the need for this provision.

If any Church should be charged with this task it would have to be the Church which takes care of the Archives of that major assembly.

The old provision may have had a place when the Acts were written in a book and not distributed on a scale on which we distribute them; it appears superfluous right now.

Article 48.

Each Synod shall be at liberty to solicit and maintain contact with its neighbouring Synod or Synods in such a manner as they shall judge most conducive to general edification.

Remark:

Apart from the fact that we have only two Regional Synodical areas, this article seems superfluous anyway.

Article 57.

The Ministers shall do their best and work to the end that the father present his child for baptism. And in the Congregations where besides the fathers also godfathers or witnesses are taken at Baptism (which custom, being in itself permissible, shall not be changed lightly) it is proper that such be taken who adhere to the pure doctrine and are of a pious conduct.

Remark:

This article appears to be antiquated and no longer applicable to our situation. In our years in the Ministry we have never yet witnessed the appearance of witnesses at the baptismal font. And in any case, their appearance may be considered so rare that no special article about this institution appears necessary.

Article 65.

Funeral sermons or funeral services shall not be instituted.

Remark:

Although most funerals among us are conducted out of the Churchbuilding, we do not think that there is any danger that the proceedings will become a "service" or that the message will become a "sermon" in the pregnant sense of the words. This article appears therefore redundant.

Article 83.

Furthermore, to the poor, departing for sufficient reasons, so much money for travelling shall be given by the Deacons as they deem adequate. The Consistory and the Deacons shall, however, see to it that they be not too much inclined to relieve their Churches of the poor with whom they would without necessity burden other Churches.

Remark:

We consider this article, too, no longer applicable in our situation. We do not see much sense in retaining provisions which are not "alive" in our Churchlife and are more or less a "dead letter."

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o-o-o.

Herewith we have concluded our report.

Once more we urge all Consistories to send us their remarks as soon as possible.

We send this report in as many copies as there are office-bearers. A limited number has been reserved for possible later requests for one.

It is now up to the Churches to render it possible for us to complete our task before the deadline set by the General Synod of Coaldale 1977.

Respectfully submitted

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C. Olij
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