

To the General Synod of Smithville, Ont.
1980

Esteemed Brethren,

The Committee for the Revision of the Church Order herewith presents to your assembly the first part of a definite draft of that revision.

As soon as we had completed our first draft, we sent it to the Churches, in order to receive the remarks from the Churches which would be helpful in reaching our objective. It was our intention -- and our hope -- to present to your assembly a complete definite draft in which all the remarks received from the Churches were to have been incorporated insofar as we could go along with them.

Alas, only a few Churches complied with our request to send their remarks early; until very recently we kept receiving comments and suggestions.

Further, many other tasks which had to be done prevented us from dedicating as much time to the present one as we would have liked to do; besides, personal and congregational circumstances sometimes rendered it quite difficult to give sufficient time and attention to this task.

Yet we are grateful that we could send to the Churches the "provisional" revision of the Church Order, and that now we can present to your assembly the first twenty-two articles which have been revised from that "provisional" report, and which we consider to be our final draft for presentation.

Our advice to your assembly is not to adopt those revised articles. In our opinion, the time of preparation has been too short, the work is too comprehensive, and the consequences are too weighty for a hasty decision. We are convinced that no definite decision should be taken until the complete, definitive draft of the Revised Church Order has been completed, and the Churches have had ample opportunity to study it and to make their views known.

Thus our advice to your assembly would be to continue the Committee with the mandate to present such a definite draft revision within a year, sending copies to the Churches with the request to send in remarks before January 1, 1983, in order that the Committee be able to present the results of its labours to General Synod 1983, having taken into account the remarks received from the Churches.

Meanwhile, we would wish to dissuade Synod from adopting any of the present articles. If there are any suggestions and wishes, we are certain that the Committee which we envisage will be happy to receive the same.

Some of the remarks which we received from the Churches regard the language used, and changes in words and/or sentences have been proposed. Some of those remarks and suggestions we have incorporated in the twenty-two articles which we present to your assembly. Others we considered incorrect or no specific improvement.

We have not consulted a language-expert, seeing the uncertainty regarding the definitive text. We would suggest that the Committee-to-be-appointed ask some brethren who may be considered competent in this field to advise them regarding the proper wording and grammar.

It is with gratitude that we may state that the remarks from Churches and Churchmembers were generally favourable and that the changes proposed were not such that we had to change the basic thoughts expressed in our revision.

The revised articles speak for themselves, we trust. Yet we wish to give some explanation which may indicate how we came to changes in the "provisional draft" and now arrived at the conclusions evident from the twenty-two articles.

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1980
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(10 pages)

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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.

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.

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 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 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 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.

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 Church 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.

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 with 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 shall further be

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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 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.

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 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.

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.

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.

ARTICLE 10. (11) Proper Support

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

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 with 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.

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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.

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 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 Minister 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.

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.

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

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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.

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.

ARTICLE 20. (19) Students of Theology

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

ARTICLE 21. (20) An Edifying Word

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

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 or heresies be taught.

AD ARTICLE 1

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 suggesting read -- "that there are." No fact is stated but a rule, what should be.

AD ARTICLE 2

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.

AD ARTICLE 3

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 afore-mentioned 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.

AD ARTICLE 4

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 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

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AD ARTICLE 13

No remarks

AD ARTICLE 14

"Requests" takes the place of "desires."

AD ARTICLE 15

No remarks

AD ARTICLE 16

Although we have changed a few expressions, we would advise to take the wording of a revised Form for the Ordination or Installation of Ministers of the Word, once such a form has been adopted by a General Synod.

AD ARTICLE 17

No remarks

AD ARTICLE 18

A few changes were proposed, and we adopted one: delete the words "the provisions 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 into our Church Order.

AD ARTICLE 19

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.

AD ARTICLE 20

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.

AD ARTICLE 21

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

AD ARTICLE 22

We added "and that no heresies be taught" as was suggested by one of the Churches.

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 regard also to the doctrine and conduct 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.

Herewith we have come to the end of this report.

Stating our suggestions and advice to your assembly once more, we summarize them as follows:

That Synod

1. Do not adopt at the present time any article of the Church Order in its revised form, but decide to wait till the complete Draft Revised Church Order is available;
2. Decide to continue the Committee for the Revision of the Church Order;
3. Instruct this Committee to send a definite draft of the Revised Church Order to the Churches before January 1, 1982, soliciting remarks from the Churches , to be sent to the Committee before January 1, 1983; and to present the end-result of its work to General Synod 1983.

Respectfully submitted

Yours in the Lord,

J.Geertsema

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