

o the General Synod 1977
c/o Convening Church of Coaldale, Alta

Esteemed brethren.

Herewith we submit our report on the Revision of the Church Order. We have done considerable work on the remainder, but have not yet come to a definite proposal concerning the rest of the articles.

We wish to submit our draft without any comments or commentary. Our proposals should be judged on their actual contents and not on the basis of our "explanation" or argumentation.

We have not consulted any linguists; we feel that this should be done once the Churches have expressed themselves on the proposed draft itself.

For your information we mention that we took into account the criticism brought in against the previous draft, and that we took good note of and perused the report on the revision of the Church Order which served at the General Synod of Kampen 1975 of our Netherlands sister Churches.

As for the present Article 21 C.O., it certainly is not our intention to let it disappear from the Church Order, but we propose to give a reworded version a place in the part still to be submitted.

The LORD guide you with all your deliberations and decisions.

Respectfully submitted

w.s. P. Kingma
w.s. C. Olij
w.s. W.W.J. Van Oene

PROPOSED REVISION CHURCH ORDER

ARTICLE 1. PURPOSE

In order that good order in the Church of Christ may be maintained it is necessary that there should be : offices, assemblies, supervision of doctrine, sacraments and ceremonies, and Church discipline.
These matters will be dealt with in the following articles in due order.

ARTICLE 2. THE OFFICES

There are three kinds of offices in the Church : those of the Ministers of the Word (some of whom may be called as Missionaries or as Professors of Theology), of the Elders, and of the Deacons.

ARTICLE 3. 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 4 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 determine whether the Congregation shall receive the opportunity beforehand to draw the attention to brethren 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 harmony with the adopted regulations.

The names of the appointed brethren 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. 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

No one shall be declared eligible for call within the Churches except

1. Those who 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. Those who 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. Those who have been examined according to the rule described in Article 8.

C. CALLING TWICE

No call shall be extended twice to the same Minister in the same vacancy except with the approval of Classis.

D. COUNSELLOR

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

ARTICLE 5. 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 not be ordained until the Classis has approved the call.

The Classis shall approve the call only

1. Upon satisfactory testimony concerning the soundness of doctrine and life 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 not be installed until 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, which shall also confirm that he has been honourably released by the Consistory with the Deacons of the Church where he served and by the Classis.

ARTICLE 6. BOUND TO A CHURCH

No one shall be called to 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 among those who have become estranged from the Gospel, or is to be charged with some special task.

ARTICLE 7. 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.

ARTICLE 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, 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.

ARTICLE 9. FROM ONE CHURCH TO ANOTHER

A Minister, once lawfully called, shall not leave the Congregation with which he is connected 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. PROPER SUPPORT

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

ARTICLE 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.

ARTICLE 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. RETIREMENT OF MINISTERS

If a Minister of the Word reaches retirement age 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 and connection with the Church which he served last, and this Church shall provide honourably for his support and for that of his widow and/or other dependents.

ARTICLE 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. 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. THE OFFICE OF MINISTERS OF THE WORD

The specific duties of the office of Ministers of the Word are : thoroughly and sincerely to present to the 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.

ARTICLE 17. EQUALITY AMONG THE MINISTERS OF THE WORD

Among the Ministers of the Word equality shall be maintained with respect to the rights and duties of their office and also in other matters as far as possible according to the judgment of the Consistory and, if necessary, of the Classis.

ARTICLE 18. 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 regularly 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.

ARTICLE 19. PROFESSORS OF THEOLOGY

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 Church-

es 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. 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. 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 meetings of public worship.

ARTICLE 22. THE OFFICE OF ELDERS

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 every one 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.

ARTICLE 23. THE OFFICE OF DEACONS

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.

ARTICLE 24. CONTACT WITH OTHERS

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.

ARTICLE 25. 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 reelection.

ARTICLE 26. EQUALITY TO BE MAINTAINED

Among the Elders as well as among the Deacons equality shall be maintained

with respect to the rights and duties of their office and also in other matters as far as possible according to the judgment of the Consistory with the Deacons.

ARTICLE 27. SUBSCRIPTION TO 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. Any one 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.

ARTICLE 28. OF 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 have a tranquil life in all godliness, peace, and honesty.

ARTICLE 29. THE ECCLESIASTICAL ASSEMBLIES

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

ARTICLE 30. MATTERS TO BE DEALT WITH

These assemblies shall transact no other than ecclesiastical matters, and shall deal with them in an ecclesiastical manner. A major assembly shall deal with those matters only which belong to its Churches in common or which could not be finished in the minor assembly.

ARTICLE 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 be proved to conflict with the Word of God or with the articles of this Church Order.

ARTICLE 32. CREDENTIALS

They who are delegated 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.

ARTICLE 33. INSTRUCTIONS

Instructions or proposals which are to be dealt with in the major assemblies shall not be written until the decisions of previous major assemblies touching these matters have been read, in order that what was once decided be not again proposed, unless it is deemed necessary that it be changed.