

**Church Order
of the
FREE REFORMED CHURCHES
OF NORTH AMERICA**

(Based on the Church Order of Dordrecht 1618 and 1619)

2010 Edition



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Preface

Anyone who wishes to trace the history of the Church Order of the Free Reformed Churches of North America will have to dig through various Acts of Synods and Classes. As with so many things in the earlier history of our churches in North America, this Church Order, in its English version, developed as we did—by fits and starts. This is not to be misunderstood as if there were no recognition of the need for a version of the old Church Order of Dordrecht of 1618—19, in the language of our churches and adjusted to our peculiar situation; quite to the contrary. The fact is, there was so much to do and so few people to do it.

Amongst those who did work on it and who are no longer with us, we would call special attention to the names of Rev. C. Noordegraaf, Rev. J. Tamminga and Elder Frank Vanden Bout (of Grand Rapids). And a word of thanks is due to Rev. L.W. Bilkes who, together with these men, did so much to produce the first draft in English. It was particularly Rev. P. Vander Meyden who was instrumental in providing the final draft and finishing touches in the early 1980s.. Recognition ought also to be given to various faithful consistory members who spent hours going over the various drafts, Mr. Jack Tamminga (of Vineland) did the lay-out and printing of the first published loose-leaf edition in 1984. Rev. C. Schouls was instrumental through this process as a key member of the Publications Committee, under which responsibility for the Church Order rest until 2009. In 2004, the format changed from loose-leaf to a convenient pocket-sized published edition. Rev. Schouls, Rev. VanEssen and brother C.A. VanDoodewaard were instrumental in that work .

Several changes have been made to the Church Order in the past couple of years. As well, the increasing reliance on technology and the internet for document storage and retrieval has led Synod to instruct the Church Order Committee “to provide a current and combined edition of the Church Order and supplements on the web and in printed format.” (2010 Acts Article 36).

With the anticipation that updated versions will now be made available online, two changes have been introduced to assist in accurate referencing.

The title now includes the year of the edition and all changes from the previous print edition will now include a footnote reference to the Acts of Synod article where the decision to change the language was made.

The Apostle Paul said “let all things be done decently and in order” (I Cor. 14:40) and he referred specifically to proper conduct in the churches. Any church order is a man made product and, for that very reason, fallible and subject to alterations. The very format of this issue is a mute testimony to that fact. Nevertheless, we believe that the principles expressed in this

volume are derived from the Scriptures. Not all articles are of equal importance: some are directly derived from the teaching of the Word, some are derived by implication while yet others are the expression of sanctified common sense. For the sake of good order in the churches, all ought to be observed. As always, these rules are to be observed and implemented with discretion. A blind adherence to any formulation of principles, no matter how good, can only lead to a form of stifling legalism. A disregard for decency and good order in the Church of Jesus Christ can only lead to chaos.

May the King of the Church bless these efforts for the good of His own cause.

For the Church Order Committee,
Ray Pennings
Calgary, October 2010

PREAMBLE

The Free Reformed Churches of North America, confessing their complete subjection to the Word of God, acknowledging Christ as the only Head of His Church, and desiring to honour the apostolic injunction that in the churches all things be done decently and in order (I Cor.14:40), regulate their ecclesiastical organisation and activities according to the following articles.

Article 1: Purpose and Content of the Church Order

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

OF THE OFFICES

Article 2: The Offices of the Church

The offices are of four kinds: of the ministers of the Word, of the professors of theology, of the elders and of the deacons.

Confessing male members of the church who meet the Biblical requirements for office bearers are eligible for office. Only those who have been officially called and ordained or installed shall hold and exercise office in the church.

Article 3: Who May Not Officiate as Minister of the Word

No one, though he be a professor of theology, elder or deacon, shall be permitted to enter upon the Ministry of the Word and the Sacraments without having been lawfully called thereunto. And when any one acts contrary thereto, And after being frequently admonished does not desist, the classis shall judge whether he is to be declared a schismatic or is to be

punished in some other way.

A. A consistory may, with the approbation of the Classis, which must also conduct a similar examination as mentioned in paragraph B, permit a brother of its congregation, whom it considers qualified, to speak an edifying word and perform other labours under its supervision in its congregation.

B. No one may be permitted to speak an edifying word in the congregations of the Classis to which he belongs without first being presented by his consistory to the Classis for examination as to his motives, spiritual gifts, purity of confession, ability to expound the Scriptures, and gifts of public address.

C.

D. If the result of this examination is favourable such a person is given approval to labour in this particular Classis.

E. In the event such a brother is also an office-bearer, he remains subject to the length of service as Article 27 stipulates for elders and deacons.

F. In the event such a brother changes his residence out of the jurisdiction of his Classis, he forfeits this right.

G. Anyone who is permitted to speak an edifying word in accordance with Article 3 may not officiate when public confession of faith is made in the congregation.

Article 4: Admission to the Office of Minister of the Word

The lawful admission of those who have not previously been in the office of the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments consists of the following:

- First, the *Examination*, both of doctrine and life, which shall be conducted by the Synod.
- Secondly, the *Calling* by the Consistory, after preceding prayers and after voting by the congregation with due observance of the regulations established by the Consistory for this purpose and, furthermore, with the advice of the counsellor appointed for this purpose by the Classis. A Consistory may not call a candidate to the Ministry of the Word before the Synod has officially announced his candidacy.
- Thirdly, the *Approbation* by the members of the calling church, when, the name of the minister having been announced for two consecutive Lord's Days, no lawful objection arises.
- Fourthly, the public *Ordination* which shall take place in a worship service of the congregation with appropriate stipulations and interrogations, admonitions and prayers and the imposition of hands by the officiating minister (and by other ministers of the church who are present) in accordance with the Form for this purpose.

Article 5: Calling of Ministers to Another Congregation

Ministers already in the ministry of the Word in our churches must likewise be called by the Consistory, with observance of the regulations made for the purpose by the Consistory and of the general ecclesiastical ordinances with the approbation of the Classis, to whom the ministers called show good ecclesiastical testimony of doctrine and life. After being presented to the congregation on two consecutive Lord's Days and there having been no legal objections presented against them, they shall be installed with appropriate stipulations and prayers agreeable to the Form for this purpose.

A. No congregation may in the same vacancy call a minister more than once in two years except in very special cases in which the minister declares that he retracts his first decision, or when circumstances have entirely changed; in either instance the Classis to which that particular church belongs must give permission, after the Classis meeting has judged the grounds on which the second call rests. A candidate, who has declined the call of a certain congregation, can later as minister be called within the period of two years during this vacancy.

B. A minister shall consider a call for a period not longer than three weeks, and a candidate not longer than six weeks, inasmuch as a call is considered voided when it has been under consideration three or six weeks.

A call to a minister of a corresponding church may be considered for six weeks.

C. "*Classis Contracta*"

The approbation of the credentials given to a minister, in accordance with Article 10, by the Classis to which he is called, can be done by two consistories, designated by the Classis, which shall invite all the Consistories of the Classis to their meeting. By their absence, the invited Consistories are considered as having given their approbation. These consistories, as *Classis Contracta*, shall follow the procedure of corresponding in writing with the other consistories asking questions relating to the approval of such credentials. (See Acts of Synod 1982, #41, p. 15)

D. As a brief ministry in a congregation is usually contrary to its best interest, Consistories are advised not to call ministers who have not laboured three years in their congregations and the ministers are admonished not to leave their congregations that soon unless urgently required. A minister who came to his present congregation from the Netherlands should not be called during the first three years of his pastorate (see Acts of Synod 1963). (Concept-rules for the election and calling of

ministers of the Word: see Supplement No. A-1; Concept Call Letter: see Supplement No.A-2)

E. When a minister of our churches accepts a call from another church in Canada or the U.S.A. which is not affiliated with our denomination, the following regulations shall apply:

1. The particular minister, by this decision, ceases to be a minister of our churches and thereby immediately forfeits his right to perform any official work in these churches.
2. The Consistory shall pay the minister his salary to the end of the current calendar month and after that time is free of any financial obligations, including housing.
3. The Consistory shall immediately advise the other churches of these proceedings.

F. When a minister of our churches accepts a call to a church in a foreign country with which our churches are not in correspondence relationship, the following shall apply:

1. The Consistory and the two Consistories mentioned in Article 5, Sub. C, as *Classis Contracta*, shall determine as soon as possible the date upon which the particular minister shall terminate his services; usually this date shall not be later than six weeks after the acceptance of the call.
2. The particular minister is allowed to officiate in our churches until the date established according to paragraph '1'.
3. The Consistory is required to pay the particular minister his salary and provide him with housing to the date set according to '1'. After this date, however, the Consistory is discharged of its obligations as outlined in the call letter or any subsequent agreement made during his ministry in that church.

The Consistory shall, with the advice of the counsellor, give to the minister an official release. (Supplement No.15)

G. Calling ministers and candidates from other denominations:¹

1. A consistory considering calling a minister or a candidate from another denomination, shall seek the advice of the Synodical deputies of Interchurch Relations. Before giving their advice, these deputies shall make thorough inquiry (including a colloquium doctum) with respect to both the denomination and the person of the minister or candidate. When their advice is negative, the consistory shall not pursue the matter. Should the consistory desire not to abide by the negative advice, it ought to present this case before Synod.

¹Article 5 G-J amended Acts of Synod 2010, Article 40

2. In case the minister, who is being considered for a call, does not belong to a denomination with which we have Complete Correspondence relationship (see Art. 51), the Consistory must inform the deputies of the reasons for considering such a minister and whether the needs of the local church justify his nomination.
3. With respect to the calling of ministers belonging to a denomination with which we have no Complete Correspondence relationship, deputies cannot make a final decision. They must report to Synod, which decides whether or not the minister may be called. With respect to calling ministers belonging to a denomination with which we do have Complete Correspondence relationship, deputies may make a decision.
4. When a minister has accepted the call to the congregation, he shall not be admitted to the ministry of the Word and Sacraments nor be installed in the congregation which has called him until he has sustained an examination similar to a candidacy examination at Synod. Before such an examination can take place, the minister is to present good evidence of his call to the ministry as well as good testimonies with regard to his confession and walk of life.
5. A candidate is to show that he has successfully completed the required studies at a reputable seminary or university in preparation for the ministry, as well as good testimonies concerning his confession and walk of life. A candidate must sustain a full examination at Synod.
6. At every colloquium doctum or examination, Synod shall be assisted by deputies of Interchurch Relations.

H. When a minister of our churches accepts a call to a denomination with which our churches maintain an ecclesiastical relationship (see Art. 51), the following rules shall apply:

1. The Consistory shall as soon as possible determine the date upon which the minister shall terminate his service. This date is the same date on which the minister shall officially preach his farewell sermon.

2. The Consistory is obligated to pay the stipulated salary to the minister and provide him with housing up to the date set according to '1'. After this date the Consistory is discharged of any obligations undertaken in the call letter or during the tenure of the minister. This implies that a minister ordinarily has no claim to any emeritus funds, nor his wife and children to any financial assistance. It is considered that the minister is, from the date mentioned in '1', the entire and sole responsibility of the church whose call he has accepted.
3. The Consistory shall give the minister an official release which is also a testimonial of his doctrine and life (see Article 10 and Article 5-C).

I. Admission of ministers from other denominations:

1. When a minister of another denomination desires to be admitted to the office of minister in the Free Reformed Churches, the following rules are to be observed:
 - a. He calls on the consistory of the Free Reformed Church closest to his residence.
 - b. The consistory presents him to the deputies of Interchurch Relations.
 - c. He must present good testimonies with regard to his confession and walk of life, if possible from his own denomination.
 - d. After this, deputies Interchurch Relations shall closely examine him with regard to the motives for his request, his relationship to the Lord and his calling to the office of minister, as well as the quality of his ministerial training.
 - e. Deputies of Interchurch Relations shall conduct a colloquium doctum with him.
 - f. When deputies of Interchurch Relations judge the application for admission to be in compliance with church order and the applicant's confession and walk of life commendable, they then present the request to Synod which with the assistance of the deputies of Interchurch Relations, conducts a candidacy examination. This procedure is to be followed only when it concerns ministers who have successfully completed

their studies at a reputable theological seminary or university in preparation for the ministry.

- g. When it concerns candidates, they shall, in addition to meeting the foregoing requirements, present their degrees.
- h. Upon acceptance of the application Synod shall declare the minister or candidate eligible for call in the Free Reformed Churches. If after two years no call has been accepted the eligibility lapses.
- i. Upon accepting a call from a congregation of the Free Reformed Churches he shall, at his installation and/or ordination sign the Form of Subscription for ministers of the Word. (Supplement No. 10)

2. When a minister who has not pursued a course of study at a theological seminary or university in preparation for the ministry, desires to be admitted to the office of minister in the Free Reformed Churches, the following rules are to be observed:

- a. He contacts the Consistory of the Free Reformed Church closest to his residence.
- b. The Consistory presents him to the deputies Interchurch Relations.
- c. He must present a good attestation regarding his confession and walk of life, if possible, from his own denomination.
- d. Deputies of Interchurch Relations make inquiries as to the manner in which he has been ordained to the ministry.
- e. Deputies of Interchurch Relations conduct a colloquium doctum with him with regard to the motives for his request, as well as his calling and his relationship to the Lord.
- f. Upon favourable result, Synod, with the assistance of deputies of Interchurch Relations, shall examine him by having him deliver a sermon on a text selected by deputies of Interchurch Relations, in order to ascertain whether or not he has exceptional gifts.
- g. If the preliminary judgement of Synod is favourable, it will conduct a peremptory examination of the particular person with regard to his general knowledge, orthodoxy, and his basic knowledge of practical homiletics and pastoral work in the congregation.

h. Upon favourable result, Synod shall designate several congregations where he shall, under the supervision of the pastors and consistories of these congregations, preach until the next meeting of Synod is convened. The consistories of these congregations shall report on his preaching to Synod.

i. After receiving favourable reports from the consistories, Synod shall proceed to examine him according to Article 8, sub B-9, and upon favourable results shall declare him eligible for call for a two year period. If after two years no call has been accepted the eligibility lapses.

j. If, along with his minister, either the entire or part of the congregation (which he served) also joins the Free Reformed Churches, and his labours are required there, the following rules are to be observed:

After the rules mention in a - g have been observed with favourable results, Synod may permit him to speak a word of exhortation in his congregation and continue his work there, as he did before, until the next meeting of Synod is convened

During the same time the procedure mentioned in h – i is to be carried out.

k. After he has been declared eligible for call and upon accepting a call from a congregation of the Free Reformed Churches he shall subscribe to the Form of Subscription for ministers of the Word at his installation.

J. Visiting Ministers:

1. A visiting minister, candidate or seminary student from another church federation ordinarily may not preach in a Free Reformed Church. Exceptions to this general rule are provided for in points 2 through 5 below.

2. A visiting minister from a church with which the Free Reformed Churches have a corresponding relationship (see Art. 51), ordinarily may preach in the Free Reformed Churches.

3. A visiting minister from a church with which the Free Reformed Churches have only a Limited Contact or no formal relationship at all may be granted a one-year licence to preach in

the Free Reformed Churches if he has received permission according to the following rules:

- a. The inviting consistory sends a request for the visiting minister to preach in the Free Reformed Churches to deputies of Interchurch Relations, after coming to a positive evaluation based on their investigation regarding the minister's orthodoxy. The consistory's investigation shall include pertinent questions of a doctrinal nature, and the auditing of several sermons as to their doctrinal soundness.
 - b. These deputies shall make a decision as soon as possible, after conducting a Colloquium Doctum with the visiting minister and evaluating the consistory's report on its findings.
 - c. Upon favourable decision, deputies shall grant a one year preaching licence and shall make a formal announcement concerning this in the official magazine of the Free Reformed Churches. Preaching licenses shall ordinarily be renewed annually by Synod upon the recommendation of the deputies of Interchurch Relations. If a "licensed" visiting minister does not preach for three years in the churches his name shall be removed from the approved list. Reinstatement shall take place only with the unanimous approval of the Executive of the deputies Interchurch Relations.
 - d. Deputies of Interchurch Relations at all times have a right to withdraw the permission.
 - e. The permission shall be reviewed by the deputies of Interchurch Relations when the minister concerned accepts a call to a church from another denomination.
4. Consistories are allowed to invite non-FRC ministers on a one time basis (preaching in one or two congregations on one Lord's Day in a calendar year), without the requirement of the minister sustaining a colloquium doctum, provided all of the following conditions are met:
- 1) The consistory conducts a reasonable amount of investigation to determine that the minister is a member in good standing in a Reformed church, fully subscribes to the Three Forms of Unity or the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, and that his preaching does not conflict with the said confessions.

2) Sends the request and a written report describing the investigation carried out and its results, at least one week before the day the invited minister is to conduct a worship service, to the Interchurch Relations Committee.

a) Voting by the committee may take place via email, and no reasons for the decision will be required by voting committee members or the committee as a whole to the consistory. A congregation has the right to request a colloquium doctum in case the majority of the committee fails to grant permission to the one-time request. Sustaining this colloquium doctum leads to the granting of a preaching license in our churches.

b) Deputies of Interchurch Relations has the right to request a colloquium doctum when a majority of the committee deems it advisable. (This may be prudent in the case of a series of requests from various congregations for a certain minister or other unforeseen circumstances). Sustaining this colloquium doctum leads to the granting of a preaching license in our churches.

5. Senior students studying at the seminary approved by our churches, as well as recent graduates, who have permission to preach in their denomination, with which we have a corresponding relationship, may be invited to preach in our churches provided the request of the consistory is accompanied by the advice of one or more of the full-time Free Reformed professors at such seminary. The procedures under 3 above must be followed.

6. Recent ministerial candidates who were trained at the seminary approved by our churches may be invited to preach in our churches provided the request by the consistory is accompanied by the advice of one or more of the full-time Free Reformed professors at such seminary. The procedures under 3 above must be followed.

Article 6: Calling to a Special Work

No minister of the Word shall be permitted to accept an extraordinary ministerial position such as military chaplain or chaplain in institutions of mercy except with the consent of his consistory and Classis. Classis shall decide whether this extraordinary ministerial position is spiritual in character and directly related to the ministerial calling. The relationship which will exist between this minister and the congregation concerned shall

be arranged with the approval of its Classis.

Article 7: A Particular Congregation

No one shall be called to the ministry of the Word who is not connected to a particular congregation.

Article 8: Ministers Without Theological Training

A person, who has not pursued a course of study at a theological seminary or university in preparation for the Ministry, shall not be admitted to the Ministry unless there is assurance of his exceptional gifts: godliness, humility, modesty, common sense and discretion, as also gifts of public address. When such a person presents himself for the Ministry, the Classis, following approval of the Synod, shall first examine him. If the preliminary judgement is favourable, he shall be given the right to speak a word of edification in several congregations of the Classis for further review of his gifts and the Classis shall further deal with him as it shall deem edifying, according to the general regulations of the Churches.

These regulations are the following:

- A. No one may be examined according to Article 8 who has studied at a theological school or seminary.
- B. The following regulations are to be followed in examinations according to Article 8 :
 1. The person, aspiring to the ministerial office, shall contact his Consistory to secure the credentials from it concerning the required qualifications as stated in Article 8.
 2. To this end, the Consistory shall begin by inquiring as to his relationship to the Lord, his calling, exceptional gifts, and walk of life. Following this, the Consistory shall decide whether to recommend the particular person to the Classis.
 3. In the event of a favourable decision, the person is recommended to the Classis by means of a full, written report.
 4. The Classis shall, in considering the report of the Consistory, tentatively examine him as to purity of confession, relationship to the Lord, calling to office, exceptional gifts and general education.
 5. Upon a favourable result, the Classis shall recommend the particular person to the Synod by sending it a written report and with it a copy of the report of the Consistory as mentioned under '3'.
 6. The Synod shall first examine the written credentials from the Consistory and the Classis concerning the requirements mentioned in Article 8, then also examine the person by having him deliver a short sermon on a text selected by the Synod, in order to ascertain whether or not the required qualifications are indeed present.
 7. If the preliminary judgement of the Synod is favourable it will

- conduct a peremptory examination of the particular person. The Synod shall give him some time that he may prepare himself for this examination.
8. The Synod shall designate several congregations where he shall, under the supervision of the pastors of these congregations, preach a sermon in each case on a different text. The Consistories of these congregations shall make a report thereof to the Synod. After receiving favourable reports from these Consistories the Synod can proceed to the examination.
 9. The examination shall cover the following subjects:
 - a. Practical explanation of Holy Scriptures, for which purpose he is given a chapter in the Old and one in the New Testament four weeks prior to the examination.
 - b. Dogmatics and Apologetics
 - c. Ethics
 - d. Symbolics
 - e. Bible History
 - f. Church History
 - g. Homiletics
 - h. Poimenics (Pastoral care)
 - i. Liturgics
 - j. Catechetics
 - k. Church Polity
 - l. He shall also improvise on a text, designated to him one hour before.
 - m. He shall also submit a written sermon on a text that has been given him two weeks prior to the meeting.
 10. The person being examined must have been a confessing member of one of our churches for two years and must have attained the age of thirty years before he can be admitted to this examination.
 11. If he has filled the requirements and the Synod has made an affirmative decision concerning him, he is then made a candidate for the Ministry of the Word in our churches.

Article 9: Admission of New Members into the Ministry

They who have just recently come to profess the Reformed doctrines may not be admitted to the ministry in the churches except with great carefulness and caution, and after they have passed a probationary period of one year and in accordance with the provisions of Articles 4 and Article 8.

Article 10: Accepting a Call Elsewhere

A minister, once lawfully called, may not leave the congregation with which

he is connected to accept a call elsewhere without the consent of the Consistory and knowledge on the part of the Classis; likewise, no other church may receive him until he has presented a proper certificate of dismissal from the church and the Classis where he served. (See Concept-credentials for Departing Ministers, Supplement No. 3)

Article 11: Support of Ministers

On their part, the Consistories, as representing the congregations, shall provide for the proper support of their ministers and shall not dismiss them from service without the knowledge and approval of the Classis (Synod).

A. The Consistory shall provide for the proper support of the minister and his family, also in case of illness, in such a way that they have no financial worries. The Synod shall nominate Deputies who shall have charge of the funds for assisting needy congregations. (See Supplement No. 4)

B. When the disciplinary action of suspension is deserved, then dismissal from service office may not take place. Dismissal of a minister from active service in the congregation shall occur only when for weighty reasons and exceptional circumstances a pastoral relationship has been irreconcilably broken. Further, the dismissal shall occur only when attempts at reconciliation by both the church visitors and the Classis (Synod) have been unsuccessful, resulting in an intolerable situation.²

C. A plan with regards to the financial obligations of the congregation towards its dismissed minister must be proposed regulated by the Consistory and approved by the Classis (Synod). At a minimum, the minister of the Word keeps the privilege of salary and housing for three months from the date of dismissal, as well as any additional obligations approved by the Classis (Synod).

D. The Consistory of the congregation shall announce the eligibility for call of its dismissed minister. This eligibility shall be valid for two years from the date of dismissal. After this period of eligibility has expired, he shall be honourably released from office by the Classis (Synod). If the dismissed minister desires to have this period extended, he must show cause for this at Synod and Synod may extend this period twice for one year, provided he again present himself to Synod to request each such extension.

² Acts of Synod 2009, Article 29

Article 12: Changes to Another State of Life

Inasmuch as a minister of the Word, once lawfully called as described above, is bound to the service of the church for life, he is not allowed to enter upon a secular vocation except for such weighty reasons as shall receive the approval of the Classis (Synod).

Article 13: Emeritation

Ministers, who by reason of age, illness, or otherwise, are rendered incapable of performing the duties of their office, shall nevertheless retain the honour and title of a minister, and the church which they have served shall provide honourably for them in their need, likewise for the widows and orphans of ministers.

A. Request for Emeritation:

1. The emeritation declaration shall take place upon the request of the minister concerned via the Consistory by the Classis. A minister may request to retire at the age of 65 years. If he requests to retire while he has not yet reached the age of 65 years, he is to submit certificates of two medical doctors.
2. When a minister, due to illness, requests to retire while he has not yet reached the age of 65 years, the Consistory shall grant him at least half a year of sick-leave before applying for retirement at Classis (Synod)
3. Retirement shall not take place if the disciplinary measure of suspension is applicable.
4. In cases of retirement under the age of 65 years, Classis (Synod) is to investigate whether the incapability of performing the office mentioned in Article 13 has possibly ceased and, if so, retirement must be withdrawn.

B. Emeritation Procedure:

When a minister is declared emeritus, the following rules shall be observed:

1. Classis (Synod) shall seriously try to maintain the principle of Article 13, which is that Classis shall only grant retirement to ministers of the Word who because of old age, illness or other reasons have become incapable of performing the duties of their office.
2. In retirement applications the declarations of medical doctors are to be considered decisive. With regard to this, Classis has the right to request the applying minister of the Word to submit himself to a medical examination by one or more medical doctors as appointed by Classis (Synod).
3. In dubious cases, as, for example, when a minister's request for retirement is obviously the result (either completely or partly) of

the poor relationship between the applying minister on the one hand and his Consistory (Congregation) on the other hand, or at least related to this, Classis (Synod) is seriously to consider whether or not a satisfying solution other than that of retirement declaration can be found.

4. In connection with this it is inadvisable that Classis (Synod) grant temporary retirement, since it conflicts with the principle of Article 13.
5. Synodical Deputies in charge of the Retirement Fund, upon receiving the application from the Consistory concerned, are obliged to grant support to that church, in accordance with the existing stipulations. (See Fall Classis 1956)

C. Emerititation Privileges:

1. Retirement shall begin on the day set by Classis (Synod). From the date on which retirement begins, the minister of the Word keeps the privilege of salary and housing for 3 months. Also a minister's widow keeps the right to the full salary and housing for 3 months after her husband's decease. After these 3 months have expired, retirement payments, guaranteed by the congregation and stipulated in the call letter in accordance with existing regulations, shall begin.
2. If a retired minister or minister's widow desires to move to a foreign country, the deputies shall transmit the payment which they would send to such person in Canada or the U.S.A. to him or her in that foreign country.

Article 14: Absence from Office

If any minister, for the aforesaid or any other reason, is compelled to discontinue his service for a time, which shall not take place without the advice of the Consistory, he shall nevertheless at all times be and remain subject to the call of the Consistory.

If the "leave of absence" being granted to a minister according to Article 14 would have as its result the practical severance of the relationship between him and the congregation, then this "leave of absence" may not be given without the approval of the Classis (Synod).

Article 15: Preaching Elsewhere

No minister may preach the Word or administer the Sacraments in places where there is no church without the approval and cooperation of the nearest Congregation. This Consistory must be present and give guidance. The Classis (Synod) should have supervision over this.

It should be clear that office-bearers, being in countries in which there are churches with which correspondence is maintained, shall not perform any kind of duties in churches other than those with which our church has

correspondence.

Article 16: The Task of the Ministers of the Word

The office of the ministers of the Word is to continue in prayer and in the ministry of the Word, to administer the Sacraments, to watch over their brethren, the elders and deacons, as well as the congregation, and finally, with the elders to exercise church discipline and to see to it that everything is done decently and in good order.

Article 17: Equality of Ministers

Among the ministers of the Word equality shall be maintained with respect to the duties of their office and also in other matters as far as possible according to the judgement of the Consistory and, if necessary, of the Classis; which equality shall also be maintained in the case of the elders and the deacons.

Article 18: The Tasks of Professors of Theology

The office of the professors of theology is to expound the Holy Scriptures and to vindicate sound doctrine against heresies and errors.

Article 19: Training for the Ministry of the Word

The churches, whenever necessary, shall put forth every effort to ensure that there may be students who are being trained in theology and that these, if necessary, are financially supported. (See Supplement No. E-9)

Article 20: Theological Training

The churches shall take care of the theological training for the ministry of the Word, the regulation of which shall be made by the Synod.

Article 21: Evangelization and Foreign Missions

In obedience to Christ's great commission, the churches must bring the gospel to all men at home and abroad, in order to lead them into fellowship with Christ and His Church. In fulfilling this mandate, each Consistory shall stimulate the members of the Congregation to be witnesses for Christ in word and deed, and to support the work of home and foreign missions by their interest, prayers, and gifts.

Article 22: Election of Elders

The elders are chosen out of a nomination made by the Consistory and the deacons, with the assistance of the congregation, in such a way that double the number to be chosen are presented to the congregation. After those chosen have been appointed and approved, they shall be installed with public prayers, and stipulations agreeable to the Form for this purpose.

According to the principles involved, reelected officers should be reinstalled. (See Supplement No. A-6)

Article 23: Duties of Elders

The office of the elders, besides what was stated in Article 16 is to take heed that the ministers, together with their fellow elders and deacons, faithfully discharge their office, and as much as possible visit the families of the

congregation in order to comfort and instruct the members, and also to exhort others in respect to the Christian Religion.

Article 24: Election of Deacons

The deacons shall be chosen, approved and installed in the same manner as was stated concerning the elders in Article 22.

Article 25: Duties of Deacons

The office peculiar to the deacons is diligently to collect moneys and other contributions of charity, and after mutual counsel, faithfully and diligently to distribute the same to the poor as their needs may require it; to visit and comfort the distressed and to exercise care that the alms are not misused; of which they shall render an account to the Consistory, and also (if anyone desires to be present) to the congregation, at such time as the Consistory may see fit.

Article 26: The Deaconate and Ministries of Mercy

The deacons shall enable the needy under their care to make use of Christian institutions of mercy. They shall confer and co-operate with deaconates of neighbouring churches when this is desirable for the proper performance of their task. They may also seek mutual understanding with other agencies in their community which are caring for the needy, so that the gifts may be distributed properly.

Article 27: Terms of Office for Elder and Deacon

The elders and deacons shall serve two or more years according to local regulations, and a proportionate number shall retire each year. The retiring officers shall be succeeded by others unless the circumstances and the profit of any church, in the execution of Article 22 and Article 24, render a reelection advisable.

Article 28: Relation to Authorities

As it is the task of the Christian authorities to promote the life of the church in every way possible, recommending this to their subjects by their example, and to assist whenever necessary the ministers, elders and deacons to help and protect them by proper regulations, so it is the duty of all ministers, elders and deacons diligently and sincerely to impress upon the entire congregation the obedience, love and respect which they owe the authorities.

Further, all church officers shall set a good example to the congregation and seek to gain and retain the good will of the authorities toward the church; however, it should be understood, that when the ordinances of the authorities conflict with God's revealed will, men must obey God more than man.

OF ECCLESIASTICAL ASSEMBLIES

Article 29: On Ecclesiastical Assemblies

Three kinds of ecclesiastical assemblies shall be maintained: the Consistory, the Classis and the Synod.

Other Assemblies: Another kind of ecclesiastical assembly is the Particular or Regional Synod. (see articles 47-49) Because of the smallness of our denomination, *Particular Synods* are not possible.

Article 30: The Authority of Ecclesiastical Assemblies

In these assemblies ecclesiastical matters only shall be transacted and that in an ecclesiastical manner. In major assemblies only such matters shall be dealt with as could not be finished in the minor assemblies, or such as pertain to the churches of the major assembly in common.

Article 31: Right of Appeal

If any one complain 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 the Church Order, as long as they are not changed by another Synod.

Everyone who appeals the decision of any ecclesiastical assembly must, within one month after the date of this decision, or if he has been notified by letter of this decision then one month after the date of such letter, advise the secretary of the Consistory in the event it concerns Consistory matters, or the calling church of the major assembly whose decision he is appealing in case it is a matter concerning this assembly. In the event the appeal is denied, notification of this shall be sent to the appellent.

Article 32: Proceedings

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

Article 33: Credentials

Those who are delegated to the major assemblies shall bring with them their credentials and instructions, signed by those sending them, and only they shall have a right to vote in all matters, except such matters as particularly concern their persons or churches.

Article 34: President of Synod

The office of the president is to state and explain the business to be transacted, to see to it that everyone observe due order in speaking, to silence the captious and those who are vehement in speaking; and properly to discipline them if they refuse to listen.

His office shall cease when the assembly adjourns.

Article 35: Secretary and Clerk

In all assemblies there shall be not only a president, but also a clerk who

shall keep a faithful record of all important matters

Article 36: Jurisdiction of Major Assemblies over Minor Assemblies

The Classis has the same authority over the Consistory as the Synod has over the Classis.

Article 37: The Consistory of the Local Church³

In all the churches there shall be a Consistory composed of the ministers of the Word, the elders, and the deacons, who regularly shall meet together. Normally, the minister of the Word (or the ministers, if there be more than one, in turn) shall preside and regulate the proceedings.

A. The Consistory has official supervision over the societies in the congregation. This supervision does not affect the domestic regulation of the society life but aims to see to it that in the work of the societies the confession of the churches is observed.

B. If the minister(s) of the Word and the elders deem it necessary for the discharge of their office to meet without the deacons to deal with matters of supervision and discipline, they may do so.

C. A decision, taken by the Consistory to withdraw from the denomination, shall not be in force until the consistory has consulted the congregation in a meeting especially convened for this matter, which meeting is to be announced in the church service on two consecutive Lord's Days. In that announcement the congregation is to be informed about the matter that shall be dealt with.

Article 38: Organization of New Consistories and New Congregations

In places where the Consistory is to be constituted for the first time or anew, this shall not take place except with the advice of the Classis.

A consistory must consist of a minimum of three persons. The number of elders shall not be less than the number of deacons.

Article 39: Concerning Preaching Stations

Members who live in places where as yet no Consistory can be constituted are to be placed by the Classis under the supervision of a neighbouring Consistory.

Article 40: Meetings of the Deacons

The deacons shall meet, if necessary, every week to transact the business pertaining to their office, calling upon the Name of God; whereunto the minister shall take good heed and, if necessary, be present. They will be responsible for their duties to the elders.

Article 41: The Meeting of Classis

³" Acts 2007 Article 14

The Classical meeting shall consist of the churches in the classical jurisdiction, that respectively delegate, with proper credentials, a minister and an elder.

The Classis meets at least twice per year, if possible, at a time and place determined by the previous classical meeting. 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. Furthermore, the president shall, among other things, ask each of the delegates if in his church the Consistory meetings are held, if church discipline is exercised, if the poor are cared for, and lastly if they need the judgement and help of the Classis for the proper government of their church.

Finally at the last meeting before the Synod, delegates shall be chosen to attend the Synod. When three churches of a Classis request the calling church to convene the Classis then this church shall do so.

Article 42: Concerning Advisory Members

Where in a church there are more ministers than one, those not delegated according to the foregoing article, shall have the right to attend the Classical assemblies with advisory vote.

Article 43: Concerning Church Censure

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.

Article 44: Church Visitation

The Classis shall authorise at least two of its most experienced and competent ministers to visit all the churches once a year and to take heed whether the minister and the Consistory faithfully perform the duties of their office, adhere to sound doctrine, observe all things according to the adopted order, and properly promote as much as lies in them, through word and deed, the up building of the congregation, in particular of the youth, to the end that they may in time fraternally admonish those who have in anything been negligent, and may by their advice and assistance help direct all things unto the peace, up building, and greatest profit of the churches. Each Classis is authorised to extend the mandate of these visitors as it sees fit, except where the visitors themselves request to be released for reasons of which the Classis shall judge. (See Supplement No. 9)

Article 45: Church Archives

Every church shall take proper care of its archives. This shall also be done by the Classis and the Synod. Every major assembly shall in this exercise supervision over its minor assemblies. (See Supplement No.13)

Article 46: Instructions for Major Assemblies

Instructions concerning matters to be considered in major assemblies shall

not be presented until the decision of previous Synods touching these matters have been read, in order that what was once decided be not again proposed, unless a revision be deemed necessary.

Article 47: Particular Synod

(Every year—or if need be more often—some neighbouring Classes shall meet together as a Particular Synod, to which each Classis shall delegate three ministers and three elders. At the close of both the Particular Synod and the General Synod a church shall be designated to determine the time and place of the following Synod.)

Article 48: Correspondence with other Particular Synods

(Each Particular Synod shall be at liberty to solicit and hold correspondence with its neighbouring Synod or Synods in such manner as they shall judge most conducive to general edification.)

Article 49: Deputies of a Particular Synod

(Each Particular Synod shall appoint Deputies to execute everything ordained by Synod pertaining to the respective Classes resorting under it, and likewise to supervise together, or at least with a minimum of three, all examinations of candidates to the ministry and be present at such examinations. And, moreover, in all other eventual difficulties they shall extend help to the Classes in order that the proper unity, order and soundness of doctrine may be maintained and established. Also they shall keep proper record of all their activities to report thereof to Synod, and if it be demanded, give reasons. They shall not be discharged from their mandate until Synod itself discharges them.

Should a difference of opinion occur between the Classis and the Deputies, this shall be resolved by the Particular Synod.)

Article 50: Meetings of Synod

The Synod shall meet once every year, unless there are important reasons to meet more often. The delegates to this meeting are appointed by the Classis.

- A. All items for the agenda are to be submitted to the clerk of the calling church no later than six weeks before the announced date of Synod. The agenda shall list all matters to be dealt with by the Synod except petitions (protests).
- B.
- C. The clerk of the calling church must receive all petitions (protests) at least fourteen days before the announced date of Synod.
- D. As a rule all communications addressed to the Synod shall be read in its meetings, unless the officers of Synod advise otherwise.
- E. Synod has the right to meet in Executive Session, however, it shall not make use of this right more than necessary. The matters which at the Synod have been handled in Executive Session may be reported in a meeting of the Classis provided this Classis is also meeting in

Executive Session at that time.

F.

G. All decisions made in Executive Session, except those regarding ecclesiastical censure, shall (at the discretion of Synod) be recorded in the public Acts of Synod.

H. The Classes shall share proportionately in the costs of the Synod.

I. Synod shall in its meeting make inquiry concerning the offerings for the various church funds.

J. Synod shall appoint ministers for the vacant churches who can assist and counsel them in those matters wherein those churches request their assistance and advice. When a call is extended to a minister, then the counsellor shall also sign the letter of call.

K. The secretary of Synod shall immediately after the Synod meeting, or as soon as this is possible, inform the consistories of important decisions.

Article 51: Other Churches⁴

The relationship of our churches to other denominations is regulated by Synod.

Our churches, in order to manifest the unity of the Church of Jesus Christ, seek contact with other Reformed churches, which to the best of our knowledge, are churches that maintain an unreserved commitment to and agreement with (1) the infallibility and inerrancy of Scriptures as the Word of God and (2) the validity and relevance of our confessions. In order to facilitate this process our churches have adopted three levels of ecclesiastical fellowship: *Limited Contact*, *Limited Correspondence* and *Complete Correspondence*. With regard to *Limited Contact*, it is our understanding that establishing a *Limited Contact* form of ecclesiastical fellowship with another federation in no way implies that moving towards a corresponding level is binding or expected or necessary, while it does open the door for such development under God's blessing. A *Limited Contact* relationship ought primarily to function as an exploratory, communicatory level in an official and brotherly manner.

Limited Contact including:

1. the occasional attendance and addressing of each other's broadest assembly;
2. sending each other copies of the Acts or Minutes of the broadest assemblies;

⁴ Acts of Synod 2010, Article 40

3. meeting of each other's interchurch relations committees or other delegates to:
 - a) seek confirmation of the unreserved commitment to and agreement with (1) the infallibility and inerrancy of Scriptures as the Word of God and (2) the validity and relevance of our Confessions.
 - b) develop an appreciation of each other's history;
 - c) discuss what we have in common, and where we differ;
 - d) gauge the degree of doctrinal and spiritual affinity; and
4. cooperation in areas such as: para-church mission and world relief organizations, and Christian education.

Limited Correspondence including:

1. opening the Lord's Table to each other;
2. opening the pulpit to each other's visiting ministers;
3. the frequent attendance and addressing of each other's broadest assembly (visiting delegates attending our Synod may be asked for advice at the discretion of the chairman);
4. sending each other copies of the Acts or Minutes of the broadest assemblies;
5. offering spiritual support consisting of:
 - a) calling attention to each other's spiritual and ecclesiastical problems with mutual efforts toward scriptural solutions;
 - b) warning each other of spiritual dangers which arise and which spread and begin to dominate the church of Christ;
 - c) correcting each other in love regarding any slackening in connection with the confession or practice of "the faith once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3);
 6. cooperation in areas of common responsibility, for example: offering material support and cooperation or consultation with regard to mission work, theological training and such like; and
 7. developing a joint statement particularly on those doctrines on which there are divergent views in the Reformed church community for the purpose of gauging the extent of doctrinal unity.

Complete Correspondence including:

1. the mutual acceptance of each other's (membership) attestations;
2. opening the Lord's Table to each other;

3. opening the pulpit to each other's visiting ministers;
4. mutually considering each other's ministers eligible for call;
5. mutual consultation with each other regarding significant actions such as, for example, the revision of the confession or of the Church Order, the creation, revision or cancellation of a relationship of correspondence. etc.;
6. the regular attendance and addressing of each other's broadest assembly (visiting delegates attending our Synod may be asked for advice at the discretion of the chairman);
7. sending each other copies of Acts or Minutes of the broadest assemblies;
8. offering spiritual support consisting of:
 - a) calling attention to each other's spiritual and ecclesiastical problems with mutual efforts toward Scriptural solutions;
 - b) warning each other of spiritual dangers which arise and which spread and begin to dominate the Church of Christ;
 - c) correcting each other in love regarding any slackening in connection with the confession or practice of "the faith once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3); and
9. cooperation in areas of common responsibility, for example: offering material support and cooperation or consultation with regard to mission work, theological training, and such like.
10. adoption of a joint statement particularly on those doctrines on which there are divergent views in the Reformed church community for the purpose of gauging the extent of doctrinal unity. Such adoption does not constitute the acceptance of an extra credal or otherwise binding statement.

Other churches whose usages regarding non-essentials differ from ours shall not be rejected. (*Comment: this is transferred from art. 86 and now included in art. 51*)

OF DOCTRINE

Article 52: Signing of the Form of Subscription by Ministers

The ministers of the Word shall subscribe to the Three—Forms of Unity, by signing the stated Form of Subscription for ministers and office-bearers.

The ministers of the Word who refuse to do so shall de facto be suspended from their office by the Consistory or Classis until they, after conferring together, are willing to sign it. If they persist in refusing they shall be deposed from their office.

The ministers of the Word shall by signing the Form of Subscription, solemnly as in the presence of God, agree and bind themselves to the doctrine, service, and discipline of the Free Reformed Churches of North America. The signing by candidates to the ministry of the Word shall take place after they have passed their Synodical examination. (See Form of Subscription—Supplement No. 10)

Synod pronounces that the Three-Forms of Unity clearly express themselves with regard to the personal return of Christ and that it is not Reformed to teach that Christ shall visibly and bodily reign for a thousand years on earth, since this is contrary to God's Word, so that no one is permitted to teach or propagate this.

Article 53: Signing by the Elders and Deacons

Likewise, the elders and deacons, upon taking office and in a Consistory meeting, shall express their agreement with the Three-Forms of Unity by signing the stated Form of Subscription.

Article 54: The Necessity of Christian Education

The Consistories shall see to it that the parents, in harmony with the promises made at the baptism of their children, have them taught at schools where the instruction is in accordance with the Word of God and the Three-Forms of Unity.

Article 55: Perverse Literature and Worldly Amusements

The office bearers shall with all the possible means at their disposal counteract the effect of all heretical, revolutionary, and immoral literature and worldly amusements and in the preaching as well as in catechising and house visitation warn against everything that imperils the purity of Christian life.

OF THE SACRAMENTS AND OTHER CEREMONIES

Article 56: Concerning Holy Baptism

The covenant of God shall be sealed unto the children of believers by the Sacrament of Baptism, administered by a minister of the Word in a public worship service, as soon as the administration thereof is feasible.

Article 57: The Duties of Parents Concerning Baptism

The ministers of the Word shall do their utmost in order that parents request the Sacrament of Baptism for their children and that with the administration of the sacrament they take upon themselves the obligations connected to it.

Should it be necessary to have witnesses participate at the Baptism, these should be persons who are in agreement with the pure doctrine and blameless in their walk of life.

Article 58: The Use of Forms

In the Baptism of children, as well as of adults, the ministers of the Word shall use the respective forms drawn up for the administration of this sacrament.

Article 59: The Baptism of Adults

Adults are through Baptism incorporated into the Christian church, and are accepted as members of the church, and are therefore obliged also to partake of the Lord's Supper which they shall promise to do at their Baptism.

Article 60: The Proper Administration of Baptism

The names of those baptised, and of the parents and (or) the witnesses, likewise the date of baptism, shall be recorded.

A. The baptism of one who comes from another Christian denomination shall be considered valid if it has been administered in the name of the Triune God, by a minister of the Word, authorised by that denomination.

B. Recipients of Baptism:

1. At baptism in special cases the Consistory must be convinced:
 - a. That the child to be baptised is a child of the covenant.
 - b. That it is certain that they who answer the baptismal questions and thus agree to the stipulations of the church are competent to do so.
2. Children, whose parents are not, but whose grandparents or one of them, are confessing members of the church, may be baptised, if the grandparents are willing to take upon themselves the supervision of the child's upbringing.
3. Children who have been legally adopted by members of our churches have the right to the sacrament of Holy Baptism, wherefore for their baptism the same stipulations exist as for the other children of believers and the same Form of Baptism shall be used.
4. The Consistory shall decide up to what age children shall be baptised with the Form of Baptism for the children of believers, inasmuch as maturity as well as age must be given consideration.
5. Baptism shall not be administered outside the assembly of the church unless extreme circumstances make it necessary and then only after a decision by, and in the presence of, the Consistory.

C. Non-Eligible Parents:

1. In the event one of the parents of the child to be baptised is not a member of the congregation, then the answering of the baptismal

questions shall not be required of him or her.

2. One who is under censure may not answer to the questions in the Form for Baptism.

D. A Membership Certificate of Baptism cannot be given to another church denomination; however, a statement asserting baptism can be forwarded.

Article 61: Admission to the Lord's Supper

None shall be admitted to the Lord's Supper except those who according to the regulations of the local church have made confession of faith, and are reputed to be of a godly walk, without which those who come from other churches shall not be admitted.

A. They who come from other congregations of our denomination shall be admitted to the Lord's Supper only after consent of the consistory.

B. They who come from other denominations and who have a desire to celebrate the Lord's Supper with the local congregation shall be admitted to the Lord's Supper only after the Consistory has examined them. From this examination it must be clear to the Consistory that:

1. They are permitted to celebrate the Lord's Supper in their own congregation (denomination);
2. Their walk of life is in accordance with Scripture;
3. Their personal faith-conviction is in accordance with the confession of our church.

Article 62: The Administration of the Lord's Supper

Every church shall administer the Lord's Supper in such a manner as it shall judge most conducive to the edification of the congregation, provided, however, that the ceremonies as prescribed in God's Word be not changed and that the Form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper, together with the prayers for that purpose, shall be read.

Article 63: The Observation and Frequency of the Lord's Supper

The administration of the Lord's Supper shall take place only under the supervision of elders, according to the ecclesiastical order and in a public gathering of the congregation.

The Lord's Supper shall at least be observed once every three months, and always be preceded by a Preparatory sermon and followed by an Applicatory sermon.

Article 64: Worship Services

On the Lord's Day the congregation shall assemble at least twice under the administration of the Word of God. The gatherings of the congregation on other days of the week shall be left to the discretion of the Consistory.

On every Lord's Day the Ten Commandments shall be read during the first, and the Apostles' Creed during the second service in every congregation.

Article 65: Funerals

Funerals are not ecclesiastical but family affairs, and shall be conducted accordingly.

Article 66: Prayer Days

In times of war, epidemics, persecution of the churches, and other general calamities, prayer days shall be proclaimed by the committee appointed for this purpose by the synod.

A. Two consistories are appointed to proclaim such a special prayer day. (Dundas and Hamilton)

B. The Synod urges that the annual spring Prayer Day be observed on the second Wednesday in March, and the fall Thanksgiving Day on the day designated by the government.

Article 67: Lord's Day Observance⁵

The churches shall hallow the Lord's Day according to God's Law. The congregations shall also gather for worship on recognised Christian feast days.

A. The churches are urged faithfully to keep the Lord's Day holy so that with the exception of works of mercy, charity and necessity, weekly labours and trade shall cease, that the wrath of God be not greatly kindled against His congregation on account of the desecration of the Day of Rest.

B. Those who perform unnecessary labour on the Lord's Day may not be members of the congregation.

That the Consistories be urged that such special worship services be held, and their attendance be supervised, in such a manner as does not bind or compel the conscience of any member but does nurture unity and 'keep all (members) in obedience to God.

The consistory shall exercise its judgement over each particular case.

Article 68: Catechism Preaching

At one of the services each Lord's Day, the minister shall ordinarily preach the Word as summarised in the Heidelberg Catechism, following its sequence.

Article 69: Church Singing

In the worship services only the metrical version of the 150 Psalms (contained in the Psalter published through Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965 edition and the Dutch Psalms, 1773 edition) and the 9 hymns composed of portions of Scripture, which have been approved by Synod, shall be sung. The approval of Synod shall be required before any other hymns composed of portions of Scripture shall be used in the worship services.

⁵ Acts 2009 Article 25 – 2.1

Article 70: Marriage Stipulations

Consistories shall instruct and admonish those under their spiritual care that they marry only in the Lord.

A. Christian marriages shall be solemnised with appropriate admonitions, promises and prayers. Marriages may be solemnised either in a worship service or in private gatherings of relatives and friends.

B. Ministers shall solemnise only such marriages as are in accordance with the Word of God.

C. In case of a “forced” marriage, the couple involved is to make confession of guilt, ordinarily before the Consistory, as soon as possible. If the Consistory considers it necessary, the Consistory shall inform the congregation of this confession of guilt. With regard to above-mentioned confession of guilt the chairman of the consistory shall ask the couple the following questions:

1. Do you acknowledge to have sinned against the seventh commandment of the Law of God?
2. Do you sincerely confess that you in this way have dishonoured the Name of the Lord and grieved the congregation?
3. Are you truly sorrowful about this sin?

D. Divorce and Remarriage

1 As a rule the church acknowledges the government's decision in divorce cases, at least as far as the legal consequences are concerned; however, the church has the right to a judgement of its own with regard to such a divorce.

2 Divorce on the ground of adultery is allowable. A second marriage by the innocent party is allowable and may be confirmed in the church.

3 The believing party may not seek divorce for religious reasons; however, if the unbelieving party wants to leave the other, then the believer need not prevent this at all costs.

4 It cannot with certainty be determined from Scripture, whether or not the believing party, after such a divorce, may remarry as long as the other party lives and is not remarried.

5 Because it cannot with sufficient certainty be determined whether a marriage may be dissolved through divorce for religious reasons and whether in that case the innocent party may re-marry as long as the other party lives, it is advisable that the church be very cautious in judging and dealing with such cases.

6 The church may never insist on or advise divorce. On the contrary, the church must point to the necessity of repentance with regard to that which has broken or which threatens to break the marriage, in order that the husband and wife may be reconciled to one another and the

broken relationship be restored.

7 If divorce takes place on grounds which the church judges to be unscriptural, then the church must exercise discipline upon the guilty party(ies).

8 When husband and wife divorce on grounds which the church judges to be unscriptural and if a new marriage results, the church shall not be able to co-operate in this, as long as the previous marriage partner is still alive and not yet remarried.

9 Although usually it is impossible in such cases to right the wrong caused by sin, members of the church on whom the church has exercised discipline in connection with sub 7 and/or 8, can be reinstated as members in good standing after they show repentance for their sin, also by a godly walk of life and after confessing their guilt.

10 Concerning those to whom sub 7 and/or 8 apply: If they had withdrawn their membership while church discipline was being exercised and again ask to be admitted to the communion of the church, or if they desire to be admitted to the communion of the church for the first time, such request cannot be granted until they have confessed their guilt and after a sufficiently long period of probation—which the consistory must set, upon the advice of the classis—they show sincere repentance, also by a godly walk of life.

OF DISCIPLINE AND ECCLESIASTICAL ADMONITIONS

Article 71: Censure of Members

As Christian discipline is of a spiritual nature, and exempts no one from civil trial or punishment by civil authorities, so also besides civil punishment there is need of ecclesiastical censures, to reconcile the sinner with the Church and his neighbour and to remove the offence out of the church of Christ.

Article 72: Secret Sins and the Implementation of Matthew 18:15—17

In case any one errs in doctrine or offends in conduct, as long as the sin is of a private character, not giving public offence, the rule clearly prescribed by Christ in Matthew 18 shall be followed.

Article 73: Repentance After Admonition

Secret sins of which the sinner repents, after being admonished by one person in private (Matthew 18:15), or in the presence of two or three witnesses (Matthew 18:16), shall not be laid before the consistory.

Article 74: Actions Against the Duly Admonished Un-Repentant

If any one, having been admonished in love concerning a secret sin by two or three persons, does not give heed, or otherwise has committed a public

sin, the matter shall be reported to the consistory. (Matthew 18:17). The consistory shall inform the accused sinner of the exact sin alleged against him and of any evidence that exists of the alleged conduct.⁶ Article 75:

Public Declaration of Sin

The reconciliation of all such sins as are of a public nature, or have become public because the admonition of the church was despised, shall take place (when definite signs of repentance are evident) in such a manner as the consistory shall deem conducive to the edification of the churches) involved. Whether in particular cases this shall take place in public, shall, when there is a difference of opinion about it in the consistory, be considered with the advice of two neighbouring churches or of the classis.

Article 76: Suspension from the Lord's Supper

Such as obstinately reject the admonition of the consistory, and likewise those who have committed a public or otherwise gross sin, shall be suspended from the Lord's Supper. And if he, having been suspended, after repeated admonitions, shows no signs of repentance, the consistory shall at last proceed to the extreme remedy, namely excommunication, according to the form adopted for that purpose on the basis of the Word of God. But no one shall be excommunicated without previous advice of the classis.

Article 77: Excommunication

If the sinner has not appealed to the consistory, the classis (if any) or the synod, or the suspension has been upheld by the consistory, the classis (if any) and the synod, but before proceeding to excommunication, the obstinacy of the sinner shall be publicly made known to the congregation, the offence explained, together with the care bestowed upon him in reproof, suspension from the Lord's Table, and repeated admonitions, and the congregation shall be exhorted to speak to him and to pray for him.

There shall be three such public admonitions. In the first, the name of the sinner shall not be mentioned. In the second, with the consent of the classis, his name shall be mentioned. In the third, the congregation shall be informed that (unless he repent) he will be excluded from the fellowship of the Church, so that his excommunication, in case he remain obstinate, may take place with the tacit approbation of the Church.⁷

There shall be three such admonitions. In the first the name of the sinner shall not be mentioned. In the second, with the consent of the Classis, his name shall be mentioned. In the third, the congregation shall be informed that (unless he repent) he will be excluded from the fellowship of the

⁶" Acts of Synod 2009, Article 25-6.1

⁷" Acts of Synod 2009, Article 25-6.1

church, so that his excommunication, in case he remains obstinate, may take place with the tacit approbation of the church. The interval between the admonitions shall be left to the discretion of the Consistory.

A. When members because of indifference regularly withdraw themselves from the worship services in their own denomination, the consistory shall repeatedly and patiently admonish them, and when they continue to be disobedient administer ecclesiastical censure.

1. Preference must be given to the above stipulation, namely, to deal with delinquent members according to the procedure of ecclesiastical discipline.
2. However, acknowledging a passive resignation does not conflict with the nature and character of the church. (see Acts of Synod 1981, C.O. report)

B. When members regularly withdraw themselves from the worship services in their own denomination because they attend church elsewhere, the Consistory shall repeatedly and patiently admonish them and when they continue to be disobedient, the Consistory will deal with them as may be required in accordance with the Church Order.

C. Admonition and discipline of members-by-baptism:

1. When baptised members, who have arrived at the years of discretion, because of indifference regularly withdraw themselves from the worship services in their own denomination, the Consistory shall repeatedly and patiently admonish them, and when they continue to be indifferent and disobedient, exclude them from the church.
2. Members by baptism who have been excluded from the church, and who later repent of their sin, shall be received again into the church, after a period of probation, followed by public confession of guilt and confession of faith.
3. When baptised members, who have arrived at the years of discretion, regularly stay away from the worship services in their own denomination because they attend church elsewhere, the Consistory shall repeatedly and patiently admonish them. When they continue to be disobedient, the Consistory shall deal with them as may be required in accordance with the Church Order.

D. Members of the church who have themselves rebaptised, actually withdraw themselves from the communion of the church, although this fact is not always to be regarded as a breaking with the church. It is the task of the consistory to apply ecclesiastical admonition and discipline for a period of three months, because the act of so-called re-baptism is completely in conflict with God's Word and with the confession and

Order of the church. If during these three months they refuse to repent of their sin the consistory shall consider them as having withdrawn themselves from the communion of the church. Discipline will be discontinued upon a sincere confession of guilt and a recanting of the errors which are connected with re-baptism.

E. When, because of the nature and grossness of the sin the consistory deems it unwise to wait until the next Synod meeting before proceeding with the second admonition mentioned above, it may proceed with the advice and consent of two neighbouring churches, and report its actions to the next Synod as per Article 41.

Article 78: Readmission to Church Membership

Whenever anyone who has been excommunicated desires in the way of penitence to become reconciled to the church, it shall be announced to the congregation before the administration of the Lord's Supper, or at some other opportune time, in order that, (in as far as no one can mention anything against him to the contrary) he may at the next Lord's Supper, with profession of his repentance, be publicly reinstated, according to the form adopted for that purpose on the basis of the Word of God.

Article 79: Discipline of Office-Bearers

When ministers of the divine Word, elders or deacons, have committed any public, gross sin which is a disgrace to the church or worthy of punishment by civil authorities, the elders and deacons shall immediately, after prior investigation and sentence of the consistory of that church and of the nearest church, be suspended or deposed from their office, but the ministers shall only be suspended. Whether these shall be entirely deposed from office, shall be subject to the judgement of the synod.

Article 80: Restoration of Office-Bearers

Among the gross sins which are worthy of being punished with suspension or deposition from office, these are the principle ones: false doctrine or heresy, public schisms, public blasphemy, simony, faithless desertion of office or intrusion upon that of another, perjury, adultery, fornication, theft, acts of violence, habitual drunkenness, brawling, seeking filthy lucre; in short all sins and gross offences as render the perpetrators infamous before the world, and which in any private member of the church would be considered worthy of excommunication.

Restoration in office of deposed ministers may only take place with the greatest carefulness and the approval of the synod.

Article 81: *Censura Morem*—Internal Consistory Censure

The ministers of the Word, elders and deacons shall exercise Christian censure among themselves, and in love admonish one another with regard to the discharge of their office.

(By this mutual Christian censure is meant the inquiry that takes place

under leadership of the Chairman of the Consistory at a Consistory meeting held prior to the observance of the Lord's Supper.)

OF VARIOUS REGULATIONS

Article 82: Certificate of Membership

Members who remove from a congregation, shall be given by the Consistory a certificate of membership concerning their profession and conduct, signed by the president and secretary.

A. With the above the following is also to be considered:

1. Members who leave a congregation should be prompt in requesting their certificate of membership from the Consistory and an announcement to the congregation shall follow this request. (See Supplement No. 16)
2. The Consistory which has given this certificate, should as soon as possible inform the Consistory to which this person plans to go of this matter, so they can exercise the usual supervision.
3. The departing member is obliged to bring this certificate immediately to the Consistory of the church to which he is moving.
4. When a baptised member moves to another congregation, a certificate of baptismal membership will be forwarded to the consistory of that church. (see Supplement No.17)
5. Certificates are not given to other church denominations.
6. A record of membership may be issued upon request.

B. When members of other denominations come to our churches, the Consistory shall make inquiry whether the Confession that they have made is in accordance with the Three-Forms of Unity.

Article 83: The Needy

Furthermore, the needy, when removing for sufficient reasons, shall receive assistance from the deacons as they deem adequate. They who are being cared for in institutions remain under the responsibility of the congregation to which they belonged before they entered such institutions.

Article 84: Legal Security

The churches which meet as Classis and Synod together form bodies which have sufficient legal authority over the affairs which they share as Classis and Synod respectively. These bodies are legally represented in and out of court by the classical and synodical gatherings, as well as by deputies who are duly appointed, instructed, and discharged by these gatherings and who are in all their actions bound by their particular instructions.

Article 85: Jurisdiction of Local Churches

No church shall in any way lord it over other churches, no minister over

other ministers, no elder or deacon over other elders or deacons.

⁸Article 87: Revision of Church Order

This Church Order, having been adopted by common consent, shall be faithfully observed and any revision thereof shall be made only by Synod.

⁸Article 86 incorporated into Article 51 by Acts of Synod 2010, Article 40

Addenda to the Church Order

Supplements regarding Office Bearers and Members Transfers

Supplement No. A -1 (cf. Article 4 & 5)

Concept Regulations for the Election and Calling of Ministers of the Word

Article 1: Election and Calling of a Minister

The election and calling of a minister of the Word shall be performed by the Consistory, with the assistance of the voting members of the congregation, in accordance with Articles 4 and 5. Voting members are male members of the congregation who are permitted to attend the Lord's Supper and are not under censure.

Article 2: Nomination of a Minister

In the event of a ministerial vacancy, the Consistory meets for the purpose of producing a nomination. In the process of setting nominees, the Consistory is at liberty to give to the members of the congregation the opportunity to call attention to certain ministers or candidates. To fill the vacancy it proposes two (or more) persons from amongst whom the congregation may choose.

Article 3: Election of the Minister

After the names which have been placed on the nomination have been announced twice to the congregation, the Consistory calls a meeting of the voting members, which, under the presidency of the counsellor or his substitute and after calling upon the Name of the Lord, proceeds to the election.

Article 4: Signing of Roster and Proof of Membership

At this meeting all those who are present shall sign a roster and the president is empowered, if necessary, to request proof of membership.

Article 5: Viable Electorate

Only those who are present at the meeting may participate in the voting.

Article 6: Electoral Procedure Prior to Vote

Before the voting begins, the President shall read again the names of the persons on the nomination. He shall further observe that an actual count is made of the church members present at the meeting and participating in the voting and also the number of votes that each of the nominees receives. The record of this voting is to be recorded in the usual minute book of the Consistory and approved and signed by the Consistory.

Article 7: Counting of the Votes

At the counting of the votes, blank ballots and other illegal votes, such as

ballots with more names than the number of vacancies, other names, etc., shall be excluded from the count.

Article 8: Election of the Candidate

That person is elected who receives the most legal votes, considering that in no case is one considered elected, if he receives less than one-half plus one of an even total of legal votes cast or, in the case of an uneven total, less than half plus one-half of the total of legal votes cast and in accordance with the stipulations in articles 5 and 6, above.

When there is a tie vote, another vote shall be held. At a nomination of two persons, the voting is for one of the two.

When more than two persons have been nominated, the vote is between the two who received the most votes; in case they did not receive a majority, then one more free vote shall take place. If the votes are tied for the second time, a decision is to be made by casting lots.

Article 9: Extension of Ministerial Call

The minister or candidate chosen by the congregation may be called by the Consistory to be the Shepherd and Minister of the congregation, whereof he is informed by the Consistory as soon as possible by means of a calling letter, signed by the President and Secretary and also by or in name of the counsellor. In this calling letter salary and benefits are to be mentioned and also a commitment is to be made of an emeritus salary in accordance with Synodical stipulations.

Article 10: Acceptance of Ministerial Call

After the minister or candidate has accepted the call, the Consistory shall announce his name to the congregation on two consecutive Sabbaths, that it may thus be approved by the congregation in accordance with Articles 4 and 5 and the Form for the Ordination of the Ministers of God's Word.

Article 11: Ordination or Installation

After the approbation of the congregation and of the Classis, the public ordination and/or installation according to the ecclesiastical stipulations shall take place upon the arrival of the called candidate/minister.

Article 12: Objections and Right to Appeal

Objections of a formal nature against the selection of a minister must be brought to the same meeting at which the minister is elected. Only in this case has a complainant the right to appeal to a major assembly in the event that his complaint has not been resolved.

By the Consistory mentioned in these articles is understood the broad Consistory, i.e. the Consistory with the deacons.

Accepted and approved in the meeting of the Consistory held on:

President
Secretary

Supplement No. A—2 (cf. Article 4 & 5)

Concept Call - Letter

The Consistory of the Free Reformed Church at _____, convinced of the urgent need of having its own Pastor and Teacher, has again taken up the work of calling a minister.

After having called upon the King of the Church with prayers and supplications at the meeting today of the Consistory with the voting members of the congregation, you were chosen (out of a previously made nomination consisting of you and Pastor _____, with the majority of the votes, to be our Pastor and Teacher. Thus, the Consistory has decided to extend the call to you, which we hereby do in writing. The Consistory does this with the prayer that the King of the Church, who also sends out His servants, may crown this call with His blessing and favour.

To the services that the congregation desires from its ministers belong:

- ≡ Preaching two times on the Sabbath Day, once on what is a free subject or text out of the Old or New Testament and once on a Lord's Day, or part thereof, of the Heidelberg Catechism so that no part of the Catechism is omitted.
- ≡ Preaching on the Christian feast days, Old and New Year's Day and on the Prayer and Thanksgiving days.
- ≡ Administration of the Holy Sacraments.
- ≡ Solemnizing of marriages and conducting of funerals.
- ≡ Instruction of the youth of the congregation in the doctrine according to godliness in weekly catechism classes, using textbooks approved by the Consistory.
- ≡ Visiting of the sick and family visitation and further all that which pertains to the work of a minister of the Gospel, so that it is testified to all that it shall go ill with the wicked and only those who are justified by the blood of the Cross can have eternal peace.

All of this should be performed in strict accordance to the Word of God and in agreement with the Three-Forms of Unity, the currently prevailing Church Order and the further stipulations and decisions of the Free Reformed Churches of North America.

The Consistory, prayerfully looking to the Lord, from its side promises to support you in brotherly love and communion of spirit to feed the congregation of the Lord at this place. And in order that you, labouring in the Gospel, may also without concern live of the Gospel and because the labourer is worthy of his hire, the Consistory promises you:

- ≡ An annual salary of \$_____ to be paid in twelve equal monthly instalments.

- ⌘ Free use of a parsonage.
- ⌘ A car allowance of \$_____.
- ⌘ Provisions for medical costs.
- ⌘ Service increment of \$_____ for each year in the ministry to a maximum of 10 years.
- ⌘ _____ free Sabbaths, in addition to those that must be spent in the service of vacant churches in accordance with the determination of Synod.

The Consistory also guarantees you the sum stipulated by the Synod to be paid out of the denominational fund for emeritus ministers, minister's widows and orphan children in the event you should become emeritus while serving at our church or should pass away during this time.

May the Lord give you light and wisdom to make a decision that is to the glory of God and may it be to our joy, so that we may soon hear from you that you have accepted our call with much liberty.

Done in Consistory, this _____ of _____ 2_____.

The Consistory of the Free Reformed Church at _____.

_____ President
 _____ Secretary
 _____ Counsellor

Supplement No. A—3 (cf. Article 5 & 10)

Credentials for Departing Ministers

NOTE:

1. The Consistory of the departing minister shall provide 2 copies of Form A and 1 copy of Form B to the Classis of its own congregation (or to the Consistory or Consistories that have been appointed to approve credentials. See *Classis Contracta*, Article 5-C, Church Order).
- 2.
3. [The *Classis Contracta* presently consists of the Consistories of Hamilton and Toronto, with Dundas as alternate. See Acts of Synod 1981, art.11, p.4. and Acts of Synod 1982 , art.41]
4. This Classis (or *Classis Contracta*) after approval of Form A and B, shall forward 1 copy of Form C to the Consistory of the new congregation.

_____, Minister of the Word at this church since _____, desires to accept the call extended to him by the Free Reformed Church at _____ and considering that sufficient reasons have been adduced for the Consistory to acquiesce in his acceptance of this call,

THE CONSISTORY THEREFORE:

Resolves to discharge Rev. _____ from his agreement with the Free Reformed Church at _____, which discharge shall be effective the date of his installation as Minister of the Word in the church at _____; Grants this discharge in a most honourable manner, declaring that Rev. _____ all the time of his labours at the church of _____ was faithful and diligent in his office, Christian and upright in his confession and walk, being blameless and inoffensive in the congregation.

THE CONSISTORY THEREFORE:

Proposes to the Classis (Classis Contracta) that the Synod, in a like manner and with a similar declaration, acquiesce in this discharge in order that the church at _____ may receive him, in accordance with Articles 5 and 10, of the Church Order of Dordrecht, with legal testimonials of his departure from the church of _____ where he has served and with good ecclesiastical credentials concerning doctrine and life.

The Consistory of the Free Reformed Church at _____.

Date: _____

_____ President

FORM C

The Classis (*Classis Contracta*) of the Free Reformed Church of North America, having seen the communication of the church at _____, that the Rev. _____, Minister of the Word at this congregation since _____, desires to accept the call extended to him by the Free Reformed Church at _____ and that the Consistory of the church at _____ has decided to acquiesce in his acceptance of this call considering that sufficient reasons have been adduced for it; has decided in its meeting of _____:

1. To discharge, with honour, Rev. _____ from his services in the Classis of _____, which release shall be effective the date he shall be united to the service in the Classis of _____.)

*

2. To declare concerning Rev. _____ that during the entire period of his labours in the Synod he was faithful and diligent in his office, Christian and upright in his confession and walk, being blameless and inoffensive in Synod;

3. To give Rev. _____ a copy of this declaration so these credentials, in accordance with Articles 5 and 10 of the Church Order of Dordrecht, may serve to the Free Reformed Church at _____ as a legal testimony of his departure from the congregation at _____ where he has served, and as a good ecclesiastical attestation of doctrine and life; and

4. To commend Rev. _____ upon his departure unto God and the Word of His grace, with sincere thankfulness for the faithful service performed here during---__ years and with the heartfelt prayer that it may please the Lord to make him to be a rich blessing in the congregation that he is about to serve.

For the above mentioned Classis (Classis Contracta):

Date _____

_____ President

_____ Secretary

Supplement No. A—4 (Cf. Article 13)

Concept—Credential for Emeritus Declaration of Ministers

The Classis _____ of the Free Reformed Churches, having seen and considered:

- 1 The request for emeritation and the reasons adduced therefore, submitted by the Rev. _____ to the consistory of the Free Reformed Church at _____;
- 2 The compliance with the request by the consistory;
- 3 The certificates submitted by two physicians, indicating that the Rev. _____ has been rendered incapable of performing the duties of his office. (This requirement applies only when the applicant for emeritation has become physically or mentally incapable of discharging his usual duties and has not reached the age at which this status may customarily be requested.) considers the request justified and for that reason decides:
 - 1 To grant to the Rev. _____ emeritus status, effective _____
 - 2 To grant this emeritus status based on Article 13. due to _____
 - 3 That according to the ecclesiastical ordinances Rev. _____ is emeritus minister of the church of _____ and consequently the responsibility for providing honourably in his need rests with the consistory of this church;
 - 4 To commend the Rev. _____ to God and the Word of His grace, with sincere thanks for the faithful service performed in the above named classis during ____ years, which service shall remain in grateful memory and with the hearty prayer that it may please the Lord to confirm the blessings on that labour in the most honourable way.

For the Classis above named,

Date: _____

President _____

Secretary _____

Supplement No. A—5: Ministerial Certificate of Dismissal
(See Article 5-F)

(In connection with removal to a foreign Church which does not stand in correspondence relationship)

The consistory of the Free Reformed Church of _____, having heard from the Rev. _____ that he wishes to accept a call from a foreign church with which our churches do not maintain a relationship of correspondence, has decided, in its meeting of _____:

- 1 To release, with honour, the Rev. _____ from his bond to the Free Reformed Church of _____, this release to be effective _____ (see Art. 5-F-1);
- 2 To declare concerning the Rev. _____, that he, during the time he laboured in the Free Reformed Church of _____, did so faithfully and diligently, adhering in doctrine and life to the Word of God as interpreted by our Forms of Unity and the Church Order of Dordrecht;
- 3 To commend the Rev. _____, at his coming departure, unto God and the Word of His grace, with sincere thanks for the faithful service performed here during ____ years.

The Consistory of the Free Reformed Church of _____.

Date _____

(Vice) President _____

Secretary _____

Secretary _____

Supplement No. A—6 (cf. Articles 22 & 24)

Election of Elders and Deacons Concept - Regulations for the Election of Elders and Deacons

Article 1: Proper Election of Elders and Deacons

In accordance with articles 22 and 24 of the Church Order, the elders and deacons shall be chosen by the consistory with the assistance of the voting members of the congregation, according to the stipulations of the Church Order, with observance of the rules contained in the following articles. Voting members are those male members of the congregation who are confessing members and are not under censure.

Article 2: Calling of Suitable Candidates

During the month of _____ the Consistory shall give an opportunity to the voting members of the congregation to suggest, by means of signed letters, names of brothers whom they consider to be suitable for the office of elder or deacon. This method is optional according to the by-laws of the individual church.

At the next meeting of the consistory, the consistory may add other names to this list and from this list make up a final list of candidates of twice the number of vacancies in order that the voting members may choose half of this number.

Article 3: Calling of Electoral Meeting

After the names of the candidates have been announced to the congregation on two consecutive Lord's Days, the Consistory, during the month of _____, shall call a meeting with the voting members in order to proceed to the election of elders and deacons under its leadership and after calling upon the name of the Lord.

Article 4: Viable Electorate

At this meeting all those voting members who are present shall sign an attendance list, and the president has authority to request proof of membership and to exclude non-voting members.

Article 5: Viable Electorate

All eligible members who have signed the attendance list may participate in the vote. An absentee ballot must be submitted in a sealed envelope, signed (by hand only) on the outside. The ballots shall not identify the voter in any way and will not be counted again if subsequent rounds of voting are needed.

Article 6: Electoral Procedure

Before the voting takes place, the President shall read the names of the persons on the nomination lists, both of the elders and the deacons, according to the nomination set by the Consistory. He shall further observe that an actual count is made of the number of church members present at the meeting and participating in the voting, plus the number of legitimate and accepted absentee ballots and also the number of votes that each of the nominees receives.

After the ballots have been counted, the chairman may announce the number of votes each nominee received. The deed of this voting shall be recorded in the usual minute book of the Consistory and approved and signed by the Consistory.

Article 7: Counting of the Votes

At the counting of the votes, blank ballots and other illegal votes (such as ballots with more names than the number of vacancies, other names, etc.) shall be excluded from the count.

Article 8: Election of the Candidate(s)

The brother or brothers who receive the majority shall be considered elected. One half of the valid votes plus one shall constitute a majority. When there is a tie vote, another election shall take place. When there is another tie vote, then the oldest in years shall be chosen. When, with a nomination of more than two persons, there is no majority of votes in the first round of voting, a second round shall take place to vote between those who received the most votes.

Article 9: Informing Elected Candidates

The Consistory shall inform the chosen brethren that they have been appointed as soon as possible. If an elected brother declines the appointment, and the Consistory approves his reasons, a new election shall take place, according to the same rules.

Article 10: Objections and Installation

After the elected brothers have accepted their appointment, the Consistory shall announce their names on two consecutive Lord's Days, in order that the congregation may approve the appointment made by the Consistory. If no legitimate objections are brought against them, they shall be installed in their office(s) on _____, or, if for some reason that will not be possible, on the following Lord's Day, according to the form for installation of elders and deacons in a worship service of the congregation.

Article 11: Term of Office

The elders and deacons shall be chosen for a ____ year term of office. Every year a certain number of office-bearers shall retire, in accordance with a set schedule. Those who retire shall be succeeded by others. When vacancies cannot be filled in accordance with these rules, the Consistory shall have the right to re-nominate the retiring brothers, in-order to give the congregation an opportunity to reelect them. The term of office of the elders and deacons shall begin with their installation and last—except in case of death or deposition—until successors shall have been installed in their place at the end of their term of service.

Article 12: Vacancies

When vacancies occur during the course of the year, the Consistory shall decide when they will fill the vacancies. In such instances, the Consistory shall observe these regulations except for the time element. Interim-appointed elders and deacons shall be ordained as soon as possible.

Article 13: Objections Against Procedure

Objections against methods of procedure shall be made known at the same meeting at which they occur. They who fail to do so at that same meeting forfeit their right of appeal to the broader assemblies. Accepted and approved in the meeting of the Consistory held on

_____ President
_____ Secretary

Supplement No. A—7 (cf. Article 52)

Formula of Subscription

We, the undersigned, Ministers of the Gospel, Elders and Deacons of the Free Reformed Churches of North America, do hereby sincerely and in good conscience before the Lord declare by this, our subscription, that we heartily believe and are persuaded that all the articles and points of doctrine contained in the Confession and Catechism of the Reformed Churches, together with the explanation of some points of the aforesaid doctrines made by the National Synod of Dordrecht of 1618-1619, do fully agree with the Word of God.

We promise therefore diligently to teach and faithfully to defend the aforesaid doctrine without either directly or indirectly contradicting the same by our public preaching or writing.

We declare, moreover, that we not only reject all errors that militate against this doctrine and particularly those which were condemned by the above mentioned Synod, but that we are disposed to refute and contradict these and to exert ourselves in keeping the church free from such errors. And if hereafter any difficulties or different sentiments respecting the aforesaid doctrine should arise in our minds, we promise that we will neither publicly nor privately propose, teach or defend the same, either by preaching or writing, until we have first revealed such sentiments to the Consistory, Classis and Synod, that the same may be there examined, being ready always cheerfully to submit to the judgment of the Consistory, Classis and Synod, under the penalty in case of refusal, by that very fact to be suspended from our office.

And further, if at any time the Consistory, Classis or Synod, upon sufficient ground of suspicion and to preserve the uniformity and purity of doctrine, may deem it proper to require of us a further explanation of our sentiments respecting any particular article of the Confession of Faith, the Catechism or the explanation of the National Synod, we do hereby promise always to be willing and ready to comply with such requisition, under penalty above mentioned, reserving for ourselves however, the right of an appeal whenever we shall believe ourselves aggrieved by the sentence of the Consistory, Classis or Synod and until a decision is made upon such an appeal, we will quiesce in the determination and judgment already passed.

Whereunto we do hereby set these our signatures this day

_____ of _____

Supplement No. A—8 (cf. Article 82)

Certificate of Membership

(Church letterhead)

LS.

The Consistory of the Free Reformed Church at _____
hereby declares that the member(s)

_____ born _____

_____ born _____

As far as is known to them, is (are) sound in the faith and upright in walk.

We therefore commend the above

named _____ to the
church at _____ and request the Consistory of that church

to take him (her, them) under their Christian guidance and supervision,
permitting him (her, them) to use the Holy Sacraments and whenever
necessary to assist him (her, them) by word and deed.

For the Consistory of the Free Reformed Church

at _____

Date _____

President _____

Secretary _____

NOTE: This certificate must be submitted to the above-mentioned
consistory as soon as possible. (see Church Order, Art. 82-A-3)

(Reverse Side)

Married:

Confession of Faith:

Names of Their Children

_____	Date of Birth _____	Date of Baptism _____
_____	Date of Birth _____	Date of Baptism _____
_____	Date of Birth _____	Date of Baptism _____
_____	Date of Birth _____	Date of Baptism _____
_____	Date of Birth _____	Date of Baptism _____
_____	Date of Birth _____	Date of Baptism _____
_____	Date of Birth _____	Date of Baptism _____

Residence of the above mentioned member:

Supplement No. A—9 (cf. Article 82-A-4, also Art. 60-D)

Certificate of Baptismal Membership

(Church Letterhead)

L.S.

The consistory of the Free Reformed Church of _____ hereby notifies the consistory of the Free Reformed Church of _____ that the baptized member _____ has moved to your congregation and hereby commends the above mentioned baptized member to your spiritual care.

For the consistory of the Free Reformed Church of _____.

Date _____

President _____

Secretary _____

(Reverse Side)

Name of parents: _____

Born: _____, _____

Baptized: _____, _____, in the _____

Married to: _____

Present address: _____

Remarks: _____

Supplements regarding Church Visitation and
Congregational Archives

Supplement No. B—1

Regulations for Church Visitation

The regular church visitation, which according to Article 44 of the Church Order is to be conducted annually in the congregations, shall take place in accordance with the following rules:

General Instructions

- 1 Every Classis appoints two members out of its midst with the mandate to investigate the condition of the congregations within its jurisdiction, guided by these Regulations for Church Visitation.
- 2 The visitors shall notify the Consistory at least eight days in advance of their coming as to the date and hour of their arrival, and the Consistory shall announce this to the congregation on the Lord's Day before the meeting.
- 3 All the members of the Consistory are required to be present at the meeting set for the church visitation. Every Consistory member who cannot be present is required to notify the meeting of the reasons of his absence. Should one-half of the Consistory members not be present then the church visitation cannot take place.
- 4 The Chairman of the Consistory shall see that the membership book, the minute book and the books of the treasurers of the church and the benevolent fund are available for the meeting.
- 5 Inasmuch as the usual church visitation is a meeting of the Consistory with the visiting ministers, the Chairman of the Consistory will preside. After the opening of the meeting he gives the visiting ministers opportunity to perform their labours.
- 6 When there is an extraordinary church visitation, which is a meeting of the visiting ministers with the Consistory, then the older of the visiting ministers acts as Chairman.

The Examination

A. Questions to the Entire Consistory (Consistory with Deacons):

1. Has the date and the time of the church visitation been announced to the congregation, and are the books at hand? Are all of the Consistory members present; if not, have those who are absent given an account of the reason for their absence?
2. Is it the usual rule to have two sermons on the Lord's Day, one based on a text from Scripture and one on the Heidelberg Catechism and the latter in such a way that all fifty-two Lord's Days in the Catechism are covered? (cf. C.O. Art. 68)
3. Are the Ten Commandments and the 12 Articles of Faith regularly read

in the church services?

4. Are the church services well attended?
5. Does the preaching bear fruit?
6. Are the parents desirous to have their children baptized so that the Sacrament of Holy Baptism is not needlessly postponed?
7. Are the names of the baptized, also their birth and baptism dates and, when children are baptized also the names of the parents, recorded in the church records?
8. Is the Lord's Supper observed at least four times a year, preceded by a preparatory sermon?
9. Is proper attention given as to who are allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper?
10. Are marriages solemnized in a Christian manner?
11. Are family visiting and calling on the sick and on the poor regularly being done by the Consistory in accordance with their mandate?
12. Does the Consistory take care that the catechism classes are regularly held? What question books are presently being used?
13. Do the parents endeavour, as much as possible, to send their children to schools that harmonize with the principles of the Free Reformed Churches?
14. Are the parents that are neglectful in this admonished by the Consistory?
15. What relation exists between the Consistory and the societies of men, ladies, young men, young ladies, boys, girls, etc.? Does the Consistory from time to time visit the meetings of these societies?
16. Are office bearers elected according to the Church Order and are the regulations for this observed?
17. Is the Form of Subscription in the minute book and is it signed by all the members of the Consistory: minister, elders and deacons, also upon re-installation?
18. When does the Consistory meet, and are the times and dates made known to the congregation?
19. Are issues dealt with by the Consistory recorded in the Minute book and are those minutes, after they have been read and approved, also signed by the Chairman and Secretary of the Consistory?
20. Are all matters coming before the Consistory dealt with according to ecclesiastical rules?
21. Are the decisions of the Classis and Synod faithfully carried out?
22. Is church discipline faithfully carried out in accordance with God's Word and the ecclesiastical rules?
23. Does mutual censure among the members of the Consistory take place before each observance of the Lord's Supper?
24. Do the offerings taken for the church and the benevolent funds speak of

the willingness of the people to offer for these causes?

25. Are the offerings stipulated by the Synod regularly taken?
 26. Are all the offerings counted in the presence of various Consistory members?
 27. In the event that the business administration of the church is done outside of the Consistory are there by-laws defining the relationship between the Consistory and the Business Administrator or Executive Committee?
 28. Is a financial report on the affairs of the church funds and the benevolent fund regularly made to the church members?
 29. Are the finances and the legal papers of the church and of the benevolent fund kept in a safe place so that there is no possibility of suspicion or difficulties arising by change of officers through death or completion of tenure?
 30. Is the membership record kept in order and are the changes in the total number of baptized and confessed members noted therein, i.e. changes caused by baptism, confession, acceptance and giving of membership papers, and are these figures reported in the statistics of the church yearbook?
 31. Are the archives of the congregation properly kept; are they up-to-date and in a safe place? Who is responsible for this?
 32. Is any work of Evangelization and Missions done?
 33. Is there anything special to report concerning the spiritual or financial needs of the congregation?
 34. **Questions proposed to Vacant Churches:**
 - a. Are measures taken to call a minister of the gospel, with or without the assistance of the Needy Churches Fund?
 - b. Are the Synodical Appointments faithfully observed?
 - c. Are good sermons being read, also on the Heidelberg Catechism?
 - d. At the services, does one of the Elders lead in prayer?
 - e. Are the services of the moderator called for in weighty matters?
- B. Questions to be asked to the Elders and Deacons, in the absence of the Minister:**
1. Does the pastor, in carrying out his work, in preaching and administering the Sacraments, act faithfully in accordance to God's Word, the Forms of Unity and the Church Order?
 2. Does he regularly conduct the catechism classes, visit the sick faithfully and see that house visitation is done with the help of the elders?
 3. Does he conduct himself in his family and public life as a godly man?
 4. Does he study diligently?
 5. In carrying out the ministry, does he use the Forms of the church literally and does he lead the public worship in an edifying manner?
 6. Does he have sufficient income to support his family and is his salary

increased according to the rising cost of living?

C. Questions to be asked to the Minister or Ministers and the Deacons in the absence of the *Elders*:

1. Do the elders regularly attend the church services and the consistory meetings?
2. Do they assist the minister and the deacons whenever necessary?
3. Do they take proper care that the church adheres to the accepted doctrine and worship of the Lord?
4. Do they visit the congregation as much as possible and endeavour to prevent or take away all offence?
5. Do they from time to time visit the catechism classes to see how they are attended and conducted and do the elders assist the minister in catechizing?
6. Do they conduct themselves in their family and public life as examples to the congregation?

D. Questions to be asked to the Minister or Ministers and the Elders in the absence of the *Deacons*:

1. Do the deacons regularly attend the church services and the meetings of the Consistory with the deacons?
2. Do they have separate meetings according to Article 40 and do they faithfully attend these meetings?
3. Do they faithfully fill their calling towards those in need?
4. How are the funds collected and the needy taken care of?
5. Are there offerings for the needy at the services?
6. Are any members of the congregation cared for in nursing homes and institutions?
7. Do the deacons, in considering the care of the needy, counsel with the minister and the elders?
8. * Do they administer the finances well in consultation with the minister and the elders? Do they keep record of the receipts and disbursements and do they at definite intervals give an accounting to the Consistory?
9. * Are the contents of the collections kept in a safe place and are at least two Consistory members responsible for their safety?
10. Do they reveal the necessary prudence in distributing to the needy with a compassionate heart?
11. Do they reveal themselves in their family and public life as exemplary Christians?

* N.B. In congregations where the administration is done by members of the Consistory, the questions that bear on the administration shall be asked when the respective persons doing this work are not present.

E. Conclusion:

1. After completing the ordinary examination, inquiry shall also be made if there are any difficulties about which the advice of the church visitors is desired. This advice is not binding. The decisions in these cases remain with the Consistory and the Classis.
2. Following this, verification is made whether the books are regularly audited and then signed by the Consistory or Committee of the Consistory as having approved them. The visitors can give advice about the arrangements of the books. After completing this examination, the books are signed by them.
3. Finally, the minutes of the meeting, reporting the results of the church visitation, are put in the minute book of the congregation, read, and after approval, they are signed by the Chairman and the Secretary of the Consistory and also by the two church visitors. The church visitors shall make a report of their findings and decisions to be read at the next Classis meeting.
4. The church visitors shall make a report of their findings and decisions to be read at the next Classis meeting.

Supplement No. B—2 (Cf. Article 45)

Congregational Archives: Guidelines for Establishing Congregational Archives

For the proper maintenance of the congregational archives, the following shall be observed:

A. Inclusion in the archives

All written materials to be dealt with or used by the clerk, treasurer or a committee of the consistory are to be included in the congregational archives, such as;

1. Incoming correspondence and copies of outgoing correspondence;
2. Minute books of the consistory as well as those of the deaconate and any committees appointed by the consistory;
3. Membership registers and/or card systems of the membership registration insofar it concerns members who have moved, died or withdrawn as well as all certificates and copies of attestations, etc., issued;
4. Cash books, etc., of the treasurer, deaconate and any other consistorial committees, with their appropriate documents;
5. Commercial documents and proofs of transactions, such as: bills of sale, proofs of possession, policies, etc.;
6. Reports and acts of Classes and Synods and reports of synodical committees;
7. Samples of letters, etc., sent to the members of the congregation.

(NOTE: It will not be necessary to keep all letters and documents mentioned under 1 and 4 above; however, this selection should not be made by only one person)

B. Organization of the archives

The various documents pertaining to one matter shall be grouped together in such a way that each matter's documents shall be included in one titled folder, numbered and ordered, each folder supplied with a table of contents and various folders placed in one box or drawer which, in turn, is provided with a title and table of contents.

The archives are to be stored in a clean, dry place, preferably a safe. If a safe is not available in the building, use should be made of the facilities available with financial institutions.

C. Management of the archives

The archives should be managed in such a way that documents and information can be readily retrieved. It is recommended that an archive keeper be appointed who, with the clerk, is responsible for this management. The usefulness of the archives will be enhanced if both

maintain an effective registration in which each document is sequentially numbered, by:

1. Cataloguing of the documents in a chronological register, according to number and date, with appropriate cross references to the minutes and the place in the archives, as well as recording of the information in a card system, according to fixed divisions;
2. Marking of the documents with a rubber stamp indicating; Archives of _____, # _____, Date _____;
3. Keeping careful records of any documents loaned out.

D. Control of the archives.

When church visitors ask whether the archives are properly kept, current and in a safe place, the consistory shall not give an affirmative answer unless and except proper previous inspection indicates this is indeed so.

Supplements regarding Synodical Matters

Supplement No. C—1 (cf. Article 41, 47 & 50)

Public Declaration of Agreement with the Three Forms of Unity

Of all the marks by which the true church distinguishes itself from all human societies, the confession of the truth must be mentioned in the first place. For our Lord Jesus Christ said, John 8:31, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed." And again, Matthew 10:32, "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven."

In obedience to the Lord, this assembly deems it proper that it be publicly declared what the confession of the Free Reformed Churches is.

All these churches acknowledge the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dordrecht, held in 1618-19, to be the full and accurate expression of their faith.

In conformity with the belief of all these churches, we, as members of their synod, declare: 1) that from the heart we feel and believe that all articles and expressions of doctrine, contained in the above named confessions, jointly called the Three Forms of Unity, in all respects agree with the Word of God, whence we reject all errors repugnant thereto; 2) that we desire to conform all our actions to them, agreeably to the accepted Church Order of Dordrecht, 1618-19, and 3) that we desire to receive into our church community any who agree with our confession.

May the King of the Church work this faith in the hearts of many and increase it and may those who have received like precious faith with us reveal the grace shown to them in the seeking of the fellowship of the saints to the glory of Him who prayed that all His own shall be one.

Supplement C—2

Guidelines for Synodical Meetings

Introduction

Article 30 of the Church Order provides a starting point for a discussion about the conduct of Synodical meetings:

"In these assemblies ecclesiastical matters only shall be transacted and that in an ecclesiastical manner. In major assemblies only such matters shall be dealt with as could not be finished in the minor assemblies, or such as pertain to the churches of the major assembly in common."

Synod meetings are not bound to observe detailed parliamentary rules, but are to be guided by the Church Order (especially Articles 29-50 are relevant) in the ordering of its meetings. Over time, various practices have been developed which assist the orderly and efficient conduct of these meetings. This document serves as a resource to assist delegates in participating in the meetings of synod. And while the documentation of procedures is necessary so that "all things be done decently and in order" (I. Cor. 14:40), a technical approach to procedure (such as Robert's Rules of Order) ought to be avoided. "An ecclesiastical manner" of discussion must be brotherly in tone, winsome in approach, and always submissive to the authority of God's Word.

This document contains two sections: the first section is a general description of our synodical processes while the second section contains a glossary of definitions and processes as they have been established over time (primarily adapted from Martin Monsma's Church Order Commentary.)

Basic Principles

In Reformed church polity, a local congregation is a complete manifestation of the body of Christ and is not to be viewed as a sub-division of a denominational superchurch. Our federation is known as "Free Reformed Churches of North America" (plural). Synod meetings derive their authority from the churches that compose it, and hence exercise a delegated authority. The first item on the Synodical agenda, therefore, is to collect the credentials of the delegates, with which they are sent from their local churches, in order to publicly establish that the meeting is appropriately constituted.

A Synodical gathering is a gathering of churches based on a confessional unity. Thus, although the consistory remains the final authority on all matters, belonging to a federation of churches implies an obligation to abide by Synodical decisions, since such decisions are to be based on the Word of God. The purpose of Synodical discussions is not simply to achieve a majority support for particular proposals, but rather mutually to understand and apply God's Word to the issue at hand.

This means that a Synodical meeting is a deliberative assembly. While it is proper that the matters on the agenda are discussed in the churches prior to the meeting, delegates come to Synod not to advocate on behalf of a position that has been adopted locally, but to contribute to the discussion and to listen to the arguments raised, in order that conclusions may be reached in accordance with God's word. Churches send "delegates," not representatives and in recognition of the deliberation that takes place prior to a Synodical decision, there are no Synodical procedures for "proxies" for churches who might not be able to be in attendance. It is appropriate that the delegates to Synod be elders, recognizing that this most properly belongs to their office and calling.

Overview of Synodical Meetings

How is the Agenda Established?

At each synod, a Convening Church is designated with the task of making arrangements for the next synod. It is the task of the Convening Church to announce the date and location of the Synod at least three months before the date of the meeting and to establish a deadline and contact person for the submission of agenda items which items are to be received by such no later than six weeks before the Synodical meeting. The consistory of the Convening Church is responsible to draft an agenda, assemble the submitted items, and distribute all of the relevant materials to the churches. This should be done as quickly as possible with a view to providing all of the churches maximum opportunity to discuss the matters in advance of the Synodical meeting.

The agenda ordinarily shall include reports from committees that have been established by previous synods, overtures or communications of individuals or consistories, and appeals. At each Synod, a report from each of the churches is also provided (either directly or by church visitors) with the opportunity for the churches to seek the advice of Synod on any questions or issues about which they may be concerned.

Submission of Reports

1. Article 41 Reports

Article 41 reports are ecclesiastical reports that ought only to be submitted after having been appropriately approved by the local consistory at a meeting (whose minutes should reflect this.) The reports ought to be dated and officially addressed. Although it is understandable that they are prepared and signed by the clerk, they are formally the report of one ecclesiastical body to another and hence they need to be presented (for eg. on official letterhead) and addressed to reflect that reality. It should be kept in mind that these reports are submitted and kept as part of the archives.

1

The content of Article 41 reports ought to include whether “consistory meetings are held, if the church discipline is exercised, if the poor are cared for, and lastly if they need the judgment or help of the Classis for the proper government of their church.” The concern was raised that some of these reports have become someone formalistic, reporting on the outward activities (their essence amounting to “we were able to worship x times last year, the consistory met y times, our membership rolls are at z, and there are no matters for which we seek Synod’s advice) but not speaking to the spiritual essence of the congregational life.

2

It is difficult to develop templates that will address the concerns. Instead, drafters of these reports should be mindful of the historical and biblical reasons for these reports. As Monsma and VanDellen helpfully point out, “The Reformed position that supervision in the Church of Christ should be mutual in character certainly has the whole tenor of the New Testament Scriptures for its support, and also finds its parallel in Romans 15:14 “...able also to admonish one another.”(VanDellen and Monsma, *The Revised Church Order Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan,1965), p. 139

2. Overtures

An overture is a request by a consistory for Synod to take a particular action. An overture ought to be formally drafted and addressed to the synod. In its opening paragraph, it ought to briefly provide the context or circumstances which give rise to the request and then, in precise language that can be

incorporated into a Synodical motion, make the request of Synod. The balance of the overture should contain the necessary background and arguments which the consistory is submitting in support of its request. The document ought to make reference to any previous Synodical decisions that impact on the matter being raised, make clear why this is a matter which appropriately falls within synod's jurisdiction, and provide enough detail and background to the argumentation that allow other churches to clearly discern the background for the request so that they can appropriately prepare themselves for Synod's consideration of the matter.

3. Committee Reports

The only reference to committees in our Church Order is in Article 49, which is not operative in the FRCNA because it refers to Particular Synods which, due to our size, we do not have. The language, nonetheless, is instructive. Committees (referred to as deputies in the article) are appointed "to execute everything ordained by Synod." They are to provide "help...in order that the proper unity, order and soundness of doctrine may be maintained and established." They are to "keep proper record of all their activities to report thereof to Synod, and if it be demanded, give reasons." In the case of disputes, it is clear that the committees do not carry the authority of synod but rather, that the specific matter in dispute needs to be brought back to the Synod for resolution.

3

The carrying out of synodical responsibilities through a series of standing committees has been practiced throughout FRC history and functions well and efficiently. Standing committees all have clear mandates that have been approved by Synod and are in the Church Order Supplements. A great deal of work gets carried out through these synodical committees and the bulk of Synod's agenda is spent dealing with the various committee reports. The concerns that have been voiced at Synod regard not so much the form of these reports, but rather underlying assumptions about the committee's authority and its relationship to Synod.

The argument has been made that our system has evolved such that committees sometimes go beyond their "execution" role and that a "committee caucus model" is in the early process of evolving. It is helpful to remind ourselves of the four elements that belong to decision-making in any institution: the legislative part (the establishment of basic policy); the executive part (the responsibility to carry out a decision); an administrative part (following through on the day-to-day details of the decision); and a judicial part (making a decision regarding any disputes that may arise in the process.)

4

In Reformed ecclesiology, the legislative and judicial roles must be carried out by office bearers in ecclesiastical settings. This has

implications for how we view and what we should expect of our synodical committees.

In practical terms and addressing the concerns that committees at times may go too far in proposing matters to synod or using their reports to “sell” their recommendations, the following guidelines should be kept in mind.

- ≡ Committees should be clear to explicitly frame their reports in the context of their mandates or specific assignments from Synod. Committees are executors of policy and therefore should always remind themselves and the body of the decisions which they are executing.
- ≡ Committees are servants of Synod and exist to assist, expedite and inform decision-making, not steer it. There is the perception that has sometimes arisen that committee members are bound at Synod to follow the “committee line” and not speak against a proposal if they were part of the committee that has recommended it. This is mistaken. Delegates at Synod are there as office-bearers sent by their church to a deliberative assembly. Notions of “caucus solidarity” in a synodical assembly are not compatible with Reformed ecclesiology.
- ≡ It has become the practice of committees to conclude their report with a list of recommendations, which is very helpful to the synodical process. For the most part, where these recommendations involve straightforward “execution” matters and so there is no issue. However, when the recommendation involves a matter on which there has been some dispute, it would be more appropriate and consistent with the direction suggested by Article 49 that committees summarize the arguments pro and con and not seek to steer Synod’s decision with a recommendation, but rather provide synod the necessary background and information so that Synod can make the decision. Although, especially when the matter involves persons or sensitive matters, there is an understandable reluctance to have details generally known in the larger body, it is inappropriate for a committee to withhold information out of sensitivity if that information is relevant to the decision which synod is being asked to make. Committees have an executive and administrative task, not a legislative or judicial one.
- ≡ Committee members have right (even the responsibility) to draft and submit minority report when substantive differences arise (“After a thorough discussion of the issues, the committee could not come to a consensus on the matter and therefore we are submitting both a majority and minority report regarding this matter.”)
- ≡ On occasions, this “committee caucus model” has evolved to an even further generation whereby the executive of a committee is considered to have the authority to make decisions of behalf of the committee. Committee reports to synod should have the signoff of the entire committee and not just the executive. Executives are to serve the body by shaping and preparing agendas and facilitating

the conduct of the committees business, not to serve as an alternative decision making structure.⁹

1

Prayer Service

On the evening preceding the first full day of Synod, a worship service for prayer is called under the authority of the convening consistory. The minister of the convening church (or its counsellor if it is vacant) preaches an appropriate sermon and leads in prayer. All delegates of Synod are expected to attend this service.

Opening Session

Shortly following the prayer service, the opening session of Synod is conducted. This session is chaired by the minister of the convening church (or its counsellor, if it is vacant) and is opened with devotions. The first item of business is the presentation of delegate credentials. Provided that a quorum (two-thirds of the delegates) is present, the Synod is declared to be legally constituted.

The election of Synodical Officers follows. All delegates are eligible to be elected for any executive position. (The only exception is the Chairman of Synod from the previous year, who is not eligible for re-election as chairman, although he may fill another position.) Elections are held by open ballot (i.e. there are no nominations—everyone is eligible) and continue until one person receives a majority of the votes cast. If after two open ballots no person has received a majority, only persons who have received votes in the previous round may be named on the next ballot, with the person(s) who received the smallest number of votes being dropped in each subsequent round.

Voting shall take place first for Chairman, then for Vice-Chairman, next for First Clerk, and finally for the position of Second Clerk using the same process for each. Motions to appoint persons to the above positions without a vote shall be ruled out of order by the chairman.

After the election of the Officers, the elected Officers take their places and the elected Chairman is responsible for the proceedings from that point. The Opening Session concludes with the reading of the Public Declaration of Agreement with the Three Forms of Unity, at which time all delegates should stand as a public demonstration of their agreement.

Regular Sessions

Ordinarily, Synod holds a morning, afternoon, and evening session each day. The exact times and schedule are established each year by the Executive. Efforts are made to coordinate the schedules with the availability of fraternal delegates or Committee presenters who may need to attend for

specific agenda items, as well as with the host congregation who have made hospitality arrangements. This schedule should set specific times when invited delegates from other churches are to address Synod with the understanding that the business on hand would be suspended to allow the invited delegate to address the meeting. Each session is to be opened and closed with prayer. Ordinarily, at least one visiting delegate from a church with whom we have a Complete or Limited Correspondence relationship will be invited to lead a morning devotion (for approximately 30minutes, including prayer and singing). At the first session of each day, a roll call is conducted immediately following opening devotions.¹⁰

When Synod is in session, its members may not leave the assembly without the permission from the chair. It is also not permissible for a delegate to withdraw himself and return homeward without the consent of the assembly.

Other Positions

In addition to the elected Officers of Synod, Synod is served by a Treasurer and an Assistant Clerk. Although these persons carry out certain responsibilities during and between Synodical meetings, those who hold these positions must be appointed by each Synod. The Treasurer is responsible for the Synodical Fund and reports to each Synod, while the Assistant Clerk drafts and coordinates the publication of the Acts of Synod. A more complete description of their responsibilities can be found in Section B.

Theological Instructors, Emeritus Ministers, Missionary Ministers, and Fraternal Delegates from churches with which the FRC are in full correspondence are acknowledged as advisors to Synod and are seated as such. At the discretion of the Chairman, they may be asked to voice their advice during any of Synod's deliberations.

Executive Sessions

Synod shall ordinarily deliberate in public sessions and shall attempt to organize its meetings in a manner that facilitates the attendance and observation of its meetings by those who are interested. Certain matters, however, are appropriately dealt with in Executive Sessions that are to be attended only by delegates and such advisors that the Chairman recognizes. Ordinarily, this is reserved for items that involve specific persons, the welfare of the church in unusual situations, and the consideration of Church Visitor or "Article 41" congregational reports. Synod is not to exercise the right to go into Executive Session unless necessary.

Presentation of Agenda Items

A member of a committee or consistory shall be given the opportunity to introduce an overture or report that has been submitted to Synod. If this spokesperson is not a delegate to Synod, he shall be welcomed and provided the opportunity to participate in the discussion of the specific agenda item

¹⁰ Acts 2008 Article 17.9

in the same manner as if he were a delegate (without a vote, of course.)

1 Discussion

2

3 Discussions of overtures and reports at Synod ordinarily are conducted in three rounds. At the beginning of each round, the Chairman asks for an indication of those who wish to speak to the issue and prepares a list of speakers. In the first round, the focus of comments ought to be on questions of clarification and background. At the end of the round (or at appropriate times during the round, if in the opinion of the Chairman the discussion will be facilitated by an earlier response to the questions raised), the Committee Spokesman shall respond to each of the comments or questions raised.

4

5 The second and third rounds are conducted similarly (a list is prepared at the beginning of the round); however, the comments are to be of a more deliberative nature. While an opportunity should be provided for all delegates freely to speak, delegates are encouraged not to repeat arguments that have already been raised. At the end of each round, the Committee Spokesman is provided an opportunity to respond to the points raised.

6 Motions

7

8 After discussion, a motion recommending that Synod take a particular position or action is in order. Motions that are in conflict with the Scriptures as interpreted by our Confessions or the Church Order are to be ruled out of order by the Chairman. Motions that address other matters before Synod or conflict with a decision already made by Synod (as presently constituted – not necessarily a previous Synod) should also be ruled out of order.

9

10 Ordinarily, the position recommended in a report or overture should be the first motion that is accepted by the Chairman. If it has become clear through the discussion that a different position is likely to have the support of the body, delegates representing the committee or consistory that brought the item forward ought to be provided an opportunity to amend or withdraw their position. Motions advocating a different action than that proposed by the documents submitted with the agenda should ordinarily only be accepted after the original proposal has been defeated or withdrawn.

11

12 Once a motion has been moved, seconded, and accepted by the Chairman as in order, a discussion is opened on that specific motion. In the course of discussion, someone may move to “amend” the motion. An amendment is a proposal to slightly change or modify the motion, but must be consistent

with the motion's basic intent or purpose.

13

14 Once a motion to amend is seconded and accepted, discussion proceeds only on the amendment. (There can be subsequent motions to "amend the amendment" with the same procedure.) Voting takes place on the amendment. If the amendment passes, discussion continues on the motion as amended. (If the amendment does not pass, discussion continues on the original motion.)

15 Pre-Advice Committees

16

17 Occasionally a matter may be referred to a "Pre-advice Committee" which has the task of sorting through an issue and formulating a resolution for the consideration of the entire body. These committees are appointed by the Executive of Synod, with an assigned chairman and reporter. Pre-advice Committees are to prepare a written report that is to be signed by the Chairman and Reporter. Any member of Synod may appear before any committee for the purpose of addressing the committee about any matter referred to it. In case the Committee cannot come to a consensus, those who are in the minority may submit a "minority report" which is to be signed by all of those who support it. In such cases, the majority report shall be presented to Synod by the spokesman for the Committee and a motion sought to adopt the report. After such a motion has been seconded and accepted by the Chairman and before any discussion of that motion, the minority report shall be presented.

18 Voting

19

20 Voting at Synod takes place through a show of hands, except for any matters involving individual persons, in which case the voting takes place by secret ballot.

Minutes

The recording and presentation of an accurate record of Synodical proceedings is the responsibility of the First Clerk (in the case of public sessions) and the Second Clerk (in the case of Executive Sessions.) In practice, the Assistant Clerk prepares a draft minutes during the proceedings. These drafts are reviewed by the First and Second Clerk to ensure their accuracy and completeness and at various occasions during the Synod meeting, are presented to the body (either by a public reading or via distribution) for "approval in principle" as "concept minutes." Subsequent to the meetings, these approved minutes are edited for style and grammar and are published in a booklet, together with the relevant documents that were presented to Synod, in a publication titled "Acts of Synod YEAR." The preparation of this publication is the assignment of the Assistant Clerk, with the final version to be approved by the elected officers of Synod prior to publication. The objective is to have the published Acts of Synod

available for distribution by Labour Day each year.

The minutes of the meetings are to include records of the devotions and addresses to Synod; all main motions and appeals; all reports submitted by committees and the decisions of synod relevant to those reports; and any document or phase of the discussion that Synod by a majority vote decides to insert into the minutes. The names of those who make and second motions as well as the attribution of specific comments will ordinarily not be included as the record is intended to be of the decisions of the body as a whole. Where it is necessary or helpful in order to assist in understanding the decision taken by Synod, a summary of the major points in a discussion shall be included in the Acts of Synod.

The minutes do not contain any rejected motion (except for main motions), procedural motions (unless it is essential to make sense of the proceedings), or withdrawn motions.

Archives

A binder containing an original copy of all reports and correspondence received by Synod, together with the copies of the concept minutes as approved and the published Acts of Synod, shall be prepared by the Assistant Clerk according to the accepted procedure and delivered to the denominational Archive Keeper, the Grand Rapids consistory.

Status of Guidelines

These Guidelines for Synodical Procedure may be suspended, amended, revised, or abrogated by a majority vote of Synod.

Definitions, Task Descriptions, and Other Organizational Details

A. Definitions and Procedures:

- **Agenda**—The agenda as distributed by the convening church (in an appropriate package with index and page numbers) should include all reports and necessary correspondence, but not personal letters or letters of appeal. The Guidelines for Synodical Procedure should be distributed with the agenda. Extra copies of the agenda should be available at the Synod meeting for the benefit of Fraternal Delegates or visitors.
- **Appeals/Protests**—Appeals and protests of consistories or individual members in accordance with Church Order Article 31 shall only be considered if notice of the appeal has been provided within the time frames specified. Letters of appeal and protests are not circulated to the churches with the agenda, but are dealt with only at the Synodical meetings.
- **Committees**—Synod is served by a number of committees who are given a mandate to study and/or report on certain resolutions of previous synods. Two types of committees are formed: Ad-hoc committees refer to committees whose mandate is limited to a certain project or study, and once that assignment is finished, will be dissolved; and Standing committees who have a mandate to oversee or direct the

missionary, educational, journalistic, benevolent or other such ongoing activities of the denomination. Members on these committees are appointed by Synod for a prescribed term. Synod has decided that ordinarily, members should serve no more than three or four consecutive terms at the discretion of the committee. (Acts 1995 – Article 32). It has also been decided that no person over the age of 70 should be appointed to such committees (Acts 2001 – Article 30).

- **Distribution**—Electronic distribution of materials to the published e-mail address of the church or clerk is considered sufficient appropriate distribution of materials.
- **Due Date**—All materials for the Agenda of Synod are to be in the hands of the clerk of the convening church not less than six weeks prior to the commencement of Synod as published. No overtures or reports received by the Clerk after that date shall be considered, except for overtures which deal with matters relevant to reports found in the distributed agenda. Any other overture or study report shall be considered by a special decision of synod on the basis of weighty grounds.
- **Executive Session**—A session of Synod that is closed to all except delegates and such advisors as have been acknowledged by the chair.
- **Majority**—A majority is achieved when any number greater than one-half of the total is in favour.
- **Motion**—a proposal that presents a certain subject to Synod for its action or consideration.
- **Motion of Objection**—If a delegate is not satisfied with a decision of the Chairman, he may make a motion of objection in which case the matter is referred to the Synodical body for a decision.
- **Motion to Amend**—a proposal to alter a main motion in language or meaning before final action is taken on the motion. Amendments may propose to strike out, insert, or substitute certain words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs, but may not nullify the basic intent of the main motion.
- **Motion to Call the Question**—a proposal to close the discussion on a matter on the premise that the matter has been debated sufficiently. If a motion to call the question is carried, the vote shall be taken only after those who have already requested the floor have been recognized and given the opportunity to speak.
- **Motion to Divide the Question**—a proposal to divide and vote separately on a motion that consists of more than one part.
- **Motion to Reconsider**—If a delegate for weighty reasons desires the reconsideration of a matter already decided by Synod, he may offer a motion to reconsider/rescind the previous decision. The purpose of this motion is to propose a new discussion and new vote. If a motion to reconsider passes, a motion to rescind may be accepted. (A motion to rescind refers only to a decision made by the Synod in session. A succeeding Synod may alter the stand taken by a previous Synod without a formal motion of reconsideration. In all cases, the most recent decision invalidates all previous decisions when they conflict.)
- **Motion to Table**—a proposal to delay consideration of a motion

until a later time or place. If a specific time and place are specified for the consideration of a tabled motion but Synod is at that time busy with another undecided question, Synod need not be interrupted in its work if the tabled motion can wait until Synod has disposed of the question then before it.

- **Overtures/Correspondence**—Only overtures or correspondence from individuals and consistories that have been carried as far as possible in minor assemblies shall be considered for Synod’s consideration. If an overture or communication has failed to gain the endorsement of a classis or consistory, it may be submitted by the consistory or individual for Synodical consideration. If an individual or consistory has been unable first to present the matter to the consistory or classis and evidence is presented that it was impossible to do so, the matter shall be received for information and left to Synod’s discretion as to whether it will act on such matters. Personal letters, while admissible to the agenda, are not circulated to the churches with the agenda but are dealt with only at the Synodical meetings.
- **Public Declaration**—The prescribed Public Declaration of Agreement with the Three-Forms of Unity is to be read at the beginning of Synod, with all delegates and advisory members of Synod asked to stand in unison in public acknowledgement of their agreement. A delegate who assumes a seat at a later time shall be asked to stand and express his individual agreement.
- **Right of Protest**—It is the right of any delegate to protest against any decision of Synod. Protests should be registered immediately, or during the session in which the matter concerned was acted upon. Protests must be registered individually and not in groups. Delegates may, if they feel the need, ask to have their negative votes recorded. Such requests must be made immediately after the vote is taken.
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B. Task Descriptions

- **Chairman**—The Chairman is to assume the responsibility of leading the meeting and the ordinary responsibilities that are understood with that assignment. This includes ensuring that sessions are properly opened and closed, that business is transacted in good order and with decorum and that all delegates are provided opportunity to contribute to the deliberations of Synod.
-
- In addition to those general tasks, commonly understood to be the responsibility of the Chairman, several practices should be noted:
 1. The Chairman shall either himself, or assign someone to do so in his place, welcome all guests of Synod and respond to all greetings received;
 2. If the Chairman wishes to speak to a question, he shall relinquish the chair to the Vice-Chairman while so doing. The Chairman may speak to matters of fact or points of order without relinquishing the chair.
 3. The Chairman shall rule on all points of order and shall have the

prerogative of declaring a person or motion out of order. Such a ruling may be disputed through a motion of objection, which shall be put to the body, with a majority ruling.

4. If an oral vote is tied, the Chairman shall cast a deciding vote.

Vice-Chairman—The Vice-Chairman assumes all of the responsibility of the Chairman in the absence of the Chairman, and offers all assistance to the Chairman as circumstances may require.

First Clerk—The First Clerk is responsible for presenting concept minutes to the Synod for approval and for approving the Acts of Synod for publication. Although he is assisted in these matters by the Assistant Clerk, it is the First Clerk who is responsible for their accuracy and completeness.

Second Clerk—The Second Clerk is responsible for presenting the minutes of Executive Sessions and for issuing all correspondence on behalf of Synod. Although he is assisted in these matters by the Assistant Clerk, it is the Second Clerk who is responsible for and in whose name these tasks are completed.

Assistant Clerk—The Assistant Clerk is responsible for assisting the First and Second Clerks of Synod in drafting the concept minutes, arranging for the publication of the Acts of Synod, ensuring that an archival binder is organized and forwarded to the denominational archives, and for assisting in the drafting and distribution all correspondence on behalf of Synod. Although the person filling this position ordinarily will have some continuity from year-to-year and hence can be of service to the Officers of Synod with certain information and acquired expertise, all of his work takes place under the authority of and in the name of the elected officers of Synod who are ultimately responsible for the tasks undertaken.

Treasurer—The Treasurer of Synod is responsible for invoicing and collecting funds from the churches and for paying expenses that are incurred in the conduct of Synodical business. The Treasurer submits an annual report of his activities to Synod. The Treasurer is to be appointed each year by Synod and is ordinarily given status as an Advisor to Synod.

Officers of Synod—The positions of Assistant Clerk and Treasurer have been developed for practical reasons to assist in the efficient conduct of Synodical meetings, but in Reformed church polity, Synod derives its authority from the churches and therefore there is no intrinsic authority contained in these positions. Ordinarily, these brothers assist the Executive of Synod in their meetings during Synod to organize the efficient conduct of Synod's business.

Hence, the Executive of Synod, properly understood, consists of the four elected officers of Synod, with the other positions serving only as advisory and with the consent of the body.

Other Organizational Details

Hosting Church—A hosting church is appointed by each Synod and shall be responsible for the arranging the necessary facilities and equipment for Synodical meetings. This includes lodging and meal

arrangements for delegates. Such arrangements should be made in consultation with the Convening Church, Assistant Clerk, and Treasurer. Expenses incurred in this process may be submitted to the Treasurer of Synod.

The hosting church should contact all congregations in order to identify accommodation needs and make appropriate arrangements. Billeting is encouraged in order to reduce the costs of Synodical meetings. Consideration should be given to appoint a Hospitality Committee at the local level to solicit help and coordinate travel (e.g. airport pickup/return, driving to and from Synod). Such a committee needs to remind hosts to provide private sleeping and bathroom facilities, and to respect the delegates' need for rest. Guests should be informed of the arrangements in advance of their arrivals.¹¹

1. Convening Church—A convening church is appointed by each Synod and is responsible for ensuring adequate notice (at least three months) is provided to the churches regarding the arrangements of a Synodical meeting. This is to take place through an announcement in *The Messenger*. The convening Church shall also collect, organize, and distribute all agenda materials to all churches as quickly as practically possible after the deadline for submissions, which is set six weeks before the commencement of Synod. The convening church is also responsible to call and lead a prayer service and provide the leadership for the opening session (See Section I-E.)
2. Set-up: In addition to the preferred set-up of the meeting (see Graphic below), the following provisions should be noted:
 - Tables and chairs for the delegates suitably spaced, with a Psalter and Bible available for the (shared) use of each delegate. Fresh water supplies for delegates throughout the meeting should also be arranged;
 - A table sign indicating the seats for each congregation, as well as for Advisors and Fraternal Delegates;
 - A computer station (IBM Compatible) set to the side equipped with a disk drive and MSWORD, with printer and an adequate supply of paper;
 - Access to an efficient photocopier with an adequate supply of paper
 - An audio system for the meeting room with adequate microphones
 - Power supply for the Assistant Clerk (who supplies his own computer and printer)
 - Access to a telephone
 - Signage that can be used to advise visitors of “Executive Session.”
 - Up to three smaller rooms should be available throughout Synod for Committee meetings.

